Acculturation and Life Satisfaction: Immigrants in Germany^{*}

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The present study was guided by some basic questions related to acculturation and psychological adaptation. The samples were drawn from some adult immigrant communities living in Bochum, Germany. The results revealed that acculturation was found to have a substantial and direct effect on cultural adaptation. To explain, there is a significant difference between temporary residents and immigrants in acculturation to home culture with temporary residents having higher values, whereas in case of acculturation to German culture immigrants had higher values. There was no significant difference in life satisfaction between immigrants and temporary residents. However, native Germans were found to have more satisfaction in life than immigrants. It is suggested that immigrants receiving societies should pursue the principle of integration or biculturalism in which the immigrants are considered to incorporate components from home and host culture in his/her identity.

Keywords: immigrant, acculturation, cultural adaptation, biculturalism, life satisfaction

Introduction

Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological change that follows when group of individuals having different cultures comes in contact with a new culture.

Cultural changes include alterations in a group's customs, and in their economic and political life. Psychological changes include alterations in individuals' attitudes towards the acculturation process, their cultural identities and social behaviors in relation to the groups in contact (Phinney, 2003). The eventual adaptation also has core psychological features, including a person's well-being and social skills that are needed to function in their culturally complex daily life (Ward, 2001). Of late culture and psychology has begun to contribute to an understanding of those factors that contribute to making the process a positive, rather than a negative factor in personal and social development (Berry, 2001).

Acculturation is broadly a cultural socialization to the majority and host culture, whereas, enculturation is defined broadly as retention (e.g., for immigrants) or acquisition (for children of immigrants) of one's culture of origin (Berry, 1997; Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001; Kim, 2007). Cortes, Rogler, and Malgady (1994) defined acculturation studies briefly as "the process through which immigrants and their offspring's acquire the values, behavioral norms, and attitude of the host society" (p. 708). Even though the acculturation process may be a stressful life experience to immigrants (Berry, 1998), it can be a learning and growth process expanding one's world views, cultural competence and adaptability to multiple cultural competence and contexts. Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado (1995) identified acculturative changes at three levels of functioning: behavioral,

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affective and cognitive. Thus, acculturation/enculturation appears to occur across multiple dimensions.

Acculturation is a process that takes place over time. Although there is a lack of longitudinal studies in literature to examine changes with time, it is, however, possible to understand differences among groups of immigrant with different lengths of residence in their new homes. It is expected that with longer residence, immigrants would be more likely to be integrated into their new society. Often demographic factors play a role—age, gender, religion and the socio-economic status of the family have all been identified as possible sources of variation (Berry & Sam, 1997). There is also some evidence that the ethnic composition of the immediate place of residence may be important in the ways by which immigrants acculturate and adapt (Galster, Metzger, & Waite, 1999; Neto, 2001; Myles & Hou, 2003). Furthermore, it is likely that immigrants' background—rural or urban also adds in acculturation and cultural adaptation process.

Although we have no recorded data, it is our observation that the race (based on the country of origin) of the immigrant often overlaps (matching) with the race of the host country which may facilitate or hinder acculturation and adaption in a new society. Immigrants with different racial background have different ways of living, e.g., Eastern Europeans are adapting much better and more quickly in Germany than Turkish and Arabian because of racial similarity and similar ways of living and food habits. In other immigrant hosting countries, such as USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, it appears that Europeans are adapting with the new societies more quickly than non-Europeans. Should we consider foreign residents in Japan, it is well understood that Chinese and Koreans are ahead in adapting than other foreign resident groups, e.g., Europeans, Asians and Africans. Thus, it is inevitable that similarity in race of the immigrants with host country race has powerful impact on acculturation process.

