

Psychological Theories of Immigration

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Psychology provides a theoretical perspective for the analysis of human behavior and the social environment resulting from immigration. Acculturation outcomes have been of primary interest within the field of psychology as they connect to immigrant well-being. This review expands the focus from acculturation outcomes to the frameworks of acculturative stress, cultural learning, attachment theory, and ethnic identity to further explore the individual and social factors impacting immigrant psychological well-being. A review of each framework's interpretation for the varied immigrant adaptation responses is included. In addition, the coping strategies or mediating factors presented by each framework in connection to immigrant adaptation within a new environment are discussed. This review concludes with suggestions for psychological frameworks to expand their research in the immigrant experience to further contribute to the knowledge base of human behavior and the social environment.

KEYWORDS *Acculturation, attachment theory, cultural learning theory, ethnic identity, immigrants, psychology*

INTRODUCTION

The process of immigration calls for an understanding of human behavior within the context of a social environment when individuals choose to relocate for both personal and social reasons often leading individuals in less developed countries to countries with more resources. Dovidio and Esses (2001) found that the relocation process creates social consequences resulting from (a) the reactions of the receiving countries, (b) adaptations taken by the immigrant group, and (c) mutual exchanges between the immigrating and receiving parties. They also suggest that immigration requires

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biopsychosocial adjustment to a new country that can impact the mental health of immigrants. Despite the importance of the issue of immigration and its global relevance, researchers find that immigration remains an under-researched area within psychology (Berry, 2001; Dovidio & Esses, 2001).

This brief literature review includes theoretical perspectives on acculturation and acculturative stress. The major themes include (a) utilizing adaptive acculturation responses when acculturating, (b) managing acculturative stress, (c) learning and exploring the norms of the new culture, and (d) reshaping an ethnic identity. The first section of this literature review focuses on Berry's (2001) theory of acculturation as a basis of comparison with other theories in this review. The next section identifies how immigrants manage stress resulting from acculturation from an acculturative stress perspective, attachment theory framework, and culture learning approach. The final section explores how immigrants shape their ethnic identity. The conclusion summarizes concepts and identifies implications for promoting an understanding of immigrant behavior within the social environment.

METHODOLOGY

This literature review included several databases (PsycINFO, Social Sciences Abstracts, PsycARTICLES, and Google Scholar), and the majority of articles used were found in the PsycINFO database. Keywords used in the searches included "psychology and immigration," "theories of immigration and psychology," "attachment and immigration," "cultural learning," "acculturation," "acculturative stress and immigration," "ethnic identity," "ethnic identity of immigrants," and truncated terms (e.g., "theor*" and "immigr*"). Once several relevant articles were gathered, the articles and books of frequently cited authors were reviewed. A search of books by the identified authors was facilitated by using the University of California, Berkeley library systems.

Reference sections in chapters and articles were also reviewed for additional sources including frequently cited journals. Two sources, a special issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* and *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, provided considerable information on immigration adaptation to a new culture and the response of the host culture. Other authors were identified with the assistance of professors at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Social Welfare, who specialize in the areas of immigration and mental health.

This literature review has several limitations. First, there is a limited amount of research devoted to the psychological dimensions of immigration. Second, several major frameworks related to psychological aspects of immigration overlap with others disciplines (e.g., the sociocultural perspective in sociology and the social identity theory of social psychology). Third, this

brief literature review does not represent a comprehensive discussion of all aspects of the psychological theories related to immigration.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Acculturation

The basic principles of acculturation theory explore whether acculturation is a uni-dimensional, bidimensional, or a multi-dimensional process (Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006). Under the uni-dimensional approach, the individual loses the original cultural identity and gains the cultural identity of the new culture. The new culture is acquired as it is considered to be “psychologically problematic” to accept both cultures (Sam, 2006, p. 17). Under the bi-dimensional approach, the individual can find a balance in accepting a new culture without losing his or her identification with the original culture (Sam, 2006).

