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The Relation of Drug Trafficking Fears and Cultural Identity to Attitudes Toward Mexican Immigrants in Five South Texas Communities

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of research investigating the relationship of spill-over fears related to drug trafficking and of cultural identity to Mexican Americans' attitudes toward recent immigrants from Mexico in five non-metropolitan communities in the US–Mexico borderlands of South Texas. A mixed methods design was used to collect data from 91 participants (30 intact families with two parents and at least one young adult). Quantitative findings showed that the majority of participants expressed the view that most people in their communities believed that newcomers were involved in drug trafficking and in defrauding welfare programs. A significant interaction indicated that Mexican cultural identity buffered the negative effects of drug trafficking fears as related to the view that the newcomers were creating problems in the communities and region. Qualitative data yielded positive and negative themes, with those that were negative being significantly more numerous. The findings have implications for intra-ethnic relations in borderlands communities as well as for immigration policy.

Introduction

Drug trafficking fears and changes in the borderlands milieu

In 1994, Martinez proposed a typology for classifying borderlands and concluded that the US–Mexico border was an interdependent-cooperative type because it was characterized by frequent interaction and a mutually interdependent economy. More recently, Schaan (2009) has noted that drug trafficking and violence in Mexico are having a spill-over effect that is changing the milieu of US borderlands communities. Ramirez, Argueta, and Grasso (2013) found that US–Mexico borderland community residents perceived that drug violence on the Mexican side of the border was spilling over into the US. Furthermore, this belief was related to their distrust of recent immigrants from Mexico, fearing that many of them might be associated with the cartels. In addition, it was found that because of fear of violence in Mexico, Mexican American frequency of travel to Mexico had decreased considerably, thus, interfering with familial, friendship and business as well as medical/dental service relationships that had existed between borderland communities for many years. In general, it was felt that that part of the US–Mexico borderlands was changing from a milieu that had been identified by Martinez (1994) from cooperative and interdependent to one that was alienated in character.

The Drug Wars and increased rates of immigration into borderlands communities

The attitudes that native borderlanders of Mexican descent hold toward Mexican immigrants are centrally important in the borderland communities because there is evidence that fears related to drug trafficking and violence in Mexico are driving increased rates of immigration into US border communities. Data from the Observatorio de Seguridad y Convivencia of the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juarez indicated in 2010 that 230,000 immigrants had fled to the US to escape violence in the two years before the publication of their report. The report also noted that most of these newcomers had settled in the El Paso area (Lusk, Staudt, and Moya 2012). These increased rates of immigration, combined with the increasing fears about drug trafficking and related violence, may be influencing the dynamics of native Mexican American–immigrant relations.

Cultural identity and attitudes toward Mexican Immigrants

Phinney and Ong (2007) have defined cultural identity as having two components: (1) exploration—the extent to which one has explored what one’s cultural group means to oneself; and (2) affirmation—one’s values and degree of attachment to one’s culture or group. Previous research on the relation of cultural identity to attitudes toward immigrants has largely explored only affirmation; that is, cultural identity has been defined largely by either surname and self-identification (Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984; Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997) or a scale measuring one’s degree of “Mexicanness” which was defined as the importance of maintaining Mexican traditions, the Spanish language and Mexican holidays (De la Garza et al. 1991). Furthermore, the affirmation process has been assessed in terms of whether one is Mexican American or Anglo. What has been ignored has been the fact that Mexican American borderlanders live in a bicultural context (Polinard, Wrinkle, and de la Garza 1984) and, thus, may have both Anglo and Mexican cultural identities (Sargent and Matthews 2001).