In many aspects, the situation of migration populations is similar to many immigrant hosting countries. However, there are also distinct features unique to particular groups of migrants. Features, such as immigration policy, religious distinctiveness, ties with countries of origin, family composition, especially similarities and differences in lengths of stay in the host country may lead to difficulties in approaches with a unified theory of acculturation. However, most theories of psychological adaptation agree in three considerations. First, acculturation is a process over time that can be described within segments of individual life span or throughout generations. Second, acculturation involves changes within both the migrant population and host country population. Third, acculturation processes differ according to contextual and socio-economic factors.

Of late one model that has received attention is proposed by Berry (2003). In this model, Berry built on the need for a more complex understanding of the acculturation process, including a rejection of the "bipolar" view of ethnic identity. In particular, he put forward a model that views the migrant as potentially maintaining and adapting beliefs, values and behaviors from more than one culture. In this model, migrating individuals can be either low or high in their identification with both the culture of origin and the host culture, thus yielding four categories of ethnic identity status: (1) marginalization, in which the person professes low participation in both cultures; (2) separation, in which the migrants retain high attachment to the culture of origin combined with low involvement in the host culture; (3) assimilation, in which the person yields identification with the culture of origin in presence of the host culture; and (4) integration, or biculturalism, in which the migrant incorporates components from both cultures into his/her identity. This fourth category is considered to be the most potentially enriching identity status for the migrant to adopt.

Acculturation/enculturation is an important psychological construct in ethnic minority research, because it helps explain within group variability in a host of psychological, behavioral and health outcomes (Ponderosa,

Balch, & Carielli, 1998). Researchers studying process of migration have focused primarily on two dimensions: attempts to measure acculturation, and examination of the relation between acculturative stress and mental health. Briefly, these studies have yielded conflicting results, with some researchers finding positive and other researchers' findings a negative relation between acculturation and a variety of mental health outcomes.

Although there are a number of studies that have examined the relationship between acculturation/enculturation and mental health, the psychological mechanisms that explain the relationship have not been actively studied. In addition, in most studies, pathological outcome variables, such as subjective well being, are rarely studied in acculturation research. Considerable researches have been devoted to the understanding of immigration and acculturation (Berry & Sam, 1997), but less has addressed these phenomena with life satisfaction (Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008). As affirmed by Cross (2003), culture is a resource and a great asset for healing and mental wellness. Thus, acculturation research should extend its scope beyond acculturation stress or depression to well-being in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the psychological outcome of acculturation/enculturation. Secondly, it appears in the literature that because of sampling difficulties, many studies used a convenience sample (e.g., students) rather than a community sample, which limits the understanding of acculturation experiences in the adult immigrants' communities. The present study addressed these limitations by investigating the relationship between acculturation/enculturation and cultural adaptation (life satisfaction) in an immigrant community (having Arab, Turkish and Eastern European origin) in Germany. We will limit our study on consequences of immigration in the emergence of cultural plural countries (say Germany).

The study was guided by core questions: First, how do immigrants deal with the process of acculturation? For this, we assessed the degree of acculturation (overall) among the immigrants; Second, extent of their cultural psychological adaptation, i.e., how happy are the immigrants in their new homes? To give an analytical answer, we measured the life satisfaction of the immigrants in comparison with the host citizens; Third, the present study addressed the relationship between acculturation and psychological adaptation among the immigrants in Germany.

Method

Participants

The native Germans and immigrants living in Germany (mainly in and around Bochum area) came from different cultural backgrounds and lived in 24 countries—a total of 293 respondents. They were grouped into five classes based on the country/region of origin: (1) Turkey; (2) Italy; (3) Eastern European (Poland, Russia); (4) Arabs (Arabic speaking covering six countries); and (5) others (basically short term residents, i.e., international students from Australia, Canada, Malta, Japan, Korea, China, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and Nigeria).

Instruments

The respondent completed a structured questionnaire having three sections.

General information. The section includes demographic aspects—gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, country of origin, native language and period of stay in Germany.

Acculturation measurement. The questionnaire assessed a wide range of variables related to acculturation. This scale assessed acculturation globally focusing on acculturation attitude (i.e., four categories of ethnic identity—assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization), cultural identity, language

proficiency and language use, ethnic and national peer contact.