The multidimensional process includes attitudes, values, behaviors, language, and cultural identity in which the immigrant does not disregard the values of the country of origin but rather adjusts values while adapting to those of the new host society (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006; Thomas & Choi, 2006). There is consensus among researchers that acculturation is multidimensional, and Berry (2006) provides a comprehensive approach to acculturation is his classification of acculturation strategies.

According to Berry (2006), acculturation strategies consist of daily behaviors and attitudes shaped by dominant and non-dominant cultures. These strategies take into consideration the array of immigrant psychological responses to the new dominant culture, recognizing that not all immigrants want to increase contact or cultural resemblance with the dominant cultural group (Berry, 2006). Berry notes that individual preferences include “maintaining one’s heritage and identity or having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethnic groups” (p. 34).

Van Oudenhoven et al. (2006) effectively capture this decision-making process with the following questions: “Is it of value to maintain my cultural heritage?” or “Is it of value to maintain relations with other groups?” (p. 641). When faced with these questions, four acculturation strategies can be utilized: (a) *assimilation*, which places more emphasis on daily positive interactions with the host society than maintaining one’s cultural identity; (b) *separation*, which involves maintaining one’s original culture while avoiding interaction with others; (c) *integration*, which represents a desire to maintain one’s original culture along with positive interactions with the host society; and (d) *marginalization*, which reflects the individual’s decision to neither maintain the original culture nor adopt the new culture (Berry, 2006; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006).

According to Yeh (2003), one strategy may not be more effective than another as there are differences in acculturation strategies selected by “native people, ethnic groups, immigrants, refugees, and sojourners” (p. 35). Though some immigrants welcome the acculturation process, others will experience less choice in the migration process, especially refugees forced to leave their country of origin (Hovey, 2000). Strategies vary according to the immigrant’s desire for contact with the new country, the experience of the relocation process, and the length of contact (Yeh).

The work of Ying and Lee (1999) found the use of acculturation strategies to vary depending on the stage of adolescent development among Asian youth. Younger Asian youth reflected a state of separation consistent with uni-dimensional status whereas older adolescents appeared more integrated reflecting a bi-dimensional approach. Ying and Lee posit that younger adolescents prefer separation or assimilation as they are less cognitively demanding whereas older adolescents can cognitively manage integration. Thus, acculturation levels may also depend on the age or developmental status of the individual.

Berry (2006) found these strategies to be viable when immigrants can freely select among them. Unfortunately, this is not always the case when the dominant group creates restrictions that prevent immigrants from gaining access to the dominant culture. Immigrants are less likely to welcome acculturation when they experience rejection due to ethnic or physical features that distinguish them from the larger society. Berry also notes that when “the immigrant group adopts the basic values of the larger society while the dominant group adapts its basic institutions (e.g., health or education) to meet the needs of the immigrant group,” a multicultural society can exist (p. 36). He concludes that a society needs to provide the following psychological conditions for integration to occur: (a) cultural diversity, (b) low levels of prejudice, and (c) positive regard among ethnocentric groups.

Acculturative Stress

One of the psychological responses to acculturation is acculturative stress. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that create acculturative stress, the outcomes of acculturative stress, the strategies needed to manage acculturative stress, and the impact of acculturative stress on different immigrant groups.

The concept of acculturative stress can be used to explain some of the mental health conditions experienced by immigrants. Wei et al. (2007) define acculturative stress “as a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experiences of acculturation, the psychological difficulties in adapting to a new culture, or psychological stressors resulting from unfamiliarity with new customs and social norms” (p. 386). The concept of stress is preferred over culture shock for the potential of developing coping strategies

to combat the stressors (Berry, 2006). During the acculturation process, the individual can experience changes in behavior, attitudes, and identity based on different ways in which individuals experience the acculturation process leading to distinct outcomes (Williams & Berry, 1991).

