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PERSONNEL TECHNOLOGY

AN EXAMINATION OF HISPANIC AND GENERAL POPULATION PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

(Harry C. Triandis, Principal Investigator)

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**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
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PERCEIVED ACCEPTABILITY OF ACCULTURATIVE BEHAVIORS
BY HISPANIC AND MAINSTREAM NAVY RECRUITS

G. Marín, H. Betancourt, H. C. Triandis

Technical Report ONR-17

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Abstract

A group of 75 Hispanic and 83 Mainstream Navy recruits was asked to rate their perceived acceptability of immigrants keeping or losing their native culture-specific behaviors (native language, dress codes, food preferences, music, literature, etc.) or becoming bicultural. Overall, both groups showed a marked preference for biculturalism on the part of immigrants, these results being independent of the respondent's actual level of acculturation or biculturalism. The two groups only differed on the Anglo's rejection of immigrants using only their native language while Hispanics were somewhat more accepting of this behavior.

PERCEIVED ACCEPTABILITY OF ACCULTURATIVE BEHAVIORS
BY HISPANIC AND MAINSTREAM NAVY RECRUITS

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While research on acculturation and biculturalism among Hispanics has recently increased in quantity and quality (e.g. Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Olmedo, 1979; Padilla, 1980; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines & Aranalde, 1978), there is little information on the perceptions Hispanics and Anglos have of an immigrant's different acculturation stages and their related behaviors. Since an immigrant is faced with a variety of new cultural ways upon arrival at a new country, the acquisition and use of the new behaviors will vary across individuals and across immigrant groups. Furthermore, some cultural behaviors may be maintained by a given immigrant group while another group may choose to quickly forget them (e.g., the use of the native language or dress codes). These behavioral patterns may in turn produce attitudinal responses toward immigrants on the part of the members of the host group and of the immigrants themselves and temper the level of acculturative stress felt by the immigrants (Berry & Annis, 1974).

Among Hispanics, various authors have found evidence for the maintenance of different cultural behaviors (e.g., language, food preferences, music preferences) either as a rejection of the ways of the host culture (the United States) or as part of biculturation (e.g., Grebler, Moore & Guzman, 1970; Rogg & Cooney, 1980; Szapocznik et al., 1978). Furthermore, the differential acquisition of culture specific behaviors has been shown to be an important determinant of actual acculturation (e.g., Padilla, 1980; Triandis, Hui, Lisansky, & Marin, Note 1). As a matter of fact, Padilla finds among other things, that native language use, consumption of ethnic food, and preference for Spanish music are important indicators of low acculturation among Mexican Americans. Our previous study (Triandis et al., Note 1) has also shown that preferences for ethnic music and

ethnic mass media are of value in measuring biculturalism.

Of all the tangible aspects of a culture, language seems to have received the greatest amount of attention. As a matter of fact, the ability to speak the host culture's language has usually been perceived by previous waves of immigrants as an important step in the assimilation process (Berry, 1980; Padilla, 1980). Hispanics nevertheless have for the most part continued to use Spanish across the various generations (e.g., Rogg & Cooney, 1980) and this ability of Hispanics to speak Spanish has been considered as a positive characteristic both by Mexican Americans and Anglo respondents (Ryan & Carranza, 1976).

The purpose of this study was to measure the perceived acceptability of various culture specific immigrant behaviors. Of interest here were the perceptions that Hispanic and Anglo respondents would have of immigrants keeping or losing their native language, customs, food preferences, etc. Together with options for complete assimilation, respondents were asked to rate the acceptability of immigrants keeping their own culture to the exclusion of the Anglo culture or using both cultures to the same extent (biculturalism).

Method

Subjects

Seventy-five Hispanic and 83 Mainstream recruits responded to a questionnaire while being classified into Navy jobs, as part of a larger study of their perceptions of the social environment. In each of the three Navy recruit stations (Florida, California and Illinois) when a Spanish-surnamed recruit was to be classified, the classification officer checked the recruit's self-identification on an application form on which "Hispanic" was one of the ways in which the applicant could describe himself. If the Spanish-surname recruit had selected the "Hispanic" self-identification label, he was asked to complete the questionnaire. At the same time

another recruit (with a non-Spanish surname) was randomly selected and given the same questionnaire. These other recruits are here referred to as "Mainstream" and will include both whites and blacks as well as Hispanics who did not identify themselves as "Hispanic."

