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
terminology that might be used to study these phenomena. Thus, it is appropriate to ask if the proposed terminology is optimal. In addition, the paper presents a broad model of the factors that lead to adaptation. It is appropriate, then, to ask if the model is sufficiently complete.

Thus, this paper will deal with two questions: the adequacy of the terminology and the completeness of the proposed model.

TERMINOLOGY

Berry has been using this terminology for about 10 years, and most of us who are familiar with this subject matter have become used to it. However, that does not mean that the terminology is optimal.

One of the problems in all the sciences is that we often use terms that the general public understands very differently from the way we define them. Also, terms often have surplus meaning. For example, consider the term integration. If we ask ordinary people for a definition, they are likely to tell us that placing people from two or more ethnic groups into the same institution means that we have integration. However, that meaning is very different from the meaning that Berry wishes to convey.

Of course, neologisms have their own problems—but perhaps there is a middle ground that can do the job better. Here are some suggestions that may or may not be optimal, but in any case, in my judgement, are better than Berry's terms.

Integration = biculturalism (better in indicating that two cultures are involved).
Assimilation = negative multiculturalism (includes the theoretical point that one loses a culture).
Marginalisation = double negative multiculturalism (conveys directly that one loses two cultures).
Separation = ethnic affirmation (conveys the increased ethnocentrism that is linked to this condition).

THE MODEL

One must admit that the model is complex as it is, and thus one may wonder if adding more variables is appropriate. Yet, the model is so complex that it is not testable anyway, so one might at least try to be as complete as possible.

Berry already has the concept of cultural distance. That is a very
important concept. There is ample evidence that people easily adapt to cultures that are relatively similar to their own, and have much difficulty adapting to cultures where the language family is different (e.g. an Indo-European language versus a tonal language), the religion is different (e.g. devoted Moslem versus atheist), the standard of living is very different, the political system is different, etc. But more than that, there are dimensions of cultural variation that have been studied during the last 20 years, and have provided a large literature. For example, an individual from a culture that is egalitarian, individualistic, and loose will clearly have more trouble adjusting to a culture that is hierarchical, collectivist, and tight than will an individual from an hierarchical, collectivist, tight culture.

A person from a culture where “honour” is not a major factor will have more difficulties adjusting to a culture of honour (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) than a person from a culture of honour adjusting to another culture of honour.

A person from a culture where touching is very common will have more trouble adjusting to a culture where touching is not appropriate than to a culture where touching is welcomed. One could go on and on with such examples.

Perhaps one specific example will make my point more effectively than the abstractions of the previous paragraph. Kidder (1992) studied Japanese children who spent some time in the US (a loose culture) and returned to Japan (a tight culture). These children found adjustment very difficult. They discovered that they were criticised for minor “deviations” from Japanese or school norms, such as bringing Western food for lunch, having their hair permed, having hair of the “wrong” length or colour, and speech patterns that were not perfectly Japanese. “It was really hard” said one of the returning Japanese students (Kidder 1992, p.385), “because I looked different and I talked different. My hair was kind of light color from all the sun, and my skin had a tan. And so when people looked at me they didn’t think I was a real Japanese.”

Interviews with the employees of Japanese corporations working in the US reflect this point: once their children have tasted a loose culture, they do not want to go back to a tight culture. Many Japanese who had taken their degrees in the US took jobs in loose cultures, such as Australia, for the same reason. Even Japanese who have been fully socialised to Japan, over 25 years, find it difficult to adjust to their old culture after five years of exposure to a loose culture. All this is missing from Berry’s model.

In short, the model would become complete if most of the known dimensions of cultural variation were included. The broader model would suggest also the need for studies that would examine the relationships between the variables of the present model and the variables that reflect cultural differences.
John Berry has offered a comprehensive conceptual model for the study of immigration, acculturation, and adaptation that has evolved over more than 20 years of systematic and innovative work in the field. Elaborating and refining this amalgamated framework, Professor Berry has largely demystified the acculturative process by showing that the process and product of changing cultures can be understood in familiar terms and be interpreted in the light of existing theories in mainstream psychology. These theories are referred to as "points of view" and identified as a culture learning/social skills acquisition approach, a psychological model of stress, and a psychopathology or mental disease perspective.

Berry attempts to integrate these three perspectives into his framework for acculturation research (his Fig. 2) by distinguishing them in relation to the cognitive appraisal of cross-cultural transition. At one end of the spectrum are situations that are not evaluated as posing significant challenges to the acculturating individual. In these instances, the culture learning perspective is suggested as the most useful reference. In circumstances where experiences are judged to be problematic but surmountable, the acculturative stress paradigm is considered more appropriate for analysis. At the other end of the spectrum, when acculturative experiences are appraised as debilitating and result in serious adjustment difficulties, the psychopathology model is recommended for interpretation. Although this method of classification does offer one means of integrating contemporary theories on the acculturative experience, it does not do justice to the burgeoning theory and research in the field. The psychopathology perspective may be readily seen as an extension of the core stress and coping paradigm, influenced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and applied to the acculturation domain; however, the integration of the social skills/culture learning approach within this framework is more problematic.