Impact of Drug Wars in Mexico on the US–Mexico border region of South Texas

As Payan (2006) has reported in *The Three U.S. Mexico Border Wars*, major competition between the drug cartels that initiated serious acts of violence in the area of South Texas in which our research was centered began in the city of Nuevo Laredo across the border from Laredo, Texas, in 2005. In 2010, the violence in Mexico had its greatest impact on the communities in which we collected our data, when there were several shoot-outs, murders, and abductions in the city of Mier, Tamaulipas, almost directly across the Rio Grande River from the five communities from which participants were recruited for this study. Mier became an intersection between two cartels, the Zetas and the Pacific Cartel, and in 2010 there were several battles for dominance that lasted for nine months. In an associated press article published in December 2011, it was reported that one third of the 8,000 citizens of Mier had left the community during the height of the battle between the two cartels. It has been estimated that up to that time about 40,000 people in Mexico had been victims of the drug wars since their inception in the 1970s (Sherman 2011). A study by Rios Contreras (2014) observed that, among those border cities in Mexico that had experienced high violence levels (Juarez, Tijuana, Matamoros, Reynosa, Mier), all had unexpected outflows of more than 25% of their populations. The investigator concluded that the majority of Mexicans migrated largely because of security issues related to fear of drug-related violence that had escalated since 2008.

Aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of cultural identity (i.e. Anglo and Mexican cultures) as well as spill-over fears related to the drug trafficking wars era on the attitudes that Mexican American borderlanders hold toward recent Mexican immigrants who have settled in borderlands communities. The authors utilized a semi-structured approach to qualitative data collection to provide pointed responses to research questions, while simultaneously allowing flexibility to examine attitudes that emerged naturally in the course of interviews with participants. Using this approach, the authors were able to gain greater insight into perceptions and attitudes held by older and younger native-born Mexican Americans toward their recent immigrant counterparts.

Literature review

Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1984) collected data on Mexican American borderlanders in Hidalgo County, Texas and found that attitudes toward undocumented immigrants and Mexican immigration policy were characterized by intra-ethnic diversity, which varied by number of years of education, income, and generation level of respondents. The more the years of education, the higher the income, and the greater the generation level, the more negative were the attitudes of Mexican American borderlanders toward immigrants. Subsequently, Polinard, Wrinkle, and de la Garza (1984) compared attitudes of Mexican American borderlanders (Hidalgo County, Texas) and non-borderlander Mexican Americans (Travis County, Texas) and found that borderlanders were more negative with respect to undocumented Mexican immigrants' harming the community, abusing welfare programs, and having a negative impact on their personal lives. Another study by De la Garza et al. (1991) found that attitudes of Mexican Americans from Hidalgo and Travis Counties in

Texas differed by degree of “Mexicanness.” They found that the higher the score on questions measuring “Mexicanness,” the stronger the participant support for less restrictive Mexican immigration policies. The authors indicated that the use of the term “Mexicanness” was meant to conceptualize cultural identity as a continuum of attachment to Mexican culture. They concluded that the “Mexicanness” measure was useful in identifying the “ethnic” issues which were a direct link to Mexico and things Mexican. These investigators also argued for considering the role of non-cultural variables (age, income and choice of region of residence—US–Mexico border or at a distance from the border) in order to determine whether or not these Mexican Americans perceived immigrants as affecting their daily lives. Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1997) compared the attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy of Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans from both Cameron and Hidalgo Counties in the borderlands of South Texas. They found that Mexican Americans had more positive attitudes toward immigrants and non-restrictive immigration policies than Anglos did, but the relationship was complex. For example, if Mexican American participants viewed immigration as an important issue and perceived immigrants as affecting their personal lives, they were more likely to support more restrictive Mexican immigration policies. Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1997) concluded that their findings were supportive of De la Garza et al.’s (1991) findings regarding the importance of considering both cultural and non-cultural variables in studying Mexican American attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policy.

