



Introducing Remote Enculturation: Learning Your Heritage Culture From Afar

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ABSTRACT—*Can youth living outside their heritage country become enculturated from afar via avenues of modern globalization? In this article, we expand the theory of how heritage cultural socialization occurs in transnational families by introducing the construct of remote enculturation as a modern form of cultural transmission. Remote enculturation falls within the cultural socialization category of ethnic/racial socialization and is a form of enculturation that involves learning aspects of one's heritage culture via indirect or intermittent exposure, or both. We compare and contrast remote enculturation with traditional enculturation, proposing that self-initiated remote enculturation, in particular, has strong ties with the development of identity. Research on immigrants' consumption of foreign media and on parenting international adoptees supports remote enculturation as a distinct avenue of cultural learning, as do the experiences of youth from*

immigrant families. We conclude with a research agenda to empirically evaluate the construct of remote enculturation.

KEYWORDS—*enculturation; globalization; cultural socialization; racial/ethnic socialization; cultural transmission; remote acculturation*

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International migration is at an all-time high (1) and families are increasingly transnational. This has implications for enculturation or first-culture learning for youth who live outside their family's heritage culture. As the term is used in anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, *enculturation* refers to the implicit and covert aspects of cultural transmission (i.e., imitative learning), whereas *socialization* refers to the explicit and overt aspects involving direct instruction (i.e., instructional learning; see 2). However, in developmental psychology and sociology, and as we define the term in this article, enculturation encompasses both covert and overt cultural transmission (3). Traditionally, enculturation occurs in childhood and is facilitated by parents' efforts to socialize their children ethnically and racially, as well as by youth's direct interactions with peers and others in the local community (2–4). However, this traditional conceptualization may not fully capture all the ways today's youth learn about their heritage culture. Can youth become enculturated to their heritage culture from a distance via avenues of modern globalization (e.g., foreign media, Skype, brief visits, exposure to food and art of the heritage country)? We propose *remote enculturation* as a modern form of enculturation characterized by learning aspects of one's heritage culture from afar via indirect (i.e., not physically present) or intermittent (i.e., discontinuous, short term) exposure, or both. In this article, we (a) locate remote enculturation within the child development literatures of enculturation, ethnic/racial socialization, and identity development; (b) provide transdisciplinary research support for remote enculturation from the media/communication and adoption literatures; and (c) propose a research agenda.

REMOTE ENCULTURATION AND RELATED CONSTRUCTS

The concept of remote enculturation is situated within several related literatures on how culture is transmitted, most notably enculturation and ethnic/racial socialization. Fundamentally, enculturation “aims at developing persons into competent members of a culture including identity, language, rituals, and values” (5, p. 213). Enculturation traditionally occurs through interactions (e.g., home conversations, school play), observations (e.g., watching food being prepared, attending religious services), and coaching (e.g., social conventions) of and by youth who are physically embedded in their heritage culture, that is, living in the country of their family’s origin (2).

Enculturation is often referred to as cultural socialization, one of four socialization strategies parents use in transmitting ethnic/racial information to the next generation (6). Cultural socialization stands aside from the other three ethnic/racial socialization strategies (i.e., preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism) in that it involves instilling cultural customs, knowledge, and pride (e.g., encouraging use of the native language), as opposed to focusing on coping with discrimination or color or culture blindness. Parents’ enculturation efforts play an important role in children’s development, conferring benefits to youth such as stronger academic engagement, efficacy, self-esteem, and ethnic identity (7, 8).

Although transmission of cultural norms and values via enculturation is relevant to all children, remote enculturation applies to youth growing up outside their family’s heritage country. In these circumstances, cultural transmission may not occur via enculturation from the local cultural milieu. Children growing up in expatriate communities where little heritage culture is available (i.e., communities of low ethnic vitality) may depend heavily on remote avenues of enculturation, whereas youth in communities with high ethnic vitality have opportunities for both direct (i.e., traditional) and remote enculturation. Thus, individuals who are enculturated remotely fall along a continuum based on the degree of concurrent traditional enculturation they experience, ranging from those experiencing no traditional enculturation (e.g., international adoptees) to those experiencing some traditional enculturation (e.g., native-born, ethnic-minority youth several generations removed from the heritage culture) to those experiencing strong traditional enculturation (e.g., children of immigrants and “third-culture kids” whose families are posted overseas because of jobs with the government or corporations).

