Immigrants: A Forgotten Minority

Steve Binggeli[1], Jörg Dietz[2], Franciska Krings[2]

[1]Rice University

[2]University of Lausanne

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to Steve Binggeli, Rice University, Department of Psychology, 6100 Main Street, MS – 25, Houston, TX 77005, Steve.Binggeli@rice.edu, Phone: 713-348-8077, Fax: 713-348-5221.

Employment discrimination against immigrants – the unfair behavioral biases against residents of a country who were born abroad, do not possess the local citizenship, and yet live there permanently – remains a vastly under-studied topic in industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology, despite several calls over the past 30 years for such research (Bell, Kwesiga, & Berry, 2010; Dietz, 2010; Hirschman, 1982; Pettigrew, 1998). A search for articles published in the same seven top journals selected by Ruggs et al. (in press) in their timely article did not yield a single article that focused on discrimination against immigrants. Recent reviews of employment discrimination (Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006) also did not mention immigrants, and neither did Ruggs et al. in the focal article with the exception of discussing Hispanics in the United-States. Yet, sociological and economic research (e.g., Mayda, 2006; van Tubergen, Maas, & Flap, 2004) has produced convincing evidence that immigrant employees are often the targets of discrimination, and this research will only become more relevant as the worldwide immigrant population of 240 million in 2010 is expected to rise to 405 million in 2050 (International Organization for Migration, 2010).

Just on the basis of the sheer number of immigrants, I/O psychologists should pay more attention to the experiences of immigrants in the workplace, but as elaborated below, other good practical and scientific motives for doing so exist. In this article, we adopt the structure of the focal article to propose a basis for developing research in this direction by 1) demonstrating the importance of the problem, 2) presenting the specificities of immigrant employees, 3) reviewing the relevant literature in I/O psychology and 4) giving recommendations for future research.

The Importance of the Problem

Immigrants are an increasingly large and important group in the labor forces of many nations. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD,

2012a), immigrants accounted for 70% of the increase in the labor force in Europe and 47% in the United-States (U.S.) between 2000 and 2010. In Western nations, foreign-born workers currently represent between about 10% and 30% of the labor force, with, for example, about 16% in the United-States (OECD, 2012b). Furthermore, in sectors that suffer skill shortages (e.g., IT, mechanical engineering), a fierce competition for qualified immigrant employees exists (Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006), indicating that immigrants add to national labor forces not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively.

Concerning the treatment of immigrant employees, legal regulations vary between countries. In the United-States, for example, the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees based on their national origin, which means they are protected because they (1) come (or their ancestors) from a different country and/or (2) belong to an ethnic or racial group (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, EEOC, 2012a). Despite these legal regulations, immigrant employees remain proportionally over-represented in low status jobs, are more frequently unemployed, and receive lower salaries for the same work than do native-born employees (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Moreover, the number of claims (11,833 in 2011) for employment discrimination based on national origin has increased by 47% between 2001 and 2011 in the United-States, which is about two times more than the increase of the total number of charges (23.6%) registered by the EEOC during the same period (EEOC, 2012b). Supplementary evidence of employment discrimination against immigrants has been accumulated by the International Labour Office in many different countries (e.g., ILO, 2011; Zegers de Beijl, 2000), suggesting that it is a global phenomenon.

These statistics reviewed above indicate that the expertise developed by I/O practitioners and scholars in identifying and reducing employment discrimination can contribute to the improvement of the working conditions for immigrants. Yet, doing so is a

complex task because immigrants are a diverse minority and they often differ from locals on more than one dimension (Dietz, 2010).

Immigrants: A Diverse Minority

The diversity among immigrants is evident in several ways. First, Pettigrew (1998) identified seven types of immigrant status, including illegal migrants, asylum seekers, and legal migrants. Depending on their status, the legal context varies for immigrant employees, and so do their experiences of discrimination: While illegal migrants largely suffer from exploitation, legal migrants often experience that they are "under-employed" as their foreign qualifications are devalued.

Second, immigrants come from different countries and, hence, cultures (Phinney, 1990; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Rodriguez, & Wang, 2007). Associated with this diversity in national origin are differences in skin color, language, values, attitudes, religion, knowledge, education, or behaviors. The degree to which immigrants differ from locals on these dimensions is likely to affect their acculturation process and, therefore, their integration in the job market (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010).