In summary, the attitudes of Mexican Americans toward immigration policy and undocumented immigrants from Mexico are multifaceted and complex (Jiménez 2007). With the advent of the drug wars era (Payan 2006) and the resulting spill-over effects from drug crimes and violence (Ramirez, Argueta, and Grasso 2013; Schaan 2009), these attitudes are likely to be even more diverse and complex. Compounding this problem may be the fact that the data for the relation of cultural identity to attitudes toward immigrants could be confounded because cultural identity measures on borderlander participants have been limited to assessing Mexican identity while ignoring identity with Anglo culture. In previous research (De la Garza et al. 1991; Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997), cultural identity of participants was assessed by participant self-identification or surname or by questions seeking to determine degree of “Mexicanness.” Thus, prior to our study only one aspect of the cultural identity of borderlanders had been explored. Although Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1984) did note that Mexican American border residents live in a multicultural environment, to the present authors’ knowledge, there has been no attempt to assess degree of both Mexican and Anglo cultural identity (bicultural identity) in the participants when attempting to understand their attitudes toward the new immigrants. The present study seeks to correct this oversight by using an acculturation instrument that has good psychometric characteristics. Thus, the unique contributions of this study are that it examines both identification with Anglo and Mexican cultures and that it explores positive and negative attitudes toward the new immigrants (both documented and undocumented).

The research questions addressed were as follows:

1. Will a significant majority of participants indicate that they have heard that, in their communities and region, new immigrants are involved in drug trafficking?
2. Will a significant majority of participants indicate that they have heard that, in their communities and region, new immigrants defraud government assistance programs?
3. Will a significant majority of participants indicate that it is their personal belief that new immigrants are creating problems for the communities and region?
4. Will the degree of cultural identity with Mexican and Anglo cultures be related to whether or not participants: (1) have heard that new immigrants are defrauding government assistance programs, or; (2) personally believe that new immigrants are creating problems in their communities and region?

Scope and methods

The current study utilized data from the second phase of a two-phase longitudinal study (findings of the first phase were reported above) on the relation of acculturation to physical and mental health in 56 intact families in five non-metropolitan US–Mexico borderlands communities in South Texas. Data were collected approximately 10 years apart with 56 intact families in five non-metropolitan borderlands communities in South Texas. In the first phase of the study, intact families were operationally defined as two biological parents married and living together with their children, at least one of whom was a high school student, and at least one grandparent. Participation was limited to intact families because a central objective of the first phase of the study was to examine acculturation processes in adolescents in the context of socialization influences of both parents and grandparents. In this second phase, every effort was made to recruit families representative of the three US generations (USG) and the two socioeconomic status (SES) subgroups used in the study's first phase.

Between phase I and II of the study, the authors did not make contact with participants. Authors made attempts to contact all participants from the first phase of the study to participate in the second phase. The following inclusion criteria were used for the second phase: (a) families must continue to be intact (both parents living together); (b) the family must include a child, now a young adult, and (c) all potential participants in the family must agree to participate. The final sample for this study was comprised of a smaller subset of participants who were contacted and agreed to participate. Due to health problems, death, or unavailability, the grandparent sample was particularly small; as such, the authors focused on attitudes of parents and their children, now young adults, in this study. The participants for the second phase of the study were comprised of 91 Mexican Americans: 60 parents (47–63 years old), and 31 children (24–30 years old).

A bilingual research assistant (RA) who had an MA degree and was a retired elementary school teacher recruited eligible participants via telephone. She was the same RA who had

collected the data for phase I. She did not live in the region in which the study was done, but was known to most of the people in the communities in which participants resided. The RA explained the nature and purpose of the study to all potential participants. If the parents and young adults within the family all agreed to participate, the RA scheduled appointments to administer the paper-and-pencil instruments. Before beginning data collection, the RA asked participants to provide informed consent (available in both English and Spanish). A second RA who was a bilingual, advanced graduate student in clinical psychology conducted the interviews via telephone. Upon completion of the interviews, participants were remunerated \$50.00 each. Both RAs were trained in data collection by the senior author.

Measures and interview

The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II; Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado 1995)—The ARSMA-II is a 48-item scale available in English and Spanish that assesses cultural orientation toward Mexican and Anglo cultures. It has two subscales—Anglo orientation and Mexican orientation. Alpha coefficients for these two subscales are .86 and .88 respectively.

