

Measuring the Adjustment of Immigrant Laborers¹

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INTRODUCTION

THIS PAPER is concerned with measuring the adjustment of predominantly immigrant Mexican-Americans in a Northern industrial community and with examining the relationship of various measures of adjustment to each other. Two basic approaches to the problem of measuring adjustment are used: the first involves external criteria, and the second, internal criteria.

External criteria, such as income, occupational level, and material level of living, are used to compare the immigrant Mexican-Americans with the members of the (Anglo) host society. The immigrants are defined as adjusted or, more specifically, economically absorbed when they have been integrated into the economy and are moving up the occupational hierarchy and income scale.

The second approach to measuring adjustment involves questioning the immigrants about their conceptions of the extent to which adjustment has

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Institute of the Society for Social Research, University of Chicago, May 25, 1962. These data are a very small part of a larger study of value assimilation among immigrant workers in Racine, Wisconsin. Lyle Shannon, formerly of the University of Wisconsin and now at the State University of Iowa, and Robert McGinnis, formerly of the University of Wisconsin and now at Cornell University, were co-directors of the project from 1958-1961; Shannon and Thomas J. Scheff have been co-directors since that time. Kathryn Lettau was project supervisor. This study was conducted with the support of the Research Committee of the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin, a grant from the National Institutes of Health (Project RG-5342), the Urban Research Committee of the University of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Urban Grant (Ford Foundation), and the National Science Foundation. Elaine Krass has provided invaluable editorial assistance.

been achieved or their intentions to engage in behavior indicative of adjustment. In this manner we have attempted to view the immigrant as he sees himself. Even though this approach has advantages, reliability becomes a problem. There is a definite possibility that the person being questioned will respond with what is considered to be an appropriate answer for someone who is relatively new in the community and a minority group member as well. Nevertheless, by asking questions such as "How did your life change when you and your family came to this community?" and "Do you intend to remain in this community or return to your former home?" we hope to derive a valid indication of the respondent's satisfaction in the new community.

Following the separate presentation of data relevant to external and internal adjustment we shall turn to the second task of this paper—an analysis of the relationship between internal and external measures of adjustment. By cross-tabulating internal adjustment with our three measures of external adjustment, we will attempt to ascertain whether or not, and if so, to what extent, it is justifiable to predict internal adjustment, or over-all satisfaction, from external criteria such as occupational level, income, and material level of living.

BACKGROUND OF THE SAMPLES

The sample from which the data for this paper are taken consisted of 209 Mexican-American heads of households or their spouses. The control group consisted of 189 Anglo heads of households or their spouses. Approximately half of each sample was male, and half was female. The Mexican-American sample was selected from the 1958 City Directory for the community and supplemented from other sources. The Anglo sample consisted of every twentieth eligible dwelling unit within the boundaries of five areas of Mexican-American concentration in the city and the area immediately surrounding.² The Mexican-American interview completion rate was 81 per cent, and the Anglo rate was 68 per cent.³

² The Mexican-Americans were significantly younger than the Anglos. The mean age for the Mexican-Americans was thirty-nine years while the mean age for the Anglos was fifty-three years. The median age category for the Mexican-Americans was thirty to thirty-four years and that for the Anglos was forty to forty-four years. A detailed description of the samples is available upon request.

³ Designing and pretesting the interview schedule took place during a five-month period in 1959. Eleven different versions of the schedule were pretested with 140 interviews in a Mexican-American industrial community in Northern Illinois before the final bilingual version was accepted. Nine Mexican-American bilingual interviewers were recruited and trained in the Northern Illinois community, and nine Anglo interviewers were recruited and trained in the Wisconsin community. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. The Anglo completion rate of 68 per cent may be attributed to the fact that thirty-four interviews were

For the most part, the Mexican-American sample had arrived in the community after 1940 whereas the Anglo sample had either been born in the community and always resided there or had arrived between 1900 and 1945.⁴ More than 70 per cent of the Mexican-Americans grew up in Texas and 13 per cent grew up in Mexico while almost 80 per cent of the control group grew up in the North Central United States and 17 per cent grew up in Europe. Of the Mexican-Americans 89 per cent had moved to this particular community from Texas or Mexico but only 33 per cent indicated that they definitely planned to move to the community when they left their homes, and most had lived in other places before settling in the community.⁵

When asked how they had heard about the community, both Anglos and Mexican-Americans usually mentioned relatives or personal knowledge. The significant difference between the two groups lies in the fact that 38 per cent of the Mexican-Americans had heard about the community from friends or other personal contacts but only 19 per cent of the Anglos gave this response.