Third, immigrants differ with respect to the time they have spent in the host country. Immigration often occurs in waves; i.e., people from a certain region/country emigrate massively to another country during a certain period of time. For example, in 2000, most immigrants to the United-States came from Hispanic countries, while in 2012 most immigrants came from Asian countries (Pew Research Center, 2012). A consequence of immigration occurring in waves is that specific immigrant groups may be particularly discriminated against, but only at specific historical points in time.

The diversity among immigrants is likely to elicit subgrouping processes among locals (Richards & Hewstone, 2001), so that locals would stereotype immigrants into subgroups as a function of their similarities and differences. Further, different immigrant groups are

associated with distinct stereotype content (Lee & Fiske, 2006) and hence likely to be treated differently in the workplace. For instance, low status immigrants perceived as sucking up their host country resources might suffer from more blatant forms of discrimination, whereas highly competent and competitive immigrants might be the targets of subtler forms of discrimination. Thus, I/O psychologists are well advised to focus on specific immigrant groups when considering employment discrimination against immigrants.

Review of the Literature

While, as mentioned earlier, not a single article in top journals focused on employment discrimination against immigrants in the last 22 years, some articles touched on immigrant status. In two articles (Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000) the sample included foreign-born participants: Kravitz and Klineberg, for example, found that foreign born Hispanics perceived more workplace discrimination than did Hispanics born in the United-States.

We extended our research to the other sixteen I/O relevant journals identified by Zickar and Highhouse (2001) and included the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (JMP) because it had published a special issue on employment discrimination against immigrants (Dietz, 2010). Results of our research on *web of science* for *immigrant** or *migrant** or *foreign** or *foreigner** or *nationality** in the topic (keywords, title, abstract) of articles published in those 24 journals since 1990 showed 260 occurrences. We identified 11 articles that focused on stereotype, prejudice or discrimination against immigrants in the workplace (8 were published in JMP, 2 in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and 1 in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*).

Scope issues do not allow a review of each of these 11 studies, but three themes emerged: (1) Type of immigrant status affects type of discrimination, (2) Accents and other linguistic aspects affect discrimination, and (3) Acculturation strategies may underlie

discrimination. First, consistent with our earlier assertion, different types of immigrants face different forms of discrimination. For illegal migrants, Marfleet and Blustein (2011) argued that they are most likely to be employed in low-status jobs and that their vulnerable position is exploited rather blatantly. Asylum seekers (Schultheiss, Watts, Sterland, & O'Neill, 2011), while they can obtain work authorization, are likely to face difficulties in getting their skills, education and experience properly rewarded. Finally, highly qualified immigrant professionals, who represent serious rivals for locals on the job market, are likely to face subtle forms of discrimination (Baltes & Rudolph, 2010; Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010; Petersen & Dietz, 2005). For example, Petersen and Dietz (2005) found that subtly prejudiced people, but not blatantly prejudiced and nonprejudiced ones, only selected fewer qualified foreign applicants when they had been advised to maintain a homogenous workforce in a recruitment situation.

The second major theme relates to discriminatory treatment as a function of language-related factors. As mentioned in the focal article, Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes, and Ferris (2006) studied accent effects on the evaluation of applicants from ethnic minorities, showing that an applicant with a Hispanic name and accent was most likely to be discriminated. Similarly, Hosoda, Nguyen and Stone Romero (2012) showed that applicants with a Mexican-Spanish accent were evaluated as less suitable for a software engineering job and as less likely to be promoted for a managerial position than applicants with an English-American accent. Finally, Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2010) found that applicants with a French-accent were rated as more employable than were those with a Japanese accent, especially for jobs that had high communication demands. Hence, this body of research provides another example of the subtlety of discrimination against immigrants by showing how some immigrants might be more discriminated against than others based on their accent.

The third theme, particularly unique to immigrants, is acculturation strategies. Dutch research (Oerlemans & Peeters, 2010) showed that whereas local employees favored the full assimilation of immigrants into the local culture, immigrant employees preferred a dual-orientation of partial adaptation to the host culture and partial retention of their original culture. The more local and immigrant employees disagreed on these acculturation strategies, the more it impeded their relations in the workplace, thus, setting the stage for discriminatory treatment. Acculturation strategies also have other effects in the workplace. For example, depending on their acculturation, immigrant employees might have lower expectations for fair treatment in the workplace, which employers might exploit (see, for example, Avery, Tonidandel, Volpone, & Raghuram, 2010).

