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**Acculturation: Adaptation or Development?**

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Commentary on “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation” by John W. Berry

John Berry’s conceptualisations of acculturation are theoretically relevant yet mainly taxonomic, defining four acculturation outcomes of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. These are supplemented by a process model of acculturation adhering basically to the following stress-coping paradigm: experiences or life events associated with migration are evaluated as stressors and may be dealt with by employing various coping strategies. Immediate effects of stressors when not coped with effectively may be a state of stress that leads to long-term changes or adaptations. Berry’s model includes a considerable collection of background and moderating variables that may influence the stressor–coping–stress–adaptation process at any time. The long-term outcome *adaptation* is not necessarily adjustment but may involve critical states and resistance to the pressure of assimilation in the host society.¹

The two points I wish to raise in my commentary are: (1) acculturation as development—introducing a developmental perspective into theoretical thinking in the domain of acculturation research; and (2) acculturation as identity change—a plea for the inclusion of identity changes into the process model of acculturation.

**ACCULTURATION AS DEVELOPMENT**

The theoretical approach Berry takes is to construct a “process” model of acculturation utilising the stress-coping paradigm of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). There are two problems associated with this line of thinking: one is

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¹ Berry suggests a further way of conceptualising psychological acculturation: learning in the forms of culture learning, behavioural shifts, or social skill acquisition. But he does not further pursue this line of thinking.
that the combination of group-level structural components and individual-level process components leaves the researcher with a model that is hard to test. The group-level factors can only be assessed at one measurement point or in one state, most likely at the beginning of measurements for the process analyses. This approach is justifiable with variables undergoing little change over time. But the factors suggested by Berry do not all belong to that category; for example, an economic situation or attitudes may change within very few years.

The second problem is Berry's choice of a stress-coping paradigm to represent a psychological paradigm for individual acculturation. To approach the process of acculturation via a stress-coping model represents a theoretical decision that results in narrowness and affects the validity of the model as regards long-lasting changes: the stress-coping paradigm is developed to meet situational demands not to model developmentally induced long-lasting changes (cf. Schönpflug, 1994). Therefore, Lazarus and Folkman's approach does not seem to be the type of process that will lead to enduring outcomes at the level of personality changes. Moreover, also, the changes induced by the stress-coping process are not necessarily changes towards acculturation; new skills (following active learning, e.g. keeping time schedules) and thinking ahead are not necessarily acculturation phenomena, but may be the result of the increasing self-organisation of an individual during the course of normal development.

An alternative view of acculturation is that it is a migration-induced process of individual development in various developmental domains. Development refers to changes in the realm of personality, social behaviours or relations, and cognitions or cognitive skills. Hence, development seems to be a process not distinguishable from the changes associated with the process of acculturation. In terms of developmental psychology it is important to consider the developmental state of an individual during migration (which is age-correlated). Early migration leads to other types of psychological adaptations or developmental trajectories than migration in adolescence or adult age.

Let us look at the advantage gained through substituting the learning or coping view of psychological acculturation with a developmental perspective. The arguments arise from viewing the process of enculturation as part of development: culture constructs the normative frame for development; it imposes constraints on the possible ways changes may take place during development. Culture contacts demanding enculturation into another culture or acculturation interrupt or disturb the enculturation still in progress when in contact with members of one's own culture, e.g. family, school, peer group, etc. Hence, adaptation to a new culture has to be viewed globally, as life-long and age-correlated, a perspective that is only provided by developmental psychology.
ACCULTURATION—A PROCESS WITHOUT IDENTITY CHANGES?

Berry’s variables influencing the stress-coping paradigm are moderating and mediating variables of a more personal and a more social nature: social orientations, such as the attitudes of prejudice and experienced discrimination; personal resources such as coping strategies, expected locus of control cognitions; and cultural variables, such as similarity of language and cultural distances, to name only a few examples. Berry’s model neglects one important aspect of changes associated with acculturation: the basic process underlying other acculturative changes appears to be ethnic identity formation. According to Brewer’s (1991) model of social identity, two opposing processes may be postulated: (a) a need for assimilation, and (b) a need for differentiation from own or host group. The intensities of these needs vary with the degree of inclusion in either group of origin or host group. When inclusion in the cultural group of origin is low, the need for assimilation is high; when cultural inclusion is high, the need for differentiation is high, whereas the need for assimilation is low. When the degree of inclusion is at medium level and both needs are at medium intensity, an optimally balanced psychological state seems to be reached: satisfaction with own situation and self is at an optimal level whereas it decreases to a minimum level at either extremes, high and low, of inclusion. In contrast to Brewer, who stayed in an experimental social frame of conceptualisation and research, recently completed studies in our project “Acculturation and Development” (Schönpflug, submitted; Schönpflug, Ataç, & Akçal, 1996) provide evidence for further dependent variables. Psychological well-being showed an optimal level at medium level of inclusion and medium levels of intensity of both the opposing need for assimilation and for differentiation to the cultural group of origin. Three indicators of well-being, psychic and physical symptoms of feeling distressed and vulnerability, show similar results. Whereas the proposed relationships were not observed with equal significance in all age groups and in both sexes there was clear support for the model when we considered Turkish adolescents aged between 13 and 18 living in Germany, but not when we analysed young adults of the same ethnic group.

Psychological acculturation as a process of ethnic identity change may also be conceptualised by the two opposing processes, the need for assimilation and for differentiation. With increasing demands on the own ethnic minority group to participate in the majority group, the balance of the two needs may reach optimal or less than optimal levels, resulting in further drifting from the group of origin. This manner of conceptualising the process of acculturation reduces the complexity of the process to the fundamental issue of ethnic identity changes and the associated or resulting psychic well-being.
CONCLUSIONS

The basic process underlying acculturation is more encompassing than a stress-coping paradigm suggests. It involves the reorganisation of a developing individual in terms of ethnic or social identity, personality organisation, cognitions, and social behaviour. But if a process model of acculturation includes all these domains of possible changes in an individual, it is an aspect of developmental processes initiated by the non-normative critical life event of migration or life events associated with migration, such as giving up one's support networks or facility of communication by learning a new language. The developmental changes may be called acculturative changes when the changes are the result of processing cultural aspects, either via cognition by developing new cognitive orientation systems or by learning new skills and ways of social behaving. Adopting this perspective would enrich both research and theorising in acculturation and in development. Pursuing the process of acculturation would reveal to developmental psychologists the role played by culture and culture transitions in developmental paths. Assessing various developmental domains such as personality, cognition, social behaviour, or emotions would teach researchers to conceptualise acculturation as a psychological process involving regulatory and reorganisational processes, analogous to the process of development.

REFERENCES


Where is Culture in the Acculturation Model?

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Commentary on “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”

by John W. Berry

The lead article provides a useful overview of the broad literature concerned with immigration and acculturation. Much of the paper concerns the