Of those whose reasons for coming to the community were ascertained, 80 per cent of the Mexican-Americans were seeking work, had no work in their place of origin, or came to take a specific job, in contrast to 46 per cent of the Anglos who came for these reasons. The difference between the two groups is significant at the .001 level. The data are presented in Table I.

Thus, we can see that most of the Mexican-American group moved to the community from Texas, that they were usually economically motivated to make that move, and that they were expecting—or at least hoping—to find work in the new community.

MEASURING EXTERNAL ADJUSTMENT

We have defined external adjustment as economic absorption in the urban industrial community and have sought to compare the immigrant Mexican-

originally omitted. Twenty of these were obtained some nine months after the initial survey. The directors noted that these persons, classified as not contacted, had in actuality not been followed up with adequate diligence. Sixteen items such as age, education, occupation, and size of community of orientation were selected for comparison with the 189 interviews originally obtained. The only significant difference found was for occupational status of the female, and this was at the .05 level. It was therefore decided not to reprocess the various Guttman scales and individual variables but to eliminate the twenty clean-up interviews from further consideration.

⁴ All but 7 per cent of the Mexican-Americans arrived in the Northern industrial community in 1940 or later, but about 70 per cent of the Anglos had arrived before 1940 or had always lived in the community. Mexican-Americans were significantly different from Anglos in their dates of arrival at the .01 level of confidence.

⁵ Mexican-Americans were significantly different from Anglos in that Anglos were more likely to have made their move to the community by plan. Mexican-American-Anglo, $\chi^2 = 20.43$ 6 d.f. $p < .01$.

TABLE III

Total Annual Family Income of Mexican-Americans and
Anglos in a Northern Industrial Community

	Mexican (Per Cent)	Anglo (Per Cent)
\$7,000 or more	5	14
\$6,000 to \$6,999	9	13
\$5,000 to \$5,999	19	16
\$4,000 to \$4,999	33	16
Up to \$3,999	20	28
Not Ascertained	13	13
TOTAL	99	100
	N = 209	N = 189

Mexican-American-Anglo, $\chi^2 = 24.10$ 4 d.f. $p < .001$.

a Guttman scale with a Coefficient of Reproducibility of .916 and a Minimum Coefficient of Reproducibility of .764. The possessions-scale scores of Mexican-Americans and Anglos are presented in Table IV; Anglos scored significantly higher than the Mexican-Americans at the .001 level of significance.

Thus, in terms of each of the three measures of external adjustment, the Anglos have been significantly better off than the Mexican-Americans. However, in view of their predominantly immigrant status, the Mexican-Americans were not expected to compare very favorably with persons who had been in the urban industrial setting for a longer period of time.⁷

MEASURING INTERNAL ADJUSTMENT

Despite their lower occupational status, income, and material level of living, it would be surprising indeed if Mexican-Americans did not interpret a factor such as regular employment as evidence of success in the urban, industrial setting. Similarly, persons who have been in a position to contrast living conditions in the Southwest or in migrant labor camps with those of Mexican-Americans in the Northern industrial community have observed

⁷ The differential adjustment of immigrants and locally-reared persons—persons with similar backgrounds reared in an urban industrial setting—has been described in several articles. Thompson P. Omari's study of 200 Negro migrants in Beloit, Wisconsin, "Factors Associated with Urban Adjustment of Rural Southern Migrants," *Social Forces*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (October 1956), pp. 47-53, demonstrated that length of residence in Beloit was more highly correlated with socio-economic status and community satisfaction than any of a dozen or more other variables that were hypothesized to have some relationship to adjustment. Also see: Basil G. Zimmer, "Participation of Migrants in Urban Structure," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 20 (April 1955), pp. 218-224.