The traditional enculturation literature has always included examples of parents exposing their children to their heritage culture indirectly or intermittently or both (e.g., playing music of the heritage culture). However, as telecommunications capabilities have grown, information and resources from the heritage culture have become increasingly accessible. Consequently, remote avenues of enculturation are more feasible and promi-

nent. Therefore, remote enculturation is a modern form of cultural socialization that merits examination.¹

Remote enculturation addresses ways in which individuals learn about a culture through remote means. As such, it has parallels with remote acculturation (i.e., learning a second culture from afar; 9, 10). However, heritage culture learning is qualitatively different from acquiring a second culture, even if both processes occur remotely. Young people’s degree of remote acculturation can be correlated with less satisfaction in life (11), more parent–child conflict (10), and poorer nutrition (12), likely because learning a new culture remotely can perturb cultural identity and family interactions. In contrast, remote enculturation into one’s heritage culture is expected to connect an individual with family history and inform the development of core ethnic identity, both of which are positively correlated with psychological, academic, and health outcomes for youth of color (13). Thus, remote enculturation is expected to *fortify* cultural identity and family interactions, thereby fostering well-being.

Dimensions of Remote Enculturation

Table 1 outlines prominent features of remote enculturation and distinctions from traditional enculturation. Perhaps most salient in remote enculturation, contact with the heritage culture is usually indirect (e.g., via phone or Internet communication, artifacts, books) rather than in person, or may be intermittent (e.g., brief, occasional visits) rather than continuous, or both may be true. For example, in recent news stories, Latino emigrant families used Smartphones to communicate seamlessly with relatives in Latin America (14), Caribbean emigrant families returned to the islands at Christmas to foster children’s cultural and family connections (15), and Iranian young adult émigrés travelled to World Cup games to connect to cultural roots (16). Additionally, the process of remote enculturation is relatively active because it includes efforts by parents or youth, or both, to seek out the remote heritage culture.

Both traditional and remote enculturation usually begin at birth, and continue into childhood, which is a sensitive period for enculturation. However, milestones later in life (e.g., the onset of the search for ethnic identity, transition to college, and transition to parenthood) can trigger remote enculturation. Thus, a protracted sensitive period for remote enculturation extends through young adulthood, and active remote learning of one’s heritage culture (e.g., taking adult education classes to improve heritage language skills) can continue well into adulthood. In contrast, traditional enculturation often concludes in adolescence (e.g., heritage language fluency is usually achieved in childhood; 3).

¹Although the concepts of remote enculturation and what might be considered ‘remote cultural maintenance’ are related, we distinguish them: The latter occurs when adolescents or adults who are already enculturated to their heritage cultures try to stay culturally connected by remote means.

Table 1
Comparison of Traditional Enculturation and Remote Enculturation.

| Dimension | Traditional enculturation ^a | Remote enculturation |
|--|--|--|
| Directness of contact between the enculturating individual and the enculturating agent | Direct, face to face | Usually indirect, not face to face |
| Continuity of contact between the enculturating individual and the enculturating agent | Continuous | Intermittent or continuous |
| Proximity of enculturating individual to enculturating agent | Near, proximal | Far, remote |
| Overt/Covert | More covert | More overt |
| Age | Early childhood to adolescence | Early childhood to adulthood |
| Sensitive period in life span | Childhood | Childhood to young adulthood |
| Initiators | Primarily parent/other initiated | Parent/other and self-initiated; self-initiation especially prominent later in development |
| Triggering events | Childbirth | Migration, onset of ethnic identity search, transition to college, transition to parenthood |
| Location | Local cultural community | Online, college, in heritage country, etc. |
| Avenues for cultural learning | Observations and interactions with local community, coaching by adults and older generation ^b | Phone/online communication, international/ethnic media, artifacts and books from heritage culture, brief intermittent visits to heritage country |
| Motivation | Weaker motives for continuity, belongingness, and distinctiveness; unique motives for efficacy; comparable motives for meaning | Stronger motives for continuity, belongingness, and distinctiveness; comparable motives for meaning |

^aSources for the description of traditional enculturation include Berry (2) and Birman and Addae (3). ^bAs used in anthropology, enculturation refers to the implicit/covert aspects of cultural transmission; however, in developmental psychology and sociology, and as used in this article, enculturation (also commonly called socialization) is a broader concept that also includes overt/explicit teaching activities (2).

Traditional enculturation occurs via different channels of cultural transmission: vertical (parents to child), oblique (other adults and institutions to child), and horizontal (child to child; 2). The same transmission channels occur for remote enculturation. Examples include an international adoptee Skyping with her birth parents in the heritage country (vertical; see <http://www.internationaladoptionsearch.com>); a second-generation immigrant youth visiting relatives in the home country every summer (oblique; 17); and a “third-culture kid” keeping in touch with friends in his heritage country via Facebook (horizontal; see <http://www.thirdculturestories.com>). However, whereas parents and others initiate traditional enculturation, remote enculturation can also be self-initiated. Additionally, relatives (who often live in the heritage country) and people or groups outside the family often play a larger role in remote enculturation.