Demographic Questionnaire—Demographic information (Ramirez 2002) included the birthplace of young adults, parents, and grandparents, as well as years of education for each. Also included were occupations, annual family income, level of proficiency of English and Spanish, ethnicity, age, and gender. Combined parental income was reported as ranges with increments of \$4,999, beginning with \$10,000 and ending at \$70,000 or above. No family reported an income ranging from \$40,000 to \$44,999.

Socioeconomic Status—The criteria used to categorize families as either lower or middle socioeconomic status (LSES, MSES) were similar to those recommended by Leondar-Wright (2005)—specifically, annual family income at the time of the larger study; parental education and occupation were also used to determine SES.

US Generational Status—Families were classified into one of three US generations: (a) 1st USG—grandparents, parents, and young adults all born in Mexico; (b) 2nd–3rd USG—some grandparents and parents born in the US and some in Mexico, all young adults born in the US; (c) 4th–6th USG—all family members born and living in the US. Of the 10 families studied, four were 1st USG, three were 2nd–3rd USG, and three were 4th–6th USG.

Individual Interview—The interview included three semi-structured questions. The first two questions asked the participant to report on attitudes toward new immigrants that they had heard expressed by others in their communities and region. These questions were therefore prefaced with “have you heard,” referring to others, so that participants could be free to discuss the issues as they perceived them to occur in their environment. These questions were followed by a specific question asking whether or not they themselves believed that immigrants were causing problems for their community and region. The different phrasing of the questions provided investigators with a diversity of opinions (positive, negative, and neutral). In addition, no specific reference was made as to whether the immigrants were documented or undocumented, thus allowing participants to feel free to

make that distinction if they thought it was important. Thirty-one interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The following semi-structured questions were asked in phase II:

- Have you heard that the new immigrants are involved in drug trafficking?
- Have you heard that the new immigrants cheat on welfare and disability programs?
- Please tell me if you yourself believe that new immigrants have made this community and region worse?

Participants

Fifteen of the families were LSES and 15 were MSES. LSES families had combined parental incomes that ranged from \$10,000–40,000. The majority (53%) of LSES families earned between \$15,000 and \$19,999. None of the LSES parents had degrees from a 4-year college, and their employment consisted of physical or service type work with little or no control in the work place. Examples of LSES occupations were construction, farm work, maintenance, and secretarial work.

MSES families had combined parental incomes ranging from \$45,000–65,000. A large proportion (40%) of MSES families earned between \$45,000 and \$49,999, and at least one parent in each MSES family had completed 4 years of college, with some parents holding master's degrees. MSES occupations were those that allowed some control over hours and methods of work. Examples of MSES occupations were teacher, school counselor, parole officer, and small business owner. Additional sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Research site

Data were collected in five non-metropolitan South Texas communities located in the Southwestern region of the United States: Roma, Los Saenz, Escobares, Lopeno, and Falcon Heights. According to the 2010 US census, which best represents the population at the time of data collection (2010–2011), 98.05% of the 13,340 residents in these communities were of Mexican descent, 1.03% were Latinos of non-Mexican descent, and .92% were of Anglo descent. Approximately half of all residents were living below the poverty level. The communities from which participants were recruited are located in two neighboring counties (i.e. Starr and Zapata) on the US side of the border. These communities range in size from 800–10,000 in population and are situated on the banks of the Rio Grande River, which is the dividing line between Mexico and the US. The borderlands region in which they are located is approximately equidistant from the cities of Laredo and Brownsville.

Results

Quantitative analyses

Frequencies were calculated for responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, and 3, and chi-square analyses were conducted to examine relationships between responses to Interview Questions

1, 2, and 3. Spearman correlations were used to examine relationships between Mexican and Anglo cultural identities and Interview Questions 2 and 3.

Research question 1—Will a significant majority of participants indicate that they have heard that, in their communities and region, new immigrants are involved in drug trafficking?

