



Student Research Articles

The Bicultural I: A Social and Cognitive Approach for Understanding the Psychology of Acculturation

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Abstract

This paper investigates the processes and challenges of creating a socially integrated, empowered immigrant identity by exploring the concepts acculturation model. The author examines the psychology of acculturation and the processes for creating a socially integrated bicultural self for immigrants who retain cultural traditions while adapting to new social norms and practices. The complexity of this process embraces principles from both social and cultural psychological paradigms and emphasizes a non-dual approach for creating meaning for a bicultural individual acculturating into a new society.

The experience of moving to another town or across the country is stressful. There is discomfort of not knowing neighbors, being a new student at school, having no mental map of the surrounding communities, and wondering if other residents are multiculturally competent. However, what is the psychological process like for immigrants moving to another country, immersing themselves into a new culture, language and sociopolitical ecology? The additional pressures of learning a new language and culture, while possibly dealing with oppression, racism, and marginalization

enforced by xenophobic policies can be overwhelming for immigrants without institutional support (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987; Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 2000).

Acculturation is an individual and social experience, and relying on cultural and social psychological perspectives can facilitate a dynamic constructive approach for understanding the cognitive processes involved. Acculturation models will be reviewed and concepts of social integration and frame switching (Hong, Morris, Chiu & Benet-Martinez, 2000) as they apply to the acculturation of immigrants will be explored. While addressing all aspects of acculturation is beyond the scope of this paper, I hope to critically investigate the processes and challenges of creating a socially integrated and empowered immigrant identity.

Acculturation

Berry (1990) defines acculturation as “the process by which individuals change both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes underway in their own culture” (p. 235). Berry’s model (1980) offers four stages of acculturation: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. Assimilation occurs when immigrants adapt to the dominant culture and abandon their cultural practices and beliefs.

Separation means the minority members retain their traditional culture at the expense of assimilating into the newer dominant culture. Marginalization happens when the dominant society alienates newcomers, resulting in socio-cultural oppression of immigrants. Integration is where an immigrant’s identity is a balanced blend of traditional and current values, beliefs and behaviors (Mana, Orr & Mana, 2009). Research suggests successful integration results in lower rates of stress and depression, while encouraging resiliency and empowerment (Berry et al, 1987). Swartz-Kulstad and Martin (1999) also suggest that immigrants who successfully adapt to the standards of behavior in the dominant culture while upholding their own traditional values and beliefs are considered socially integrated and are more able to function with greater positive mental health.

Bourhis and colleagues (1997) use the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM) as a social psychological framework for understanding that acculturation is essentially relational in nature. They suggest that acculturation is interaction between immigrants and the host country itself, and this process is naturally bidirectional. Bourhis and colleagues (1997) define

acculturation by the limits the State places on immigrants trying to assimilate or acculturate in the host country. If the State declares that immigrants holding certain visas or other official documents are temporary or permanent aliens of that host country, as well as when and if they become citizens, then the immigrant's relationship to that country is legally and politically set by the State. Therefore, acculturation is not simply a psychosocial process of rehabilitating to newer values and behaviors, but one of bondage to the host State (Bourhis et al. 1997).

Gordon (1964) proposes a unidimensional assimilation model, stating immigrants' experiences of acculturation depend on how they adapt to the dominant culture, and if they fail to assimilate, they are to blame. However, this does not account for how social structures and policy interact and influence an immigrant's perceived success at integrating cultures, and Bourhis et al. argue for a bidimensional model of acculturation to account for the influences of the State on the immigration process. Because acculturation is multidimensional and involves complex psychosocial processing, how does an immigrant's social identity develop?

Social Identity

Social identity includes a cultural self, and introspective dialogue is needed to facilitate the structural and pragmatic mental changes necessary for redefining identity during acculturation (Mana et al., 2009). Because changes happen within, but are reflected externally, there must be strategies in place for immigrants to process the internal psychological shifts while simultaneously integrating into new surrounding cultures (Amiot et al. 2001). Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 1986) social identity theory (SIT) defines identity as a myriad of aspects of self that relate to others, and as to immigrant identity formation, Tajfel would argue that the immigrant, or "the minority self," has to find common themes with the "majority selves" of the native population to acculturate with less stress (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel defines social identity as "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his or her knowledge of membership to a social group together with the value and the emotional significance attached to it" (1981, p. 255). Because one person can identify with multiple aspects of multiple groups, an immigrant should identify and coagulate aspects of his or her previous culture with characteristics of the new culture.

The problem for acculturating immigrants comes when the dominant population exercises their

privileges or beliefs unskillfully and forcefully (Yakushko, 2009; Yeh, Kim, Pitus & Atkins, 2008). Immigrants deal with basic acculturation stresses and issues of oppression simultaneously, which can lead to depression and anxiety (Park, 2010). Social integration models and frame switching (Hong, et al. 2000) provide the tools for an empowering acculturation process for immigrants redefining their identities. Phinney, Korenzyk, Liebkind and Vedder (2001) find a strong sense of national pride and ethnic identity are the markers for healthy, adaptive cognitive processes and accomplished social integration.