Instrument

A questionnaire of 31 questions was specially designed to tap the respondents' perceptions of different aspects of the acculturation/assimilation process. The items asked the respondents to rate on a five point scale how appropriate or objectionable they perceived the behaviors of immigrants to the United States who preferred to (a) maintain native cultural characteristics, (b) acquire and use only cultural characteristics of the U. S. culture, or (c) become actually bicultural. These three possibilities were presented in terms of language, foods, music, literature, dress styles, general behaviors, as well as in terms of the immigrants' children's language and behavior preferences. Finally, other more general questions asked the respondents to rate (again on an appropriate-objectionable continuum) immigrants keeping or forgetting their native culture or becoming bicultural.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of the distribution of responses to the different items showed only one item for which there were significant differences between the two samples. Mainstream respondents found more objectionable to have immigrants to the United States use only their native language than the Hispanic respondents ($X^2(5) = 14.70, p < .01$). For all of the other items, the two samples held fairly similar opinions.

Although our response categories are not strictly interval scales, it is instructive to look at the responses in terms of means where on a five point scale

we have given a score of one to the behavior being perceived as very appropriate, a score of two to the behavior being appropriate, and a score of five to the behavior being perceived as very objectionable. In this type of analysis, we find again a marked difference between Hispanic (M=1.90) and Mainstream (M=2.03) respondents on their perceptions of the appropriateness of immigrants speaking only their native language.

When items with means at the extremes of the five point scale are observed, we find that both Hispanic and Mainstream respondents consider four behaviors as objectionable (means higher than 3.80): immigrants who (a) eat only U.S. food, (b) listen only to U.S. music, (c) read only native literature, and (d) keep only their native culture and do not learn much about U.S. culture. From these results it seems that Hispanics and Mainstream respondents favor the biculturality of immigrants. This is implied in the perceived need to learn the new (host) culture while not putting aside the native culture as would be the case when immigrants eat only U.S. food or listen only to U.S. music.

The value placed on biculturality by these respondents is also found when we look at those behaviors considered appropriate by them (means of 2 or less). Two items are considered as particularly acceptable and appropriate: (1) The use of both languages by immigrants and (2) having the children of immigrants become bilingual. While these results could be expected from the Hispanic respondents given the well documented importance Hispanics give to speaking Spanish (e.g., Rogg & Cooney, 1980; Ryan & Carranza, 1976) they are of special interest coming from our Mainstream respondents. These data may in part be reflecting the assumed recent resurgence of ethnicity among whites and blacks in the United States as well as the belief of the Mainstream in the value of biculturality and bilingualism.

It is important nevertheless to reiterate the fact that both groups of

respondents felt that immigrants to the United States should acculturate enough to gain sufficient knowledge of the U.S. culture. As a matter of fact, 77% of the Mainstream respondents and 76% of the Hispanics felt that it was objectionable for immigrants to keep their native culture and not learn the U.S. culture. By the same token, 66% of the Mainstream respondents and 70% of the Hispanics felt that it was objectionable for immigrants to forget their native culture. As could be expected from the above figures, significant percentages of respondents felt immigrants should actually become bicultural (76% of the Mainstream respondents and 83% of the Hispanics).

An analysis of the individual's responses to the above questions on the accepted biculturalism or monoculturalism of immigrants in terms of the respondent's level of acculturation (using our indices developed in Triandis et al., Note 1) showed that the agreement with a biculturalism notion was for the most part unrelated to the individual's level of acculturation or biculturalism.

An acculturation index composed of a preference for Anglo co-workers and an Anglo school for the respondent's children correlated fairly strongly with finding objectionable: (a) the need to speak English and Spanish ($r = .32, p < .004$); (b) the eating of only native or only U.S. foods ($r = .37, p < .001$ and $r = .34, p < .003$ respectively); (c) listening to only U.S. music ($r = .35, p < .002$); (d) reading of only native literature ($r = .33, p < .004$); (e) immigrants' children speaking only English ($r = .28, p < .01$); and, (g) immigrants' children behaving like their parents ($r = .30, p < .008$). These results are striking because of the overall support for biculturalism even by the highly acculturated respondents.

Overall, it is interesting to note the respondents' support for a notion of biculturalism on the part of immigrants. These data may be an indication of the rejection of the "melting pot" idea not only by an ethnic minority (our Hispanic respondents) but also by members of the Anglo majority. The significance of these

results is further enhanced by the fact that our respondents (Navy recruits) may a priori be perceived as rather well acculturated (in the case of the Hispanics) and as fairly well committed to the majority Anglo culture and value system (in the case of the Mainstream respondents). The expressed preference for biculturality among immigrants is no doubt an acknowledgement on the part of the our respondents of the significance of one of this country's greatest treasures: The diversity of cultural origins of its residents.

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