Responses were 53.74% *yes*, 43.95% *no*, and 2.31% *don't know*. This difference was not statistically significant: $\chi^2(1, 88) = 0.727, p = .3938$.

Research question 2—Will a significant majority of participants indicate that they have heard that, in their communities and region, newcomers defraud government assistance programs?

Responses were 78.65% *yes*, 21.35% *no*, and 0.0%, *don't know*. This difference was statistically significant: $\chi^2(1, 89) = 29.225, p < .001$.

Research question 3—Will a significant majority of participants indicate that it is their personal belief that immigrants are creating problems for the communities and region?

Responses were 42.52% *yes*, 57.47% *no*, and .01% *don't know*. This difference was not statistically significant: $\chi^2(1, 87) = 1.943, p < .1634$.

Research question 4—Will the degree of cultural identity with Mexican and Anglo cultures be related to whether or not participants: (1) have heard that new immigrants are defrauding government assistance programs (i.e. endorse Question 2), or; (2) personally believe that new immigrants are creating problems in their communities and region (i.e. endorse Question 3)?

No significant differences were found for gender, age, SES, or generation. There was no significant correlation between the Mexican Orientation subscale of the ARSMA-II scale and Question 2: $r = -.135, p = .233$. However, the Anglo Orientation subscale of the ARSMA-II was negatively correlated with endorsement of Question 2, $r = -.220, p = .048$. There was no significant correlation between the Mexican Orientation subscale of the ARSMA-II scale and Question 3: $r = -.076, p = .498$. However, the Anglo Orientation subscale of the ARSMA-II was negatively correlated with endorsement of Question 3, $r = -.301, p = .007$.

Chi-square analyses were additionally conducted for Interview Questions 1, 2, and 3, with age, gender, USG, and SES. None of these analyses was significant.

Correlations between ethnic identity and attitudes toward immigrants

Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated between responses to Mexican and Anglo items on the ARSMA II and whether participants agreed or disagreed with the three questions asked in the interviews. We did not find a significant relationship between ethnic identity and the view that it was common knowledge in the community that the newcomers were likely to be involved in drug trafficking. For the second question (that it was common

knowledge that immigrants were cheating on welfare), we found a significant relationship between an affirmative response and endorsement of Anglo items (Anglo identity). For the third question, concerning whether the respondents themselves believed that the new immigrants were creating problems for the communities and the region, the reverse was the case; those who disagreed with that question were more likely to endorse the Mexican items. The correlational data are summarized in Table 2.

Logistic regressions

Logistic regression was used to test the moderating effect of ethnic identity on the association between spill-over fears about drug trafficking/violence and beliefs that the new immigrants were creating problems in the communities. Four logistic regressions were run. In the first two analyses, the variable assessing the belief that immigrants were involved in drug trafficking, ARSMA-II scores on Anglo Orientation, and their interaction term were the predictor variables. In the second two analyses, the variable assessing the belief that immigrants were involved in drug trafficking, ARSMA-II scores on Mexican Orientation, and their interaction term were the predictor variables. For each pair of logistic regressions associated with each ARSMA-II scale, was the outcome variable in one logistic regression analysis, and whether or not participants endorsed the belief that immigrants were defrauding the government was the outcome variable in the other. The interaction between belief that immigrants were involved in drug trafficking and the Mexican Orientation subscale was statistically significant. Follow-up analyses indicated that a higher Mexican Orientation score was associated with lower odds of endorsing beliefs that newcomers were causing problems in their communities and the region only among those who endorsed the belief that immigrants were involved in drug trafficking. Among those who did not endorse the belief that immigrants were involved in drug trafficking, there was no relationship between Mexican Orientation score and beliefs about newcomers causing problems. No other interaction effect was significant. These findings are summarized in Table 2. Follow-up analyses were repeated additionally controlling for Anglo Orientation, and the results were essentially identical ($\beta = 2.259$, $p = .002$). This indicates that Mexican Orientation is uniquely associated with beliefs about newcomers above and beyond any effect of Anglo Orientation.

