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### **Latino newcomers in Missouri: Cultural adaptation and ethnic identity**

David Aguayo & Lisa Flores

Immigrants have slowly stopped migrating to traditional coastal states (i.e., California, Florida, New York, etc.) and have begun settling more in the Midwest (Bump, Lowell, & Pettersen, 2005). Over 120,000 Latinas/os reside in the state of Missouri, a figure that is double the amount from the 1990 census figures (Lazos & Jeanetta, 2002). The Missouri communities are faced with complicated issues that may affect the settlement of these newcomers. These issues contribute to the challenges of Latinas/os in their settling communities and include dealing with education, health care, and legal documentation (Jeanetta & Valdivia, 2007). Differences among immigrants, such as their reasons for migrating, also create a unique adaptation experience for the newcomer. This qualitative study has examined the ethnic identity and adaptation of Latina/o newcomers in a rural community in Missouri, and has assessed the relation of identity and adaptation to their settlement and integration patterns in the host community. Three Latina/o newcomers (1 female, 2 male) were interviewed in Spanish from three rural communities in Missouri. Eighteen questions were asked pertaining to the strategies they used to integrate into their communities and the factors that facilitated or impeded their economic integration. The interviews were transcribed to English and coded using Atlas.ti software. Analysis of the data identified the following themes: language, life in community, social life (networking in community), thoughts and beliefs, perceptions and experiences, settlement plans, and identity. The data is described in relations to each of these areas. The current study is important because it will supplement research conducted in the Midwest regarding Latina/o newcomers and will enable professionals within rural communities to have a better understanding of how these newcomers adapt to their new American culture.