The relative frequency of using these different transmission channels varies by developmental stage. Parents are likely to be the enculturating agents for young children by sourcing artifacts from and arranging contact with the heritage culture. The effectiveness of traditional cultural transmission that is vertical (i.e., directed by parents) decreases in adolescence due to increases in youth’s autonomy and greater selectivity in adopting parents’ messages (5). Adolescents’ need to construct identity and achieve autonomy couples with greater technological skills and access, so these emerging adults are more likely to be the agents

of remote enculturation. Indeed, one aspect that distinguishes remote enculturation from traditional enculturation is that the former is often self-initiated.

Some social-cognitive and motivational processes involved in remote enculturation may also differ from those involved in traditional enculturation. Cognitively, remote enculturation requires more agency, cognitive engagement, and deliberate learning than traditional enculturation, which is automatic and can be passive (see 2), so remote enculturation may be associated with a more intense or accelerated search for identity. Additionally, motivations to seek out remote enculturation may differ from those driving the desire for traditional enculturation. Researchers have identified six distinct motivations for identity construction: the need for meaning, continuity, belongingness, distinctiveness, efficacy, and self-esteem (18). Both traditional and remote enculturation are likely to satisfy motives for finding meaning. Both likely also address motives for a sense of continuity over time and feelings of belonging, although this is more likely for remotely enculturating families living outside their heritage country. Because it is often self-initiated, remote enculturation may also be more strongly motivated by a need for distinctiveness. In contrast, traditional enculturation may more strongly satisfy motives to feel efficacious by equipping youth with competence in critical cultural skills (e.g., language; 19).

TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR REMOTE ENCULTURATION

Globalization trends have created ready access to cultural content from immigrant homelands and unprecedented opportunities for diasporas to remain connected to their heritage cultures (20). Examples of remote enculturation (although not labeled as such) are readily found in the media and communication literature, and in research on adoption.

Media and Communication

Remote enculturation processes can take several forms. In some cases, first-generation immigrants maintain cultural bonds and later generations learn about their cultures through satellite television, telenovelas, and music. For example, Korean immigrants in Texas with digital satellite television subscriptions watch broadcasts from Korea to help them teach their children Korean language, culture, and history, and feel connected and up-to-date with their homeland (21). Korean American youth view transnational films to construct ethnic identities that incorporate an authentic understanding of Korean culture (22). Similarly, telenovelas, mostly produced in Latin America, help émigrés remain emotionally connected to their cultural heritage through familiar scenery, values, patterns of interaction, and cultural styles (23); Mexican American adolescent girls watch telenovelas as a way to “travel to Mexico without leaving home” and use knowledge gained about Mexican culture in constructing an identity (24, p. 485). Additionally, second- and third-generation Hmong refugee youth worldwide listen to Hmong music to connect with their culture and each other (25).

The Internet is another example of remote enculturation processes in the media and communication. Access to the Internet, which is generally less expensive and hierarchical than broadcast media (20), provides a platform for accessing cultural information needed to create or enhance understanding of the heritage culture. For example, the Board of Jewish Education in New South Wales, Australia, provides free online information on Jewish culture, religion, and history for all ages (bje.org.au). Additionally, social media and other online interpersonal exchanges allow individuals to interact remotely around a culture’s literature, entertainment, politics, and current events. Some Internet platforms even provide virtual experiences that foster remote enculturation. For example, virtual recreations of Mecca and a simulation of a Hajj pilgrimage allow Muslims living in non-Muslim countries to learn the steps involved in the pilgrimage, explore relevant cultural objects, and interact with each other (26).

Adoption

The adoption literature also provides examples of remote enculturation among families who adopt internationally (wherein the child migrates to a new country and is typically raised by par-

ents of different ethnic heritage). Parents of internationally adopted children teach the adoptees about their birth culture using a variety of strategies, some of which resemble traditional enculturation (e.g., moving to a neighborhood with many families from the child’s birth culture, enrolling the child in heritage language classes; 27). Many other strategies resemble parent-initiated remote enculturation, as they are indirect or intermittent, or both (e.g., the transnational media/Internet resources mentioned earlier). Internationally adopted youth who do not receive extensive ethnic socialization from their adoptive parents may be motivated to seek opportunities to learn about their birth culture in adolescence and beyond, initiating remote enculturation themselves.