Williams and Berry found that “societal disintegration” occurs when previously learned cultural norms are not found in the new culture and the change creates a personal crisis. They also found the negative outcomes of acculturative stress to possibly include anxiety, depression, somatic complaints, identity confusion, feelings of marginality, and identity confusion. Jamil, Nassar-McMillan, and Lambert (2007) found post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, panic, depression, and dysthymia in their study of recent Iraqi immigrants. Hovey (2000) found a correlation between acculturative stress, depression, and suicidal ideation among adult Mexican immigrants. Berry (2006) found anxiety and depression to be the most common negative psychological responses to acculturative stress.

Williams and Berry (1991) found that the following preexisting factors can lead to higher or lower levels of acculturative stress: “ability to speak the new dominate language, prior knowledge of the culture, motives for contact, attitudes towards acculturation, level of education, values, and or self-esteem” (p. 635). They further noted that the level and type of contact can also mediate acculturative stress. For example, positive contacts with the host society can lead to reduced levels of acculturative stress. However, the levels of stress can increase when individuals encounter a discrepancy between what they expected and what they found in the new country (Williams & Berry).

Several studies have identified multiple factors that can diminish or improve acculturative stress. Longer stay in the new country is expected to reduce acculturative stress (Wei et al., 2007). A multitude of studies have found that social support from friends, families, and or institutions can reduce acculturative stress (Hovey, 2000; Thomas & Choi, 2006; Wei et al., 2007; Williams & Berry, 1991). Hovey and Magana (2002) found that socioeconomic status, the sense of control in the decision to immigrate, and willingness of the new country to accept cultural diversity are some of the factors that contribute to different levels of acculturative stress. Yeh (2003) concluded that immigration at younger ages correlates with less mental health symptoms among Asian youth. Other studies found a connection between lack of language proficiency and acculturative stress (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Hovey, 2000).

On the basis of work by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Berry (2006) identifies two distinct coping strategies related to managing acculturative stress: *problem-focused coping* (to solve or change the problem) and *emotion-focused coping* (gaining a sense of control over the emotions connected to the problem; p. 47). Berry found that when coping strategies are adequately used in response to high levels of stress, the overall level of stress remains low. Yet, when unresolved stressors are overwhelming, stress levels can lead to personal crises and to the development of depression and or anxiety.

Researchers of acculturative stress find that a sense of cognitive control and use of positive coping skills produce better mental health outcomes as the individual acculturates. Those immigrants who connect the acculturation process with positive outcomes can also experience better mental health outcomes (Berry, 2006; Williams & Berry, 1991). However, cognitive control may not always be enough for positive results during the acculturation process. For example, Wei et al. (2007) suggest that internal regulation may not reduce acculturative stress when the cause is an external factor such as discrimination.

Not all immigrants will be negatively affected by acculturative stress. For some, the acculturation process can lead to increased opportunities in the new country and produce less acculturative stress (Hovey, 2000; Hovey & Magana; 2003; Williams & Berry, 1991). Integration has been found to be connected to minimal stress levels while assimilation is connected to intermediate levels of stress (Williams & Berry). In contrast, those who feel marginalized and separate from their ethnic culture and the dominant culture experience higher levels of stress (Thomas & Choi, 2006; Williams & Berry). To summarize, the levels of acculturative stress depend on the mode of acculturation, acculturation attitudes, phase of acculturation, multiculturalism in the host society, and characteristics of the individual (Thomas & Choi; Williams & Berry).

Culture Learning Theory

An examination of psychological theories related to immigration also needs to include the process of sociocultural adaptation that relates to cultural learning theory. In making a distinction between psychological and sociocultural adjustment, Ward and Kennedy (1992) define psychological adjustment as “psychological and emotional well-being” and sociocultural adaptation as “the ability to fit in or negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture” (p. 178). They explain that though the terms are distinct from each other, both forms of adjustment are connected, just as a mood disturbance is connected to social difficulties. For example, when immigrants lack the knowledge and social skills needed to navigate within a new culture, they can experience negative psychological outcomes. Ward and Kennedy (1993) found the connection between psychological and sociocultural adjustment to vary depending on the distinctiveness of the immigrating individual and the relocation process. They note that “the relationship between the two adjustment domains strengthens as the sojourner’s world becomes increasingly defined by the host culture environment” (p. 243).