Qualitative data

Responses given by the participants to the interview questions were subjected to a thematic analysis to identify major positive and negative themes as well as overarching themes regarding attitudes toward immigrants. An essentialist/realistic or inductive approach was used, employing a semantic analysis of interview protocols (Braun and Clarke 2006). The step-wise procedure to identify thematic networks suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. Two trained undergraduate RAs coded the responses to the questions. The principal investigator and second author (an advanced graduate student) trained both RAs by developing sample responses in both English and Spanish that were similar to those given by participants. Raters were asked to rate the responses independently, and correspondences between them were determined. In situations where there was a discrepancy in the ratings, raters were asked to discuss the reasons for arriving at the ratings, and discussion continued until consensus was reached. Power issues were minimized by

ensuring there was no intervention by either of the authors in situations in which it was difficult for raters to reach consensus. When the interrater reliability was found to be .85 or better, raters were allowed to begin coding the interview data. The final interrater reliability coefficient was .99.

Positive themes and representative quotes for each theme were as follows:

Most of the new immigrants are victims of the drug wars.

Tuvieron que dejar todo, sus casas y sus trabajos para proteger sus vidas y las de sus familias.

(They had to leave everything behind, their homes and their jobs, in order to protect their lives and those of their families.)

Because of the crime in Mexico they had to come here to try and find jobs to rebuild their lives.

The new immigrants are helping to make this community and the region better.

They have opened restaurants and stores that were needed.

Some of the immigrant kids have improved the school scores on state-mandated tests and have made the band and our sports teams better.

Some of them are educated, such as doctors and lawyers.

It is important to make a distinction between immigrants who are documented and those who are not.

It is only the undocumented who are causing problems.

Those immigrants who are breaking the law and involved with crimes are the undocumented not the documented.

Negative themes and representative quotes:

Immigrants who are coming here are working for the cartels in Mexico.

People don't feel safe. We used to know everybody and now you see a lot of people that you don't know. You see their vehicles and they have Mexican plates and you think they're part of the group that are fighting each other because of the drugs. You have to be cautious now.

These people are dealing drugs or doing drugs or they are part of a cartel in Mexico like the Zetas. They are gangs fighting each other and escaping by coming here, but they are dangerous themselves.

Nos dan una mala reputación con gente fuera de la área.

(They give this community a bad name with people in other communities.)

They defraud government assistance programs (welfare, disability and food stamps).

They cheat on welfare.

You see them at the grocery store buying with food stamps and they have designer clothes and purses and drive away in Cadillacs.

Dicen mentiras para calificar para asistencia y a la gente decente no les ayuda el gobierno.

(They tell lies to qualify for welfare and the decent, hard-working people who have lived here all their lives are told they do not qualify for help.)

The new immigrants have different values from those who have come here from Mexico in the past.

They do not have good morals.

Their dress and behavior is not appropriate because they use a lot of jewelry and the women dress with revealing clothes.

No mandan sus niños a la escuela, así que andan robando y fumando marijuana.

(They do not encourage their children to go to school, so the kids are just stealing stuff and smoking marijuana all the time.)

They drive without licenses and don't have insurance on their cars.

A chi-square analysis was significant, indicating that there were more negative than positive themes in the participants' responses to all three interview questions, $\chi^2(1, 177) = 19.667, p .001$.

Overarching themes

Positive—The drug wars in Mexico were perceived as creating refugees out of most of the new immigrants. The newcomers were viewed as coming to the US to escape the violence and to rebuild their lives. For the most part, they were seen as enhancing the communities and region by starting up new legitimate businesses, offering medical and dental services not previously available, and enhancing the academic and extracurricular reputation of the schools. There was a rejection of the stereotype of all immigrants as having a negative influence on the communities and region.