Description of the acculturation questionnaire. In this study, we adapted a bicultural measure created by Cortes, Rogler, and Malgady (1994) originally for Puerto Rican populations. Leyendecker, Schölmerich, and Citlak (2006) put forward an adapted version of the scale for migrants from Turkey in Germany. In fact, the present scale is based on the Leyendecker scale but having limited items (12 items) be fitting with heterogeneous immigrant groups that assess separately the individual's orientation towards home and German cultures. The instrument was designed with a four-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all (1)" to "Very much (4)". There is a possible range from 12 to 48 score points for each scale, with "12" representing low cultural involvement and "48" representing high involvement. In this study, the Alpha coefficient of 12 items representing German culture was 0.91 and for the 12 items measuring involvement in home culture was 0.89.

The question corresponding to "How much do you enjoy home TV programs" was matched by a question about the enjoyment of German TV programs. Another item "How often would you like to eat your home countries' food?" was matched with "How would you like to eat food that Germans eat?"

It may be noted here that the rationality of using bicultural measures is that involvement in one culture does not require a reduction in involvement in the other culture. Instead, researchers have increasingly emphasized that involvement in the host culture and the culture of origin should be studied as separate phenomena and, thus, in separate scales (Berry, 1997; Cortes et al., 1994; Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Phinney, 1990). To spell out further, the single scale measurement tool has been criticized for implying that the greater involvement in one culture must correspond with less involvement in the other. By assessing involvement in the two cultures independently, bicultural scale allows researchers to access the extent to which the individual feels competent in and enjoys specific aspects of both cultures.

Culture and psychological adaptation. Psychological adaptation was measured with the SWLS (satisfaction with life scale) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). The scale measures global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. It has been tested among diverse groups, such as adolescents and college students, and has shown good psychometric properties.

Description of the SWLS. This is a five-item scale that "is designed around the idea that one must ask subjects for an overall judgment of their life in order to measure the concept of life satisfaction" (Diner et al., 1985, pp. 71-72). Individuals indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a seven-point Likert type scale. The five items of the SWLS were selected from a pool of 48 items based on factor analyses. A sample item is: "I am satisfied with my life". Scores range from five to 35 with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to participants individually (by an author and a student assistant) on student samples in classroom and dormitories. However, an author (non-German) has taken care of administering the questionnaire on the immigrants and short term temporary residents in meetings in groups and individually. The respondents were given a brief introduction to the questionnaire and printed instructions were given. They were requested to record their responses and return after stipulated period. They were informed that participation was voluntary and responses would remain anonymous. The questionnaire was available in three languages—English, German and Turkish. The respondents had chosen the version as they felt well conversant with.

Results

The present study explored whether life satisfaction differs between/among: (1) Germans and immigrants (including temporary residents); (2) students and non-students for the whole sample; (3) students and non-students for the German sample; (4) students and non-students for the immigrant sample; (5) immigrants and temporary residents; (6) four stay-groups of immigrants; and (7) origin of immigrants.

Analysis involved one-way ANOVA and computation of t -values. The results are described sequentially as follows.

Life Satisfaction

The results of analyses revealed that there is a significant difference between Germans and immigrants in life satisfaction ($t_{267.029} = 3.072, p < 0.01$). The mean life satisfaction scores were 5.09 and 4.64 for the former ($n = 131$) and the latter ($n = 157$) groups respectively, indicating that Germans are more satisfied than their counterparts. When the whole sample was categorized as students versus non-students, the difference between them was found significant ($t_{136.97} = 2.995, p < 0.01$). The mean life satisfaction score was 5.012 for students and 4.498 for others.

When the German sample was subdivided as students versus non-students, the t -value was significant ($t_{57.424} = 2.499, p < 0.05$) with students being more satisfied than non-students (means = 5.30 and 4.63, respectively). However, the difference between student and non-students was non-significant in the case of immigrant sample ($t_{76.073} = 1.735, p > 0.05$). It is plausible that the difference between students and non-students in the whole sample was an artifact of the difference between them in the German sample.