Another set of remote enculturation strategies involves facilitating direct, but relatively brief and intermittent, contact between the adopted child and others from the birth culture through culture camps and heritage trips to the birth country (27). Culture camps bring together adoptees from the same birth country to learn cultural values and customs, promote ethnic pride, and meet others with similar adoption experiences (28). In contrast, heritage trips involve travel to the birth country, alone or in a group, to experience the culture firsthand (29). Typically, culture camps are attended by children, whereas heritage travel occurs at an older age (30).

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR REMOTE ENCULTURATION

Researchers have considerable choice as they explore the processes by which remote enculturation occurs, contexts that facilitate or constrain remote enculturation efforts, and associated developmental outcomes. As a new construct, basic information is needed (e.g., range and frequency of remote enculturation strategies used). The study of remote enculturation can also deepen our understanding of the development of ethnic identity and outcomes.

First, what are the sensitive periods and triggers for self-initiated remote enculturation? Is remote enculturation most likely while adolescents explore an identity or is it triggered later, during young adulthood? A synthesis of the ethnic and racial identity literature (31) highlights adolescence as an active time of identity exploration when youth decide about the meaning and centrality of ethnicity in their lives. In contrast, young adulthood is a time when ethnic and racial identity takes on increased complexity, as youth consider how their heritage intersects with other aspects of identity (e.g., career, social class). In an increasingly global world, remote enculturation may become a core avenue for the initial development of ethnic and racial identity (e.g., via streaming heritage media; 21). Alternatively, individuals may have to be farther along in forming identity (e.g., recognizing that race and ethnicity are central to their identity) before seeking opportunities for remote enculturation (consider African American college students who study in Africa

to deepen their connection with their heritage as an outgrowth of ethnic identity development; 32). Furthermore, parallel to some studies of ethnic identity (33), research can evaluate whether experiences of discrimination trigger remote enculturation activities, perhaps by propelling a search for belonging, and whether this pathway is more evident during certain developmental periods.

Second, what motivates remote enculturation? We propose that the motives align closely with the motives for exploring and searching for identity. For example, we expect remote enculturation to be motivated by needs for meaning, continuity, belonging, and distinctiveness (18). Researchers can explore whether a cognitive understanding of the heritage culture develops first and fosters a deeper emotional attachment, or the reverse. The motives and triggers for seeking remote enculturation, and the sequence by which remote enculturation unfolds, may be different across target audiences. For example, remote enculturation may unfold differently for those experiencing strong concurrent traditional enculturation (and for whom remote enculturation is secondary) than for those experiencing no traditional enculturation (and for whom remote enculturation is primary).

Third, how is remote enculturation linked with developmental outcomes? Most proximally, remote enculturation may affect the development of a healthy ethnic and racial identity. Given that ethnic and racial identity is associated with many positive developmental outcomes (13) and buffers individuals against the negative effects of stress and discrimination (34), an understanding of the factors that contribute to healthy development of identity is essential. Theories of the development of ethnic and racial identity include a variety of social and environmental influences, such as the prominent role of parents' ethnic socialization efforts (8), as well as peers and other social contexts (31). However, remote avenues for cultural learning have not yet been incorporated into studies on identity development. Researchers should investigate whether remote enculturation is also positively associated with the development of ethnic identity and positive developmental outcomes.

Does remote enculturation add to the process of developing identity beyond the contributions of traditional enculturation? Remote enculturation strategies initiated by parents or others may bundle with traditional enculturation strategies (e.g., learning heritage language through home and Skype conversations) and influence children's development similarly. However, self-initiated remote enculturation is expected to be distinct from traditional enculturation in volition (i.e., more agentic) and in links to developmental processes like the search for ethnic identity. Theories such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT; 35) highlight the importance of autonomous motives for well-being—behaviors that are perceived to be freely chosen have more positive developmental implications. Therefore, SDT suggests that self-initiated remote enculturation has a stronger influence on the development of identity than traditional enculturation.

CONCLUSION

Remote enculturation is a modern form of enculturation or cultural socialization. Current theories of cultural socialization and the development of ethnic/racial identity do not account for the increasing ways in which individuals can become exposed from afar to materials, traditions, and values of their heritage culture. Thus, the construct of remote enculturation brings the enculturation literature into accord with the realities of today's transnational families. Naming this modern cultural process presents an opportunity to add a dimension to child development research. Remote enculturation may have a unique and positive role to play in the lives of youth living outside the country of their cultural heritage.

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