Negative—Negative changes perceived in the milieu of borderlands communities and regions included increased crime rates and community disunity attributed to the negative consequences of the proximity of borderlands communities to Mexico. The newcomers were viewed as coming to the US to extend the reach of the cartels and as worsening the spill-over effects of drug crimes and associated violence. The new immigrants were also seen as defrauding government assistance programs, depriving natives of limited resources that they legitimately deserved. In addition, the recent arrivals were viewed as importing values and life styles that threatened the Mexican American culture of the area.

Analyses and conclusions

Our findings indicate that in the drug wars era, native borderlander Mexican Americans are associating new immigrants from Mexico with drug trafficking and related crimes (Ramirez,

Argueta, and Grasso 2013). They also strongly believe that the newcomers are defrauding government assistance programs (Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1984; Polinard, Wrinkle, and de la Garza 1984; De la Garza et al. 1991; Binder, Polinard, and Wrinkle 1997).

Our results also show that degree of identity with Mexican culture had a buffering effect on participants' personal beliefs regarding whether or not the new immigrants were creating problems in their communities and region. This was not the case with respect to degree of identity with Anglo culture. To the authors' knowledge, degree of identity with both Mexican and Anglo cultures has not been assessed in previous studies investigating native Mexican American borderlander attitudes toward immigrants from Mexico. This is important, because Miller, Polinard, and Wrinkle (1984) reported that borderlanders live in a "bicultural context." In earlier research, Peck and Diaz-Guerrero (1967), as well as Sargent and Matthews (2001), observed that borderlanders were bicultural. Our findings show that even though the drug wars era has made borderlanders more suspicious of new immigrants, degree of identification with Mexican culture has a moderating effect on whether or not they believe that their new neighbors are having a negative or positive impact on their communities and the region. The qualitative data shed some light on relationships between identification with Mexican culture and more nuanced views of the new immigrants. This was especially the case in results of the thematic analyses of interview content among the younger participants, who reported that their immigrant classmates had made many contributions both in academic and extracurricular activities of the schools and churches where they had interacted with them. For example, several young participants reported that their immigrant peers had made significant contributions to a mariachi (Mexican troubadour) band in music competition with neighboring schools, which had resulted in their school's musical group being selected as a finalist in a national competition.

Our findings regarding the suspicion in borderlands communities that the newcomers are "cheating on welfare" supports De la Garza et al.'s (1991) conclusion that structural variables are crucial to understanding attitudes toward immigrants because of competition for limited resources between natives and immigrants (in this case with respect to government assistance programs rather than employment). These data are also telling because this negative perception was found to be correlated to degree of identification with Anglo culture. The greater the degree of identification with Anglo culture, the more likely a participant was to report that their fellow residents believed that immigrants were defrauding government assistance programs. Again, the qualitative findings in the form of thematic analyses of interview content shed some light on the possible association of cultural identity to attitudes toward the new immigrants; participants who scored higher on identification with Anglo culture tended to stereotype the new immigrants as people who are breaking the law and cheating on welfare programs.

In fact, our qualitative findings indicate that most of the responses to our questions were significantly more negative than positive. Nevertheless, it is important to identify the areas in which natives felt that the new immigrants were contributing to their communities and region. It is also important to recognize that these tended to vary with the age of the interviewee. Young adults focused more on contributions that their immigrant peers had made to their schools, whereas older participants tended to be empathetic toward the

newcomers because they viewed them as being refugees from the drug wars. The older adults also indicated that they were making positive contributions to the economic development and quality of life of their communities by opening new legitimate businesses and offering new services. They were emphatic in making a distinction between the undocumented, whom they saw as having a negative impact, and the documented, whom they perceived as improving the quality of life in their communities and the area.

The qualitative data were also informative about the enormity of the impact of spill-over from the drug wars, demonstrating the concern that cartels in that country are seeking to extend their reach to communities in the US.