Recommendations for Research and Practice

We already pointed out that more research on employment discrimination against immigrants is needed. Below, we suggest three avenues, which are relevant to both practitioners and scientists.

1. Understanding employment discrimination against immigrants requires cross-disciplinary and mixed-method approaches. I/O psychologists can benefit much from other disciplines with a richer history of research on immigrants. These disciplines include economics and sociology, but also more adjacent sub-disciplines, such as basic social psychology and cross-cultural psychology. In social psychology, for example, integrated threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999) or the instrumental model of group conflict (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998) are particularly relevant.

While most social psychological models take a lens of intergroup conflict, cross-cultural psychology is concerned with the impact of culture on behaviors and beliefs (Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012). Cross-cultural research on perceptions and treatment of expatriates by locals, for example, informs practitioners and scientists of employment discrimination

about the role of acculturation strategies, showing that assimilation of local cultural elements leads to more favorable perceptions of immigrants (e.g., Thomas & Ravlin, 1995; Yi-Feng, Tjosvold, & Peiguan, 2008).

Further, cross-cultural research illustrates the importance of using appropriate empirical methods to study specific cultural and ethnic minorities. The relevance of pure quantitative research, which is prevalent in the employment discrimination literature, has been questioned in this field (Hines, 1993; Karasz & Singelis, 2009), due to 1) issues with linguistic and conceptual equivalence, 2) measurement problems, and 3) difficulties with the survey process. For those reasons, these scholars have encouraged the use of qualitative and mixed methods to obtain more accurate and relevant data on those specific minorities (e.g., illiterate immigrants). This suggests that in order to learn more about the working experience of the most vulnerable immigrant groups in top I/O journals, editors and reviewers would have to remain open to unconventional methodological approaches.

2. Practice and research of employment discrimination against immigrants must account for the diversity of the immigrant population. Because immigrants are such a diverse group, it is not wise to consider them as one entity. The only exception would be generic differences between immigrants and local citizens, for example, in the legal rights that local employees but not immigrant employees have. For practitioners, this diversity suggests that immigrant groups react differently to, for instance, corporate socialization programs or training for cultural adjustment. Furthermore, the content of stereotypes about immigrants varies as a function of their national origin (Lee & Fiske, 2006) and, hence, local employees may treat different employees differently by, for example, viewing some as more competent (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011) or less socially-skilled than others (Krings & Olivares, 2007).

For scientists, it suggests that discrimination against immigrants is best studied on the basis of multiple categorization models of immigration (e.g., Kulik, Roberson, & Perry, 2007). Kulik et al.'s model inspires, among other things, the question of when immigrant status becomes the basis for discriminatory treatment as opposed to other differences, such as gender or ethnicity. Furthermore, immigrant status is sometimes easily recognizable (e.g., in application documents) and sometimes not (e.g., in social interactions), requiring research on the effects of the visibility of outgroup membership on immigrant discrimination.

3. Practice and research on employment discrimination against immigrants has to develop interventions. To date, the evidence on interventions for reducing employment discrimination in general and against immigrants in particular remains under-developed and is often inconclusive (e.g., Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Petersen & Krings, 2009; for an exception see Singletary & Hebl, 2009). Because immigrants are a unique outgroup, reducing employment discrimination against them requires theoretically and practically unique approaches. Berry's (1997) four types of acculturation, ranging from marginalization to assimilation, may offer a basis for conceptualizing interventions, which, for example, suggests that interventions for reducing employment discrimination may target immigrants only, locals only, or jointly both groups. At the practical level, among other things, immigrants unlike other outgroups often experience that their educational credentials (e.g., high school diplomas and university degrees) are not recognized (e.g., Esses, Dietz, Bennett-AbuAyyash, & Joshi, 2007). Esses et al..suggested that the formal recognition of foreign credentials might go a long way in leveling the playing field for immigrant applicants.

Conclusion

We hope that we have made our case clearly. Immigrants constitute not only one of the larger outgroups in terms of numbers, but they are also a qualitatively unique outgroup. From a practical side, it is obvious that corporations should be much interested in reducing

employment discrimination against immigrants to allow these employees to realize their full performance potential. From a scientific point of view, currently we do not only need more research, but also have rich theoretical and empirical opportunities from learning more about the treatment of immigrants in the workplace.

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