



# **WHO ARE IMMIGRANTS? THE BELIEFS OF U.S.-BORN IN MISSOURI**

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# INTENT OF STUDY: MISSOURIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRATION

- Interviews (2009-2010)
- Phone Survey (2010)
- Mixed Methods



# FRAMING THE INTERVIEW RESULTS

- Theories of assimilation/acculturation
- “New” immigration
- Ethos of reception



# ASSIMILATION/ACCULTURATION

- The canonical view: “A process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and, by sharing in their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park & Burgess, 1921, cited in Alba & Nee, 2005).



# NEW IMMIGRATION, SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION, & INTEGRATION

- 22% of child population has an immigrant parent.
- Most immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries.
- Socioeconomic and residential segregation may lead to “segmented” assimilation; some groups attain linear social mobility as perceived in the past, while others do not.



# ETHOS OF RECEPTION

- Includes the policies of local and federal governments, the conditions of the labor market, and/or the characteristics of one's own ethnic community (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).
- Is structural and attitudinal (Suárez-Orozcos, 2001).
- Can be encouraging, passively accepting, or exclusionary (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

*Reception = critical for integration*



# METHODS: DATA COLLECTION

- 28 structured interviews (20-35 minutes long)

## Sampling:

- Second-generation immigrant or later
- Ages 18-76
- Equal numbers male/female
- Met at public sites across the 7 countries of metropolitan St. Louis area



# METHODS: DATA ANALYSIS

- Grounded theory approach
- Open coding separately
- Group discussions
- Reading theory and writing analytical memos
- Writing results
- Group discussions



# FINDINGS

- Almost every respondent had some connection to an immigrant through their neighborhood, work or school.
- However, despite knowing immigrants many respondents created distance between themselves and immigrants by:
  - Forgetting that they actually knew immigrants
  - Defining their work as the “dirty” jobs (imagining Mexican landscapers or construction workers)
  - Not understanding the immigrant process



# AN IMMIGRANT IS SOMEONE WHO. . .

- is not born here.
- works in construction, restaurant/service industry, landscaping.
- “Well, you know, the most noticeable jobs that they do are, is the convenient store, the owners, operators, landscaping, you know, outdoor work type, construction work.” (R3)



# I KNOW IMMIGRANTS THROUGH . . .

- my apartment complex.
- my job.
- a close friendship.
- around town (local convenience store).



# CONTRADICTIONS: HARD-WORKING?

- R2:
- “You know, English is one of the hardest ones to learn. I think it’s very hard for them to learn English. My friends took a class and still, I have to listen very close. She’s from China and I have to listen very close when she talks to me, so it’s very hard. I mean, you know, a lot of them do well, some of them don’t.”



# HARD-WORKING?

- R2:
- “I have some really good friends that own a restaurant in Festus and they’ve worked really hard for what they’ve got since they’ve, you know, come to this country and so, yeah, they’re really good, and they’re hard workers.”



# HARD-WORKING?

- R2:
- “I mean, they just are not the same immigrants who came over back in the day, when they were really on the boats and that, and they were allowing people like massive. I would say that those immigrants were more of a hard worker than those immigrants you have that come into the country now.”



## IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

- To know about assimilation/acculturation or the **integration** of immigrants, we must understand the ethos of reception . . .
- *which is created by us all.*
- To improve integration (and work against anti-immigrant sentiment), we must remind U.S.-born of the relations they have and build upon these.



# THANK YOU!

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