The management of the acculturation process not only includes acculturative stress but incorporates cultural learning. Culture learning theory focuses on the social psychology of “intercultural” encounters with a focus on com-

munication competence, knowledge of norms and values, and sociocultural adaptation (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

In the area of language proficiency and communication competence, researchers found that the ability to speak the language of the dominant culture is connected with an increase in positive sociocultural adjustment or adaptation to the new community (Clement, Noels, & Deneault, 2001; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). In essence, the ability to speak the language of the host country leads to (a) increased participation with the host community, (b) improved cultural learning, (c) increased social support, and (d) ultimately increased adaptive sociocultural adjustment (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Masgoret and Ward further find that the simple motivation to speak a new language also has a positive impact on the improvement of language competence and on the improvement of contact with the members of the dominant group. In addition, higher levels of language confidence contribute to an increase in the identification with other minority groups (Clement et al., 2001). Searle and Ward (1990) note that friendships with members of the host culture not only provide an opportunity to learn the norms of the new society but reduce the difficulties that newcomers experience through positive encounters. Hannigan's (1990) review of the literature related to cross-cultural training found that though increased "intercultural communication can lead to effective interactions, it may not guarantee adjustment to the host culture" (p. 94).

The ability to speak the dominant language is one ingredient of language competence. Such competence includes an understanding of (a) non-verbal communications, (b) differences in rules and conventions, (c) differences in norms and values found in the new country, and (d) different communication styles (Hannigan, 1990; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Culture learning theory emphasizes the importance of rules and conventions used during face-to-face interactions (Masgoret & Ward).

Cultural learning theory also emphasizes the importance of "social axioms" defined by Kurman and Ronen-Eilon (2004) as "beliefs that can guide behavior in specific situations" within a culture (p. 192). Culture learning theory finds that sociocultural adaptation results from learning the new cultural skills needed to successfully interact with others in a new environment (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon). Immigrants are expected to lack knowledge of social axioms, and this deficit can lead to more sociocultural adaptation problems than the lack of knowledge in cultural values (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). In their review of values and social axioms, Masgoret and Ward found that knowledge of values is helpful in the acculturation process but does not directly relate to the concrete behaviors that must be displayed during communication and other interactions. They further conclude that best outcomes in sociocultural adaptation are not found in accepting new values and axioms but rather in a clear comprehension of the differences in values and axioms found in the new culture.

Many authors find that the greater the cultural distance between the individual immigrant and the host culture, the greater the difficulty the individual will experience in negotiating daily interactions and learning the norms of the new culture (Hannigan, 1990; Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Searle & Ward, 1990). Yet, previous experience (e.g., knowledge of the new country, previous visits, or familiarity with the culture) can facilitate an increased ability to learn the skills necessary to adapt to the environment (Masgoret & Ward; Searle & Ward). Finally, the increase in length of stay in the new country can increase likelihood of greater sociocultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1992).

Ying's (1995) work with Chinese Americans determines whether psychological well-being is affected by language proficiency, cultural activity, and social relationships. She concludes that individuals engaged in both Chinese and American cultural activities reflected better psychological well-being and found a better "person-environment fit". Of the three activities, social interaction was a better predictor of psychological well-being. Although initiating friendships with other ethnic groups created some discomfort due to the awareness of ethnic differences, the sustained friendships with other ethnic groups led to better adjustment levels. Her work emphasizes the importance of measuring acculturation levels across specific life domains (e.g., language proficiency, cultural activity, and social relationships) to truly determine which cultural activities lead to better psychological outcomes for ethnic groups, which truly impact acculturation levels, and which reflect a faster rate of acculturation (Ying, 1995).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory provides another means of explaining the experiences of immigrants, particularly the concepts of separation and loss. Bowlby (1969, cited by Van Oudenhoven, 2006) developed attachment theory based on observations of mother-child bonding. Researchers have applied attachment theory to the psychology of immigration, especially acculturation strategies and acculturative stress. On the basis of principles of attachment theory, secure attachment occurs when a child perceives his or her caregivers as available and responsive. Children with ambivalent or avoidant attachment styles view their caregivers as inconsistently responsive or unavailable (Hofstra, Van Oudenhoven, & Buunk, 2005). Consequently, the child's experiences with caregivers create mental schemas of the self-worth and dependence on others (Van Oudenhoven, 2006). These attachment styles are expected to influence adult relationships, school achievement, and behaviors toward strangers (Hofstra et al., 2005; Van Oudenhoven, 2006).

