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# Intersectionality of Immigrant Stereotypes: An Examination of Individual and Contextual Attributes

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## **Intersectionality of Immigrant Stereotypes: An Examination of Individual and Contextual Attributes**

Recent efforts to understand public attitudes and views towards numerous social, economic, and political topics have found immigration be one of the most important issues facing the country (Jones, 2019). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), immigrant workers (i.e., individuals residing in the U.S. but not U.S. citizens at birth), comprised 17.0% of the civilian labor force in 2020. Further, although there are various benefits associated with immigration such as increases in gross domestic product and contributions to a country's labor force (Woetzel et al., 2016), and prior work has found a substantial portion of the U.S. population to view immigration positively (Budiman, 2020), xenophobic sentiments continue to persist today.

In order to understand how immigrants are perceived as well as the underlying rationale for why immigrant status may be a stigmatizing characteristic, a more nuanced investigation of immigrant identity is warranted. The present research demonstrates the need to consider the intersectional nature of immigrant identities, such that an individual's status as an immigrant interacts with their ethnicity to result in a unique immigrant-ethnic identity. For example, although Lee and Fiske (2006) found that stereotypes of immigrants tend to gravitate towards incompetent and untrustworthy outsiders, adding information on their national origin (e.g., Mexican) resulted in greater contrast that led to differentiation among immigrant groups.

Building on Fiske and colleagues' (2002) stereotype content model (SCM), which classifies social groups based on perceptions of competence and warmth, this work adopts a mixed methods approach to capture the impact of immigrant status and ethnicity in stereotyping immigrant groups. This work also aims to articulate why

these stereotypes exist and are unique to each immigrant ethnic group. According to Fiske et al. (2002), competence and warmth result from two characteristics of social structure: competition and status. Furthermore, integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) proposes that immigrants can pose a realistic threat (e.g., competition for jobs) to Americans. In incorporating these theoretical perspectives, it may then be that immigrants are stereotyped negatively when they are seen as a threat to Americans' status or viewed as competition.

Using a 2 (immigrant, non-immigrant) X 3 (Asian, Latinx, Middle Eastern) experimental survey design, the present research accomplishes these aims and lends insight into the complex nature of immigrant stereotypes. Consistent with hypotheses, analyses of qualitative responses provided by participants indicated that immigrants are stereotyped more negatively than non-immigrants (i.e., Americans). Additionally, results demonstrated a significant immigrant status by ethnicity interaction when predicting positive stereotypes. Regardless of immigrant status, Asian ethnicity was associated with a greater value of positive stereotypes than those of either Latinx or Middle Eastern ethnicity; however, the Latinx and Middle Eastern immigrant groups were viewed as nearly identical with respect to positive stereotypes whereas the Latinx non-immigrant group was viewed slightly more positively than the Middle Eastern non-immigrant group.

In terms of why these stereotypes would differ across groups, additional analyses revealed an influential role of perceived status and competition. For example, when a group was seen as having high status, a greater number of positive stereotypes were ascribed to the group. In contrast, higher levels of competition (e.g., employment competition) posed by a group resulted in more negative stereotypes. Additionally, a series of significant interactions between immigrant status, ethnicity, status, and/or competition when predicting different

stereotypes (e.g., competent, sociable) emerged, further supporting the need to examine the intersectionality between individual characteristics (i.e., immigrant status, ethnicity), as well as consider contextual attributes (i.e., competition, status).

This research poses implications to theoretical advancements in the diversity & inclusion literature. First, the interaction between immigrant status and ethnicity supports an intersectional perspective in studying bias and stereotypes. Rather than focusing on one identity, research that investigates multiple identities and how they function in relation to each other can provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of identity and emerging stigmas. Second, recognizing how perceived competition and status of a group can affect individuals' judgements not only demonstrates additional contextual characteristics relevant to immigrant stereotypes, but also signals the dynamic and reactive nature of these stereotypes. Regarding practical implications, this work may suggest a need to reconsider how bias and stereotyping are discussed and presented in diversity training, as the current findings would advise against treating minority groups as monolithic. Given recent work that has highlighted discrimination in the hiring of immigrant employees (e.g., Veit & Thijsen, 2019), additional attention may be devoted towards educating individuals involved in the hiring process on other issues pertaining to immigrant workers (e.g., accent bias, foreign credential evaluation).

*Word Count: 750*

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