After reviewing research on the attitudes of native Mexican Americans toward new immigrants from Mexico, Jiménez (2007) concluded that the attitudes they hold are based on a cost-benefit analysis, but that little is known about the process of how these decisions are made. We think that the findings of our study can help clarify some of these processes, by conceptualizing the identity of participants as bicultural and giving them the opportunity to distinguish between documented and undocumented newcomers. These are important variables in the cost-benefit decision-making process.

Intra-ethnic disunity in borderlands communities

Our findings indicate that nonmetropolitan borderlands communities in South Texas are experiencing fragmentation. There is evidence of alienation between native Mexican Americans and the immigrants who have settled in borderlands communities since the advent of the drug wars era. The negative themes that emerged from our qualitative data indicate suspicion, resentment, and a tendency to shun the newcomers. Many natives viewed the new arrivals as different from themselves and from other waves of immigrants who have come in the past. Comments such as “they come here to break the law” and “they do not care about the education of their children or about making an honest living” were common. Our findings support previous work by Ybarra and Stephan (1994) on the relation between perceived threat and prejudice, and by Zarate and Shaw (2010) on the moderating effect of degree of perception of similarities to and differences with the newcomers on the positive or negative attitudes in turn expressed toward them.

Implications for future research

In general, Mexican American attitudes toward immigrants are complex. Future research needs to clarify the nature of the relationship of both Mexican and Anglo cultural identities to specific negative and positive attitudes toward new immigrants from Mexico. The bicultural nature of Mexican American borderlander identity needs to be investigated in more depth. For example, what aspects of Mexican identity (e.g. extent of use of Spanish language, pride in identifying the self as Mexican, etc.) are related to positive views toward new immigrants, and by the same token, what aspects of identity with Anglo culture are most related to negative views toward new arrivals from Mexico? Phinney and Ong (2007) have defined cultural identity as having more than one component. Our findings support their conclusion of a more complex definition (exploration and affirmation components) by adding a bicultural/multicultural component. In addition the views expressed by our

participants were very diverse, implying that it is important to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in future research on attitudes toward immigrants. Our findings also indicate that it is important to assess views toward both documented and undocumented newcomers.

Limitations

Our findings were limited because of the small sample size and because of the limited number of questions asked in our interviews. Our data are likely to be generalizable only to borderlands communities in which Mexican American residents are in the majority. The questions asked in the interviews were not neutral, so it is possible that they could have resulted in a negative response bias on the part of the participants. In addition, the correlational nature of the design limited our ability to make causal interpretations of our findings.

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Table 1

South Texas Participant Characteristics.

Characteristics	<i>N</i> = 91
Gender	
Male	42 (46.2%)
Female	49 (53.8%)
Family member generation	
Young adults	31 (32.0%)
Parents	60 (61.9%)
Age	
Young adults (24–30)	(<i>M</i> = 27.3, <i>SD</i> = 1.2)
Parents (47–63)	(<i>M</i> = 53.4, <i>SD</i> = 3.6)
Interviews conducted in Spanish	
Children	2 (6.5%)
Parents	28 (46.7%)
SES	
Working class	42 (43.3%)
Middle class	55 (56.7%)
USG	
First generation	25 (25.8%)
Second to third generation	36 (37.1%)
Fourth to sixth generation	30 (30.9%)

Table 2

Cultural Orientation Predicting Beliefs about Immigrants' Negative Impact by Endorsement of Drug Trafficking Beliefs.

	β	Standard Error	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval
<i>Immigrants are involved in drug trafficking</i>				
ARSMA ^I Anglo Orientation Scale	.149	.344	.188	(.592–2.277)
ARSMA ^I Mexican Orientation Scale	2.109	.701	9.056	(2.089–32.540)
<i>Immigrants are not involved in drug trafficking</i>				
ARSMA ^I Anglo Orientation Scale	–.811	.634	1.638	(.128–1.538)
ARSMA ^I Mexican Orientation Scale	.296	.619	.228	(.400–4.522)

^I Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II Scale.