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991, cited by Hofstra et al., 2005 and Van Oudenhoven, 2006) created an adult model of attachment styles that includes the categories of (a) securely attached (positive self-image and able

to trust others); (b) fearfully attached (avoids contact with others); (c) dismissively attached (positive self-image but distrusts others); and (d) preoccupied attached (negative self-image but can trust others).

When exploring the attachment styles of those who wish to immigrate, Van Ecke (2005) noted that those who immigrate are motivated by the potential for higher achievement in the host country. They appear to be less preoccupied on the importance of family than those who do not immigrate and could reflect dismissive attachment. In contrast, Van Ecke found that Caribbean women did not immigrate owing to a higher value on family relationships and their close proximity, possibly reflecting secure or fearful attachment.

Van Oudenhoven and Hofstra (2006) found that acculturation strategies of immigrants are connected to types of attachment whereas securely attached immigrants have a positive self-image, trust others, and seek contact with members of the host society in search of integration. Immigrants with attachment styles classified as dismissing and fearful tend to avoid members of the host society, thus selecting separation as an acculturation strategy in the host society. Immigrants with preoccupied attachment may prefer to assimilate. Van Oudenhoven and Hofstra further found that immigrants with secure attachment were more likely to integrate and have less stress during the acculturation process.

On the basis of adult attachment styles of members of the dominant society, Hofstra et al. (2005) found the following attitudes in members of the host society towards the adaptation strategies of immigrants: (a) Securely attached adults engage in social interactions with confidence and respond positively to immigrant acculturation strategies that lead to integration; (b) fearfully attached individuals distrust "others," including immigrants, but do value assimilation among immigrants; (c) dismissively attached adults will support avoiding social contact with immigrants; and (d) preoccupied adults will accept the assimilation of immigrants but reject their efforts to separate. These authors concluded that secure attachment is correlated with positive attitudes towards efforts to integrate by immigrants.

When linking mental health outcomes with different attachment styles after immigration, positive connections were found among those who were securely attached and psychologically adjusted (Van Oudenhoven, 2006). The securely attached immigrants do not deny their feelings of pain related to separation from their country of origin but focus less on the needs of others than the preoccupied attached immigrant (Van Ecke, 2005). Preoccupied attachment styles are related to negative psychological adjustment, and can lead to more post-immigration distress (Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Van Enke, 2005). Immigrants with a dismissive attachment style demonstrate less distress as they are accustomed to autonomy and distant relationships while denying feelings of discomfort. The use of defense strategies to deny emotions makes it difficult to connect the dismissive attachment style

with a specific psychological outcome (Van Oudenhoven, 2006; Van Ecke, 2005).

Based on attachment theory, acculturative stress can be viewed as separation that can lead to protest and despair. When the separation from a country of origin is combined with the feelings of separation experienced in a new host society, an attachment trauma can result along with the likelihood of mental disorders (Van Ecke, 2005). Van Ecke also notes that immigrants who experience years of multiple losses and separations are subject to “attachment-related risk factors” that remain despite the greater opportunities found in the new country (p. 473). She further finds that immigrants with pre-immigration traumas may bring with them poor attachment styles; therefore, the immigration experience can lead to significant mental distress.