Immigrant sample categorized as immigrants and temporary residents showed no significant difference in life satisfaction between them ($t_{155} = 1.01, p > 0.05$). No significant difference among four stay groups was also observed. Furthermore, immigrant sample did not differ in life satisfaction by their origins.

The present study also explored whether:

- (1) Acculturation to home culture differs between immigrants and temporary residents;
- (2) Acculturation to German culture differs between immigrants and temporary residents;
- (3) Acculturation to home culture differs by period of stay;
- (4) Acculturation to German culture differs by period of stay;
- (5) Acculturation to home culture differs by origin of immigrants;
- (6) Acculturation to German culture differs by origin of immigrants;
- (7) Acculturation to home culture differs significantly from acculturation to German culture for the whole immigrant sample;
- (8) Acculturation to home culture differs significantly from acculturation to German culture for the immigrant sample;
- (9) Acculturation to home culture differs significantly from acculturation to German culture for the temporarily resident sample.

To answer these questions, a series of analysis including one-way ANOVA and computation of " t " were employed.

Acculturation

The results of analysis revealed that there is a significant difference between immigrants and temporarily residents in acculturation to home culture ($t_{89.145} = -2.55, p < 0.05$) with temporarily residents having higher

values. The mean value was 3.162 for immigrants and 3.340 for temporarily residents. As opposed to acculturation to home culture, a significant difference between immigrants and temporarily residents was observed in case of acculturation to German culture ($t_{94.352} = 5.371, p < 0.001$) with immigrants having higher values. The mean value was 2.967 for immigrants and 2.494 for temporarily residents.

Acculturation to home culture is not found to vary significantly either by period of stay or by origin of immigrants. However, this was not the case with acculturation to German culture. Acculturation to German culture did vary significantly by both period of stay and origin of immigrants ($F_{3, 94} = 13.47, p < 0.001$; $F_{4, 95} = 2.67, p < 0.05$, respectively). Post hoc pair-wise comparisons for period of stay revealed that there is a significant difference: between immigrants living in Germany less than one year and immigrants living in Germany more than two up to ten years ($p < 0.01$); between immigrants living in Germany less than one year and immigrants living in Germany more than ten years ($p < 0.001$); and between immigrants living in Germany more than one up to two years and immigrants living in Germany more than ten years ($p < 0.001$). Post hoc pair-wise comparisons for origin of immigrants revealed that there is a significant difference between Italian and Eastern European immigrants ($p < 0.05$) and between Eastern European and other immigrants ($p < 0.05$).

For the whole immigrant sample, paired sample *t*-test showed that acculturation to home culture differed significantly from acculturation to German culture ($t_{94} = 8.63, p < 0.001$). The mean value was 3.248 for acculturation to home culture and 2.659 for acculturation to German culture. This pattern of results was also observed for the immigrant sample and temporarily resident sample ($t_{38} = 2.17, p < 0.05$ and $t_{55} = 11.52, p < 0.001$, respectively). The mean values were 3.132 and 2.900 for acculturation of immigrants respectively to home culture and German culture, and 3.328 and 2.491 for acculturation of temporarily residents respectively for home culture and German culture.

Life Satisfaction and Acculturation

The Pearson product moment correlation showed that life satisfaction is significantly positively correlated with acculturation to German culture ($r = 0.21, p < 0.05$) and uncorrelated with acculturation to home culture ($r = -0.02; p > 0.05$). This result applies for the whole immigrant sample. Furthermore, significant negative correlation was observed between acculturation to German culture and acculturation to home culture ($r = -0.24, p < 0.05$). The above results were interpreted in the light of past studies.

