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The Foundations of a Mexican American Bias Scale

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Introduction

Mexican Americans comprise 65% of the Latino population, and 18% of the U. S. population is Latino (U. S. Census Bureau, 2017). While Latinos may be the largest ethnic minority group, most prejudice scales were developed to measure bias against African Americans. For example, the modern racism scale (McConahay, 1986), the symbolic racism scale (Sears, 1988), and the attitudes towards Blacks scale (Brigham, 1993) are all measures anti-Black attitudes. The need for a scale to measure prejudice against Mexican Americans is noteworthy, since it could explain biased behaviors and cognitive processes that result in discrimination.

Bias against Mexican Americans has been on the rise for the past several decades (Costantini, 2013; Mikelberg, 2011). Recent instances of blatant discrimination (Latimer, 2016) signals the importance of understanding prejudice against this ethnic group. We sought to determine the underlying sources of bias against Mexican Americans and measure what was considered the most important and serious issues. This pilot study was developed to identify the constructs and serve as a first step toward a scale to measure bias. We predicted there would be consensus on characteristic traits. We also sought to understand what might motivate people to hold anti-Mexican American bias.

Method

Demographics.

Four hundred and four students volunteered from a large midwestern university. Four students did not provide ratings and were excluded. Self identified sex included 291 females, 85 males, 3 with other., and 25 missing. The majority were White (295), with Asian (40), Black (13), Latino/a (23), Native American (1), and other (10) as well. The *M* age = 20.

Procedures.

Participants volunteered through SONA, an on-line recruitment site, administered through the Psychology Department. After reading a short description of the study, participants linked to the data collection site at Qualtrics, an on-line data collection website. All materials (consent form, demographic questions, open ended response forms, and debriefing) were located. Participants spontaneously provided their notions of unfair advantages, unfair disadvantages, and stereotypes for Mexican American Males, Mexican American Females, European American Males, and European American Females. The order of completion for the characteristics of groups was randomized. Text data was coded into categories by two research assistants. For brevity, only data from the Mexican American characteristics is presented. Ratings (1-7 scale) for "I would be happy to meet people from different cultures", and Essentialist notions (genetic endowment).

Table 1.
Leading Characteristics of Mexican American Males

Advantages	Disadvantages	Stereotype Issues
Bilingual 26%	Discrimination 18%	Violent 3%
Free schooling 7%	Minority Status 6%	Criminal 18%
Get More Jobs 19%	Racism 17%	Substance Abuse 15%
Religious 1%	Low Pay 10%	Low Class 5%
Family Oriented 15%	Language Barrier 5%	Immigrant 28%
Being Male 10%	Economic Diffts 11%	Uneducated 10%
Cultural Ties 10%	Low Class 2%	Blue Color 3%
Economic Benefits 10%	Uneducated 5%	Hard Working 13%
	Immigrants 6%	Lazy 7%
		Take Jobs 2%
		No English 10%

Table 2.
Leading Characteristics of Mexican American Females

Advantages	Disadvantages	Stereotype Issues
Bilingual 22%	Discrimination 21%	Crazy 11%
Extra Financial Aid 8%	Sexism 9%	Religious 2%
Family Ties 12%	Low Class 10%	Hypersexualized 7%
Domestic Life 6%	Minority 6%	Sexual 6%
Cultural Ties 11%	Uneducated 5%	Pretty 4%
Beauty 9%	Victim 5%	No English 8%
	Racism 16%	Bilingual 6%
	No English 4%	Lazy 4%
	Hypersexualized 5%	Uneducated 9%
		Immigrant 17%
		Domestic Life 26%
		Eats Cheetos 2%

Note: N = 400.

In addition to the spontaneously provided characteristics for each group, participants completed an essentialism scale (Keller, 2005), which will act as a predictor of characteristics at a later date. Appreciation is extended to **Daniel Nguyen** for his help with coding of the characteristics.

References are available upon request.

Results

Results show frequencies between constructs for Mexican American Males and Mexican American Females. Constructs were broken into advantages, disadvantages, and stereotype issues. Table 1 shows frequency statistics for Mexican American Males, while Table 2 shows frequency statistics for Mexican American Female. Leading characteristics are in bold. The frequency counts are an indication of the consensus regarding those traits that are believed to be representative of Mexican Americans – both advantages and disadvantages, as well as stereotypes.

A regression analysis indicated that a belief that genetics chiefly determines behavior was a predictor of how much a person wishes to learn about different cultures, $B = -.12$, $t = -2.26$, $p < .02$. The more one believes in genetic determinism, the less one wishes to learn about different cultures.

In addition, a regression analysis indicated genetic determinism was a predictor of one's preference for entering into new social environments with a positive attitude, $B = -.19$, $t = -3.61$, $p < .01$. The issue of positive social engagement (or the lack of positive social engagement) has been found to be an indicator of race/ethnic bias. Here, the more one believed in genetic determinism, the less one had a positive orientation toward social engagement.

Discussion

The study of prejudice has a long history in psychology (Katz & Braly, 1933). However, there are few studies that examine the measurement of prejudice about Latinos, particularly Mexican Americans (Carranza, 1992; Marin, 1984; Neimann, et al., 1994; Willis-Esqueda, et al. 2008). Given the rapid changes in social issues (e.g., immigration) and the significance of demographic and political changes (Mulligan, 2018), an understanding of underlying prejudice against Mexican Americans becomes more important than ever to understand ethnic prejudice and end intergroup conflict.

We also found a relationship between perceived essentialism, a belief in genetic causes of behavior, and one's preference for engaging with different cultures. We hope to examine the relationship between adherence to stereotypes and a proclivity to avoid engagement with others from different cultures. Of course, if one doesn't engage with different cultures, one can not have an accurate belief system regarding persons from different cultures.

The next step in this process is to develop a prejudice scale for anti-Mexican American bias. This scale will provide an understanding of the ideology behind the discrimination that Mexican Americans face in the U. S. For example, Lilley (2012) found 1/3 of a national sample believed most Mexican Americans were immigrants and that most were "illegal". Similar to Lilley's finding, our results for Mexican American male and females show that being an immigrant is a leading stereotype. Moreover, the content of our findings indicate males and females are not considered in the same way. The current results will be used to develop a follow up nation-wide study.