Ethnic Identity

Phinney (1990) provides a multi-dimensional theory of identity development applicable to the ethnic identity of immigrant groups. Phinney’s work acknowledges that multiple factors can influence ethnic identity. Her work provides a frequently cited model that is applicable to various ethnic minority groups (Pahl & Way, 2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). Like Berry, Phinney’s model includes the process whereby the immigrant questions whether or not to retain his or her “ethnic label” or select the label of the host country (Liebkind, 2006).

Phinney’s theory is composed of the following three stages for shaping ethnic identity in a host country: (a) *unexamined ethnic identity* (unexplored positive or negative view of their ethnic group), (b) *ethnic identity search or exploration* (to search for what it means to be a member of an ethnic group), and (c) *achieved ethnic identity* (possessing a clear meaning of ethnicity within one’s life; French et al., 2006, p. 2).

Researchers found that ethnic identity does not change much in first-generation immigrants, but subsequent generations often choose to be bi-cultural (Liebkind, 2006; Phinney, 2003). As ethnic identity is a continuous process, the third stage does not always lead to achieved ethnic identity. Individuals can continuously repeat stages as they re-think and explore their ethnic identity (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999, Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004). The strength of Phinney’s model is the assumption that immigrants will not automatically want to conform to the identity of the dominant group (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999).

Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder (2001) use Berry’s theory of acculturation and acculturation strategies to describe variations in ethnic identity. Immigrants are perceived as having either developed or under-developed identities (Phinney, 1990; Phinney et al., 2001; Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999). An integrated ethnic identity occurs when immigrants who

maintain a strong ethnic identity with their country of origin are still capable of identifying with the host culture. A separate identity emerges when the immigrant maintains a strong identity with the country of origin but does not identify with the host culture. Those who give up the original ethnic identity and identify only with the host culture have assimilated their identity. These forms of acculturation can occur only if the host society creates an environment allowing for the healthy exploration of ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001).

Phinney et al. also address the psychological well-being that can result from the explorations of ethnic identities. They found that if a positive ethnic identity is clearly connected to how the minority and majority groups are viewed, it can then be assumed that ethnic identities are also connected to self-esteem. Phinney (1990) found a correlation between high self-esteem and positive ethnic identity among adolescents and adults. Therefore, if one's ethnic identity is perceived as unsatisfactory or connected to low self-esteem, one has the choice of seeking another ethnic identity that is more positively regarded.

Studies that use Phinney's ethnic identity theory to assess diverse adolescents provide the following contributions. The immigration status of adolescents can lead to (a) a weak ethnic identification with the dominant group due to a strong connection with the culture of origin; (b) a weak connection with the dominant ethnicity due to immigration status, which may promote ethnic identity exploration; or (c) a desire to reconnect with the culture of origin by later generation adolescents (Pahl & Way, 2006). Another study conducted by French et al. (2006) found that ethnic identity is more salient among ethnic minorities than among European Americans who comprise the majority group. The study by Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (1999) with Russian-speaking immigrant adolescents found the study participants to replicate and follow the stages in Phinney's ethnic identity theory. The studies completed by Pahl and Way (2006) and French et al. (2006) confirm that early adolescence creates greater exploration of ethnic group memberships, which subsides in later adolescence when ethnic identity is more secure. Ying and Lee's (1999) study found Asian female adolescents to have an achieved ethnic identity leading them toward integration faster than Asian adolescent males. They link their results to the adolescent females' higher level of maturity and their embrace of a dominant culture that supports more gender equality than traditional Asian cultures.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), grows out of the discipline of social psychology that features the relationships between immigrant groups and the dominant group in the receiving country (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). Social identity theory includes three

psychological processes through which an immigrant person can develop social ethnic identity. The first, *social categorization*, is based on social categories such as language, skin color, or other ethnic or physical characteristics that lead to the creation of a social identity. The second process, *social comparison*, involves the inevitable comparison with others based on various statuses such as financial stability. The third phase, *psychological work*, the need for a “positive sense of distinctiveness” involving positive feelings toward the group to which an individual has been categorized under by the larger society (Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994).