TABLE IV
Level of Living Scale Scores of Mexican-Americans and
Anglos in a Northern Industrial Community

Scale Types	Frequency of Scale Types	
	Mexican (Per Cent)	Anglo (Per Cent)
0. No refrigerator, no telephone, no sewing machine, no fabric rug in front room, no automatic washing machine, no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	7	1
1. Have refrigerator, but no telephone, no sewing machine, no fabric rug in front room, no automatic washing machine, no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	15	3
2. Have refrigerator and telephone, but no sewing machine, no fabric rug in front room, no automatic washing machine, no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	15	4
3. Have refrigerator, telephone, and sewing machine, but no fabric rug in front room, no automatic washing machine, no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	31	3
4. Have refrigerator, telephone, sewing machine, and fabric rug in front room, but no automatic washing machine, no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	21	54
5. Have refrigerator, telephone, sewing machine, fabric rug in front room, and automatic washing machine, but no clothes dryer, no car later than '56	4	15
6. Have refrigerator, telephone, sewing machine, fabric rug in front room, automatic washing machine, and clothes dryer, but no car later than '56	6	14
7. Have refrigerator, telephone, sewing machine, fabric rug in front room, automatic washing machine, clothes dryer, and car later than '56	1	5
TOTAL	$\frac{1}{100}$ N = 209	$\frac{5}{99}$ N = 189

Mexican-American-Anglo, $\chi^2 = 134.38$ 7 d.f. $p < .001$.

that however inadequate the housing available to immigrants, it is at least as adequate as, if not better than, the housing which they had previously. One would not expect the immigrant Mexican-American to be unaware of these and other improvements that suggest to him that progress is being made.

The responses to the question "How did your life change when you and your family came to this community?" are presented in Table V. These responses constitute an over-all measure of satisfaction with changes that have taken place in the lives of the respondents after coming to the community. Mexican-American and Anglo responses were both skewed toward the favorable end of the scale; changes were predominantly good, particu-

Level of living scale scores showed practically no correlation with satisfaction. Neither in the case of the Mexican-Americans nor among the Anglos was there significant deviation from the null hypothesis of no relationship.¹³

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have presented measures of both external and internal adjustment among Mexican-Americans and an Anglo control group. The external indicators—occupational level, family income, and material level of living—revealed that the Mexican-Americans compared very unfavorably with the Anglo sample. However, when internal adjustment was measured, it became apparent that the Mexican-American considers life in the Northern industrial community to be an improvement over what he has previously experienced and that there is no significant difference between Mexican-American and Anglo global satisfaction.

The hypothesis that there is a definite relationship between external and internal adjustment within each sample was tested and rejected. It was found that external indicators are almost totally unrelated to expressions of satisfaction or indications of intent to return to place of origin.

By analyzing the data further in the future, we will attempt to discern whether partitioning the samples according to variations in values will permit a better prediction of either over-all satisfaction or specific types of satisfaction from external indicators. We shall also test the hypothesis that increased time in the community brings about value assimilation and hence the desire for a higher, even if improbable, level of living. If this hypothesis is validated, we would predict that immigrants who have acquired either middle-class or working-class concepts of how they should live, and who have not reached the level to which they aspire, will express dissatisfaction with their position in the community and with the community itself.

In this analysis, however, we have not singled out the determinants of satisfaction or dissatisfaction and can only state that the commonly used external indicators of adjustment are not predictors of expressed satisfaction with status in the community among Anglos or among predominantly immigrant Mexican-Americans.

¹³ For the Anglos the r_s coefficient of correlation was .0493 and the value of $\chi^2 = .00$; for the Mexican-Americans the r_s coefficient of correlation was .0345 and the value of $\chi^2 = .00$.



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