Mana et al. (2009) writes, "Immigrant identities are defined here as the repertoire of immigrants' cultural and social positions vis-a vis those of the host majority group. The identity of a group, in this sense, transcends the level of individual minds and is a collective phenomenon" (p. 450). Immigrants can only make sense of their new world through the "complex set of relationships between social groups," and to understand the nature of forming a new social identity, through social integration, one must adapt to or adopt the behaviors of the groups he or she is joining. While relying on both the SIT and BAM models, and understanding the acculturation process, Mana et al. (2009), warn readers to be aware of the assumptions that those theories are founded on, "SIT assesses how group members (immigrants in our case) overcome a conflict between their quest for self-esteem and their low status and low social power, whereas BAM presumes a more harmonious social world in which immigrants may choose how to relate to the host group" (p. 466).

In both theories, assumptions do not take into account the variables of social pressure, oppression and xenophobia that could influence one's social integration and acculturation development. Social integration and reconstructing social identity has psychological and emotional costs and benefits. Some benefits include being accepted into a new community and cultural events, learning new languages, encouraging neuroplasticity, exposure to new customs, foods and traditions. A wide range of benefits for social integration promotes psychological well-being and emotional resiliency.

Some costs are depression from leaving one's "natural" culture behind, stress from difficulties learning or resisting new behaviors, and anxiety over the sense of losing cultural identity. Other costs come from a xenophobic society that mandates that immigrants assimilate or leave. These pressures can be overwhelming for someone trying to readjust personal identity, leaving him or her isolated and oppressed.

Hong et al. (2000) can provide the cognitive framework needed to adapt, integrate and advocate for acculturation needs.

Frame Switching

Frame switching, intrapsychically weaving two or more cognitive cultural concepts at one time, allows an individual to hold space for his or her primary culture while simultaneously acting out (or thinking within) aspects of another culture. However, the adopted social group also maintains power over the cognitive process of an individual creating an individual identity (Hong et al., 2000). Like code switching where individuals from one linguistic group change the dialect, speed and tone of their language to meet the dominant majority's expectations, frame switching involves the psychological adaptation of one's individual intracultural processing in response to "cues in the social environment" (Hong et al., 2000, p. 709).

Hong et al. (2000) describe frame switching as a cognitive process where relevant cultural constructs, each made of various categories influence behavior and "come[s] to the fore in the individual's mind and guides interpretation[s]" (p. 711). So if one's primary culture teaches a specific set of behaviors for one construct and the adopted culture specifies other behaviors, the socially integrated individual will preconsciously frame switch perspectives to replicate what is expected in that particular culture. Frame switching can become a consciously cognizant process when the bicultural individual becomes aware of his or her own frame-switching schema. Here, frame switching is a healthy response to locating one's identity within a new cultural ecological framework that includes interpersonal, communal and socially constructed relationships.

Conclusions

Understanding the psychology of acculturation process embraces principles from social and individual psychological paradigms and creates a non-dual approach

for creating meaning for a bicultural individual acculturating into a new society. Ascribing meaning to a cultural event is a phenomenon that depends on a myriad of factors: how one's culture and inclusion in a particular social group influences cognition, behavior and affect; a bicultural individual's ability to frame switch between constructs and their inherent categorical variables; and how that individual pragmatically operationalizes those constructs to help create meaning and a new, adaptive identity.

During my service in the PeaceCorps, I struggled with my self-concept for two years. Initially, I was

more interested in maintaining a distinct boundary between "my" culture and the Thai culture, which marginalized me from the possibility of successful social integration. It was not until I became cognizant of this error that I could remove those internal barriers and allow the Thai culture to permeate within. Thus I began to frame switch, dream in Thai, see the inherent connection between language and culture, and enjoy myself as an integrated part of the community and society I joined rather than as a awkward uni-cultural bystander.

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Internet Fraud: Information for Teachers and Students

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Abstract

Internet fraud takes a number of forms with the responsible individuals changing tactics rapidly to avoid detection. The perpetrators rely on telemarketing, emails, as well as presenting themselves personally to unsuspecting people. The evolution of internet marketing as well as ecommerce and the ease of connectivity create increasing opportunities for fraudsters while at the same time placing more unsuspecting internet users at risk of falling prey to these schemes. There exists a thriving economy online with large sums of money changing hands online. It is therefore important for any internet user to easily identify when they are exposed to internet fraud schemes and as such avoid being a victim.

Internet Uses

The internet is important as it provides an avenue as well as a backbone for electronic commerce, research, communication, and education. It provides information ranging from full books to journals, all of which are important to teachers and students. Research for instance can be very difficult if the information present in online databases was not available. Apart from educational use, students as well as teachers participate in communication through social networks, electronic mail, as well as voice communication such as Skype.

Risks of Using Internet

Use of the internet may expose both teachers and students to many risks ranging from identity theft, fraud, and exposure to malware that can easily result