This framework also involves an individual’s ability to maintain a positive self-image despite group categorization and comparisons between immigrant and dominant groups (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). Positive comparisons between immigrant and dominant groups lead to a positive identity and positive self-esteem, but when connected with devalued groups, immigrants can respond with a variety of positions (Phinney et al., 2001). According to French et al. (2006) and Liebkind (2006), Tajfel and Turner (1986) developed the following strategies to manage being a member of a devalued group and are applicable to immigrants: (a) The individual can change group membership or psychologically leave the group, (b) *social creativity*, group members can redefine the meaning of the group by comparing themselves to the dominate group as superior or changing the negative values associated with their group, or (c) *social competition*, causing the superiority of the dominant group to be confronted through social change. For example, a study of *social identities and intergroup bias in immigrant and non-immigrant children* found that immigrant children use social creativity when comparing themselves as being superior to African American children (Pfeifer et al., 2007).

In her work on ethnic identity and acculturation, Liebkind (2006) found that being a member of an ethnic group does not necessarily lead to negative self-concept. Some ethnic minority groups are more committed to their group than to the members of the majority group. Such a preference can occur among immigrants when the dominant group imposes negative or racist stereotypes or status differences. Liebkind also suggests that the grouping of ethnic groups under a minority status can result in a false impression that all minorities share the same psychological response to such status. According to her, not all ethnic groups consider themselves to be devalued despite being devalued by the dominant group. Instead, only “self-recognized ingroup devaluation can result in an internalized negative ethnic identity” (p. 89).

CONCLUSION

This literature review highlights the relevance of psychological aspects of acculturation theories for increasing understanding of immigrant well-being.

Berry's (2006) theoretical concepts of acculturation include the elements of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization that focus on the individual differences among immigrants as they explore whether to maintain their cultural heritage in a new country.

The psychological management of the acculturation process is examined primarily in terms of the concept of acculturative stress wherein changes in the elements of identity, attitudes, and behaviors may lead to various psychological disturbances, the most prominent being anxiety and depression. Factors that mediate or exacerbate acculturation stress include (a) the mode of acculturation, (b) acculturation attitudes, (c) phase of acculturation, (d) cultural pluralism in the host society, and (e) characteristics of the individual. Social support also seems to provide a buffer against acculturative stress. The management of acculturative stress includes problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Cultural learning theory provides an overlap between a psychological and sociocultural approach whereby immigrant adaptation can be assessed in terms of the adequate use and knowledge of communication skills, motivation to learn a new language, and capacity to acquire the social skills needed to integrate into a new environment.

Attachment theory can be applied to the immigrant experience of separation and loss, especially the ways in which attachment styles influence the immigrant's selection of acculturation strategies. In essence, securely attached immigrants have the potential for a healthier psychological outcome. Similarly, immigrants who select an integrative acculturation strategy are able to maintain aspects of both the dominant and original ethnic identity.

Finally, social identity theory includes the process of selecting a social identity and strategies to cope with an ethnic identity that is devalued by the larger society. Self-esteem is connected to ethnic identity and can lead to negative or positive interactions with the dominant group. It features the connection between the potential internalization of negative feedback and factors in the environment that affect the mental health of the individual immigrant and immigrant groups.

In conclusion, the psychological perspective is important to the study of human behavior and the social environment. The major human behavior concepts include acculturation styles, coping styles, motivation for group contact, motivation to learn the norms of the new culture, and reasons for transformation of ethnic identity. These concepts include the right to select whatever acculturation strategy best fits the needs of immigrants, the constantly evolving and fluid nature of ethnic identity, and the maintenance of cultural integrity regardless of the choice of ethnic identity. The social environment concepts include the mutual changes found in the newcomer and the host society and the social factors that affect the psychological outcomes of immigrants. Understanding the causes of psychological disturbances resulting from immigration can lead to better psychological treatment

of the individual, identification of psychological services needed by the immigrant community, and areas for further research related to changes in human behavior within new social environments.

NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the limitations of the current literature, it is clear that more research is needed to increase our understanding of how theories of psychology can be applied to the changes of human behavior in the social environment of the immigration experience. For example, how do attachment and acculturation styles vary among different immigrant groups and to what extent are they pathologized? Do women and men in different ethnic groups acculturate in

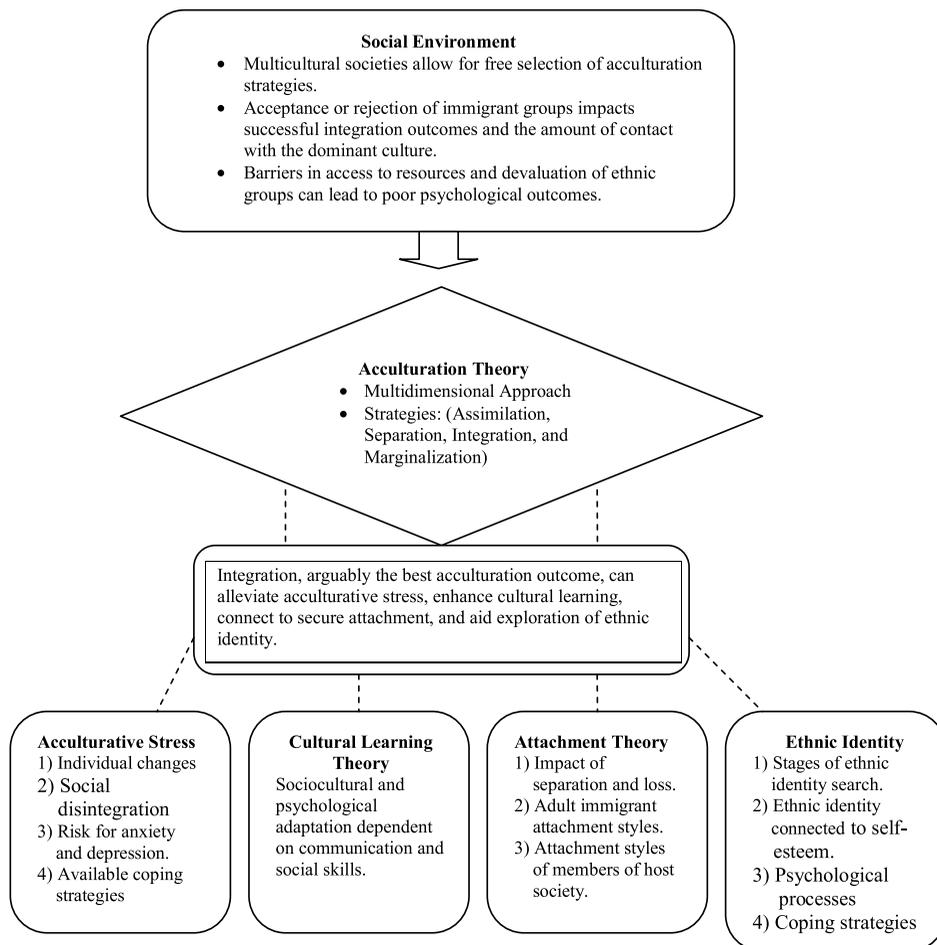


FIGURE 1 Conceptual map of psychological theories of immigration.

different ways? (as concluded by Ying and Lee, 1999, with an Asian adolescent sample). What role does legal status play in alleviating or increasing immigrant stress and acculturation outcomes? In addition to integration, are there other healthy methods utilized by various ethnic groups that have yet to be identified? Given the continuous flow of immigrants into the United States, more attention is needed in the field of psychology to assess the nature of immigrant experiences and the psychological impact of host country members.

Many of these research questions can be framed by the concepts highlighted in Figure 1. This conceptual map builds upon Berry's acculturation theory by adding the concepts of acculturative stress, culture learning, attachment, and ethnic identity. It also focuses on the role of the social environment and its impact on immigrant well-being. This conceptual map is based on the assumption that the acculturation strategy of integration produces the best mental health outcome for immigrants.

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