Discussion

The results give very detailed answers of our questions put forward earlier. Interestingly, acculturation was found to have a substantial and direct effect on cultural adaptation—life satisfaction. Acculturation may have unique instrumental values in order for immigrants to survive and succeed in their host countries including Germany. For example, language proficiency (which gained over time) might be related to increased job availability, success and higher income, thereby leading to enhanced life satisfaction.

Acculturation is a process that takes place overtime. Although stressful, it can be a profitable learning experience in the immigrants' adaptability to different cultural set-up. We found that the length of stay in the new home of the immigrants plays a significant role in acculturation process—those who are staying longer adapted better comparing with shorter stay groups gaining more life satisfaction. Although we have not recorded the generation separately (i.e., first or second generation), apparently the second generation (offspring) are more befitting and more comfortable with the society than the first generation (and new comers). Berry,

Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) also reported that the youth of the second generation are having better life satisfaction. Leyendecker et al. (2006) in their study on "Similarities and Differences Between First and Second Generation Turkish Migrants Mothers in Germany: The Acculturation Gap" found that mothers of the second generation were more satisfied with their lives in Germany. Perhaps, economic and/or academic success of these second generation immigrants contributed to a higher life satisfaction.

Acculturation of the older and parent generation may, however, help narrow the generational gap with the younger child generation, mitigating family conflicts and psychological distress (Su, Lee, & Vang, 2005). Shen and Takeuchi (2001) reported a link among acculturation, socio-economic status and mental health outcomes. Apparently, in our samples, it appeared that people those who were employed had better life satisfaction scores than those who were not employed. It is obvious that employment which brings economic solvency can improve quality of life and thereby enhance life satisfaction with any person including immigrants. We assumed that the relationship between acculturation and life satisfaction is far more complicated to establish unless the future studies examine the contribution of a variety of mediating variables—social relationships (e.g., social connectedness) together with more details of demographic variables, psychological variables and family dynamics indicators.

It is a universal fact that people feel more comfortable in their home country and therefore expected to have more satisfaction in life. This has been reflected in this study that locals (Germans) were found to have much better life satisfaction than immigrants. It is true that immigrants may have more comfortable life (especially considering economic aspects) in their new home comparing to their original home but yet unhappy. Perhaps, they feel isolated, discrimination, not well received by the locals, suffering in inferiority complex, not receiving their due shares of psycho-social benefits and above all find acculturation process more stressful.

Implication

We believe that studies, such as this one can contribute to the overall quality of life on immigrant receiving societies including Germany for both the immigrants and settled populations. Given the broad international sweep of our study and the coherence of many of the results across immigrant groups and receiving societies, the results of this study have significant implications for both public and private areas of contemporary applied psychology. Societies that are receiving immigrants should pursue the integration path, since psychological and socio-cultural adaptations are more positive among those who orient themselves in this way (Berry et al., 2006). Immigrants should be encouraged to retain both a sense of their own heritage of cultural identity, while establishing close ties with larger national society. To facilitate this, we are in agreement with Berry et al. (2006) that firstly, immigrants receiving societies should seek to develop policies and programs to encourage the participation of immigrants in the daily life of the national society so that they do not remain isolated in their own communities or alienated from the larger society. Secondly, the host society should develop policies and programs for the general population to encourage their acceptance of the cultural diversity and the participation of the diverse peoples in the life of the larger society. Public education/awareness about the value of diversity, antidiscrimination and equity laws are appropriate vehicles for these initiatives. Finally, the society should consider providing support for immigrants and ethno cultural community organizations so that the cultural loss is limited or prevented, their ethnic identity is promoted and their way of life is allowed to be maintained.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study has several limitations like any other psychological studies. A sample with a wider range of acculturation than present sample is recommended for future studies in order to have a better understanding to establish a stable relationship between acculturation and life satisfaction. Also, future studies should examine the contribution of a variety of variables including social relationships/connectedness as mediator variables together with demographic variables, psychological variables and family dynamics indicators. In spite of these limitations, the present study revealed heuristic values for future research and theory to handle the immigrant's day-to-day problem.

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