

A PORTRAIT OF MEXICAN-AMERICANS AT WORK: DISCRIMINATION, IDENTITY AND JOB SATISFACTION IN FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION MEXICAN-AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

In the last three decades, the number of Mexican immigrants living in the United States has increased from less than 800,000 in 1970 to nearly 8 million in 2000 (Camarota, 2001). With an estimated average annual growth rate of 450,000 for the 2000 to 2010 decade, the Mexican immigrant population was estimated at 10.3 million in 2004 (Van Hook et al., 2005) and is most likely near 12 million today. 72.7 percent of Mexican immigrants reside in the U.S/Mexico border states of California (48.2 percent), Texas (18.4 percent), Arizona (5 percent) and New Mexico (1 percent) (Camarota, 2001), thus indicating that Mexican immigrants are a highly concentrated population. The concentration of immigrant populations can influence levels of assimilation and cultural identification, both of which are important factors for integration and social/economic mobility in the United States. While the levels of assimilation and cultural identification of first-generation immigrants are important for understanding the perceptions and experiences of immigrants, it may be the subsequent assimilation and cultural identity of their children - second generation immigrants - that has the greatest impact on American society. Examining progress over generations is important because it may provide some insight into how the children of today's Mexican immigrants will do when they reach adulthood (Camarota, 2001). This study seeks to understand assimilation routes, cultural identity, and levels of perceived discrimination for both first- and second-generation Mexican immigrants in the border states of California, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. We are particularly interested in the perceptions and experiences of Mexican immigrants in border states because of the higher concentration of Mexican immigrants and Hispanic communities found within these states. We also believe that there is a difference in the levels of perceived discrimination felt by first-generation versus second-generation Mexican immigrants. While first-generation Mexican immigrants may perceive some levels of discrimination, they are presumably less likely to perceive high levels of discrimination because of the perceived "better" opportunities that are available to them in the U.S. versus those available in Mexico. However, we propose that second-generation Mexican immigrants will have much higher levels of perceived discrimination for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include the fact that they are U.S. citizens by birth and do not have the same perception of "land of opportunities" that their parents had upon entering the U.S. Additionally, second-generation Mexican immigrants in border states are likely to have high levels of cultural identification and in turn may attribute various situations to their ethnic identity. Research suggests that individuals who closely identify with their cultural/ethnic group may perceive ambiguous situations (e.g. being ignored by someone from the host society) as discriminatory (Schwartz et al., 2007). Cultural identity and levels of perceived discrimination of second-generation immigrants is of primary interest because of the impact this generation will have on the labor market within the next decade. The second-generation is, for the most part, a relatively young population and thus currently has the greatest impact on public schools. However, it will not be long before this generation eventually creates a large presence in the labor market. Understanding the culture and identity of second-generation immigrants is infinitely important for the success of diverse organizations. Organizations that do not make appropriate changes to more successfully retain and utilize persons from different cultural backgrounds can expect to suffer a significant competitive disadvantage compared to those that do (Cox, 1993). In order to fully understand the perceptions that influence the behaviors and attitudes of second-generation Mexican immigrants, we must first examine levels of assimilation and perceived discrimination of first-generation immigrants. The ideas regarding assimilation and the levels of perceived discrimination felt by immigrant parents will impact the assimilation path and perceptions of the second-generation immigrants.

Keywords: