

20 Acculturation in the United States of America

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20.1 Introduction

The United States (US) of America is a dynamic multicultural nation built to a large extent by immigrants. A groundswell of contemporary immigration in the last 50 years, mainly from Latin America and Asia, has brought about a demographic transformation featuring growing racial and ethnic diversity and a “fading majority” of European Americans. Moreover, for some, acculturation begins remotely in the home country, long before emigration to the United States. What implications do these demographic and globalization trends have for acculturation? This chapter will (1) describe aspects of the US national context that make it a unique setting for acculturation (Section 20.2), (2) present advances in acculturation theory that help to conceptualize acculturation in this dynamic and multicultural nation (Section 20.3), and (3) propose a contextual perspective on the link between acculturation and adaptation that integrates seemingly disparate findings (Section 20.4). Each section will conclude with a brief summary, discussion of implications and suggestions for future directions.

Acculturation is studied by multiple disciplines in the US. This broad-based interest is beneficial to visibility and funding streams for research and intervention. However, multiple disciplinary lenses also present a challenge due to varying conceptualizations of acculturation, levels of analysis, methodologies and findings (Birman & Simon, 2014). Anthropologists are interested in understanding the process of change of an entire culture, such as changes in patterns of shared knowledge, beliefs, behavior and symbols of cultural groups. Sociologists are interested in group-level phenomena including race and structural explanations for the extent to which an immigrant group assimilates, or becomes absorbed by the larger society over the course of generations. The psychological approach to acculturation (Graves, 1967) is distinct from the prior lenses because it focuses on individual variations in acculturation strategies, and psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Yoon, Langrehg & Ong, 2011).

Several groups in the US experience cultural discontinuity and acculturation to some degree, including recent immigrants (e.g., Latino immigrants from Latin America), established ethnic minorities (e.g., African Americans and Native Americans), and religious minorities (e.g., Muslims). Although an acculturation framework has been applied to these groups, other frameworks may be more

directly applicable to their experience including models of racial identity for African Americans (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley & Chavous, 1998), forced acculturation for Native Americans (Duran & Duran, 1995) and an overall emphasis on understanding the impact of structural inequalities that impact historically oppressed groups or "involuntary minorities" (Ogbu, 1987) in the US. In this chapter, we will focus on recent immigrants who have rapidly transformed US society in the past 50 years.

20.2 The United States as a case study of a dynamic and multicultural national context

20.2.1 Demographic transformation: historical and contemporary immigration trends

The historical and contemporary demographic and social-political realities in the US provide a unique context for acculturation of today's immigrants. Immigration to the US is at an all-time high in terms of sheer numbers. There are just under 40 million US immigrants today (Grieco et al., 2012; Passel & Cohn, 2009), meaning that approximately 13 percent of the US population is foreign-born (with a high of 27 percent in California). In addition, 22 percent of US children live in immigrant families (Grieco et al., 2012; Mather, 2009).

The regions from where immigrants originate paint an important part of the picture because those origins set the stage for the subsequent acculturation process (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010). In 1960, one in twenty US residents was foreign-born and 75 percent of those individuals were from Europe, whereas in 2010, one in eight US residents was foreign-born with only 12 percent of those from Europe (Grieco et al., 2012). The foreign-born population in the US today comes mainly from Latin America (44 percent, up from 9 percent pre-1960), Asia (28 percent, up from 5 percent pre-1960) and the Caribbean (9 percent) (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011; Grieco et al., 2012). Among Latin-American countries, Mexico is by far the primary sending country of immigrants to the US, accounting for 11.7 million foreign-born individuals (Grieco et al., 2012). Foreign-born persons from the Caribbean are sometimes merged into the Latin-American grouping, causing Latin Americans to occupy anywhere from 44 percent of the foreign-born population in some reports (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011) to 53 percent in others (see Grieco & Trevelyan, 2010). Statistics from immigrant sending countries in Europe also shift in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, making it difficult to have accurate estimates.

These inconsistencies in US immigration statistics highlight the arbitrariness of the categories used for government reports, which in turn reflect the US society's conceptualizations of race and ethnicity at a particular moment in time. Moreover, these statistics often mask important differences between countries of origin within the same region, all of which influence acculturation in the US.

20.2.2 Who is an immigrant? Immigrant generation and path to citizenship

In the US context, studies of acculturation have been conducted with immigrants from Europe (e.g., Aroian, Norris & Chiang, 2003; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Mil et al., 2009), Latin America (e.g., Escobar & Vega, 2000; Smokowski, Rose Bacallao, 2008), the Caribbean (e.g., Ferguson, Bornstein & Pottinger, 2008), González, Tarraf, Whitfield & Vega, 2010), Asia (Oh, Koeske, & Sales, 2000), Phinney, Ong & Madden, 2000) and Africa (e.g., Wamwara-Mbugua, Cornwell Boller, 2008). In addition, the concept of acculturation has been applied to other groups such as ethnic minorities (e.g., Phinney, 1990) including African Americans (e.g., Landrine & Klonoff, 1995; Obasi & Leong, 2010) and American Indians (e.g., Garrett & Pichette, 2000; Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). Since citizenship is granted automatically to those born in the US, the definition of immigrants generally includes only those who are foreign-born. However studies are frequently conducted on groups that include immigrants and US-born ethnic minorities, such as Asian Americans, most of whose family heritage originates in East Asia (e.g., L. Yoon & Liu-Tom, 2006), as well as Pacific Islanders (e.g., Srinivasan & Guillern 2000), Latino Americans (e.g., Schwartz, Zamboanga & Jarvis, 2007) and more recently, Muslims (e.g., Alkhazraji, Gardner, Martin & Paolillo, 1997; Asvat Malcarne, 2008).

The type of legal status immigrants have can significantly impact their acculturation experience. Whereas US immigrants (permanent) and sojourners (temporary) often migrate legally and voluntarily based on the "pull" of economic and educational opportunities in the United States, refugees and asylum seekers tend to migrate involuntarily based on the "push" of human rights violations, such as war and persecution in their home countries (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012). Economic migrants generally arrive with skill sets well matched to the US economy. Some bring financial resources, and others take advantage of economic and educational opportunities.

Undocumented immigrants, numbering 11.5 million in 2011, are a large and important immigrant group in the United States, predominantly from Mexico (Elmendorf, 2013). Although these immigrants come for economic "pull" reasons, many encounter great hardships including economic deprivation and violence prior to migration and during the border crossing. Living with fear of deportation, they are reluctant to access services and may find employment in dangerous occupations while remaining reluctant to insist on safety procedures (Forst, Avila, Anozie Rubin, 2010). Over 14 million people in the US live in mixed-status households (i.e., some family members are undocumented), vulnerable to deportation and family separations (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). As a result, acculturating and participating fully in various aspects of the US society and culture can be hampered by fears of deportation.

Refugees and asylum seekers represent a relatively small number of new arrivals to the US, less than 10 percent in most years, with approximately 70,000 arrivals

2014 (Bruno, 2015). At the same time, the US resettles more refugees than all other countries in the world combined (Patrick, 2004). The process of acculturation and resettlement is thought to be different for refugees who arrive with few resources and suffer from sequelae of trauma. However, they do receive short-term support from the US resettlement system, which provides new arrivals with 4 to 6 months of financial assistance, job placement programs, and English language training. Refugees are also eligible for all social safety net programs available to US citizens, and may have positive attitudes toward the American culture and embrace economic and educational opportunities (e.g., see Gold's 1992 study of Vietnamese and former Soviet refugees). However, some refugees who have lived through extreme trauma had a difficult adjustment process, such as those who fled the "Killing Fields" of Cambodia. Asylum seekers represent a particularly vulnerable group whose legal status can be revoked if asylum is not granted. Given uncertainties about their opportunities for remaining in the US, they experience a complex acculturation process, though their experience is rarely studied.

20.2.3 The racial/ethnic context of US acculturation and research among immigrant groups

Historically, the metaphor of the "melting pot" has dominated the US immigrant experience, and assimilation – shedding one's national origin and becoming a "real" American – was seen as necessary to achieve the American Dream of upward socioeconomic mobility. By making nationality and ethnicity distinct from citizenship, the US provides immigrants the opportunity to shed their prior national ties and become "American," creating an uncomplicated path to citizenship for legal immigrants and their descendants. This is in contrast to most European countries where descendants of immigrants continue to be considered "foreigners." During the first part of the twentieth century, European immigrant groups in the United States, even those considered to be racially inferior (e.g., Irish, Italians, Greeks), assimilated and eventually intermarried with members of the dominant groups, affirming the "melting pot" experience. However, due to the post-1965 non-White immigration surge, assimilation has been difficult because of continued racial discrimination. A case in point is the image of Asian Americans as the "perpetual foreigners" because they look different from Whites (Suzuki, 2002).

The importance of race as a marker in US society creates a unique acculturation context. The concept of acculturation is often applied to integration of racial minorities in the US, including Latinos, Asians, African Americans and American Indians, regardless of their place of birth. Second- and third-generation European immigrants are assumed to have assimilated; whereas descendants of non-White immigrants and other racial minorities are thought to continue to live in multicultural worlds, and continue to experience the process of acculturation. Although according to the US Census, Latinos are an ethnic group and can be of any color, including White, they have been "racialized" (Golash-Boza, 2006) and treated as a racial minority. Most Asian Americans today are first-generation immigrants (i.e., foreign born), including

immigrants from China (2 million), the Philippines (1.7 million) and Korea (1 million) (Greico & Trevelyan, 2010). Although most African Americans are descendants of slaves brought to the US in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, migration from Africa and the Caribbean is on the rise (approximately 5.3 million), and all are considered "African American/Black" in the US Census (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011). More recently, Muslims have become the focus of study (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008) defined not by race, ethnicity or immigrant status but by religion. While discrimination that accompanies being a member of these larger groups has a number of important consequences for health, mental health and well-being (Sirin & Fine, 2007), the great diversity within these categories is frequently overlooked in research in the US that combines language and cultural subgroups of different immigrant/foreign-born status into the large ethnoracial categories of Latinos, Asians, African Americans and now Muslims.

Our knowledge of the diversity within the immigrant experience in the US is also limited with respect to newly arriving immigrants who are harder to study (APA, 2012). Interviewing them is more costly and complex because of the need to translate interviews and questionnaires. This is an important gap in the literature since research suggests that, in the US context, there are unique features to the new immigrant experience. (See discussion of immigrant paradox in Section 20.4.)

20.2.4 Summary, implications and suggestions for future research

In this section, we briefly reviewed the diversity of acculturating groups in the US, particularly immigrants, drawing attention to the factors that shape their acculturation experiences. In particular, we noted distinctions between voluntary legal immigrants, undocumented migrants, and refugees/asylum seekers that have implications for their acculturation experiences. We also drew attention to the unique features of the cultural and social US context that shapes acculturation experiences. Most research on acculturation in the US does not sufficiently capture immigrant diversity and often excludes recently arrived immigrants. Many studies confound immigrant with ethnic minority status, particularly for immigrants from Asia and Latin America who are grouped into broad categories of Asian American and Latino, regardless of whether they are immigrants themselves or descended from immigrants.

20.3 Acculturation theory

Rapidly advancing globalization, and "super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2007) due to immigration and remote cultural transmission, require that we update our conceptualization of acculturation to encompass a broader range of experience. Super-diversity is a concept originating from Britain, which describes exponential demographic diversification due to recent immigration trends experienced by some contemporary receiving societies. First, we suggest that acculturation needs to be

understood as an increasingly complex multicultural process that occurs between individuals coming from plural sending societies to (super-) diverse receiving countries. This context raises the question of whether a *tridimensional* (3D) or even more complex multicultural perspective is needed to understand US acculturation. Second, with the ease of global communication and movement, the nature of acculturative contact has changed and may now be continuous or intermittent, direct or indirect. We describe *remote acculturation* as an example of an indirect but influential acculturation process. Based on these twenty-first century globalization trends, Ferguson (2013) proposed that "acculturation can now be defined as what occurs when groups or individuals having different cultures come into contact, whether continuous or intermittent, first-hand or indirect, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of one or more parties" (p. 249). We stress this revised definition when understanding acculturation in the US context because of its super-diversity and embeddedness in the larger context of advancing cultural globalization.

20.3.1 Beyond bidimensional (2D): multidimensional acculturation theory (3D or more)

Approximately 30 years ago, the field of acculturation psychology shifted its paradigm from viewing acculturation in a unidimensional (1D) manner to viewing it as bidimensional (2D) (Berry, 1980a). The old 1D view followed a zero sum logic of cultural affiliation, whereas according to the 2D acculturation framework, individuals can acculturate to two cultures simultaneously, sometimes called "bilinear" acculturation. 2D acculturation studies in the US tend to treat the two cultural dimensions separately (e.g., Birman & Trickett, 2001, measure acculturation to Russian culture on one subscale and acculturation to American culture on another). Other 2D studies (e.g., Cuéllar, Arnold & Maldonado, 1995) score measures in such a way as to establish four "acculturation statuses" (AIMS) based on Berry's work (e.g., 1997): *A* (assimilation: orientation to destination culture only); *I* (integration: orientation to both cultures); *M* (marginalization: orientation to neither culture); and *S* (separation: orientation to heritage culture only). Although some US acculturation research, particularly in public health (Abraído-Lanza, Armbrister, Flórez & Aguirre, 2006; Yoon et al., 2011), continues to utilize the 1D conceptualization, the 2D view of acculturation is now widely used.

However, focusing on only two cultural dimensions may be limiting, conflating nation with culture (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997). Psychological acculturation is no longer bidimensional (2D) but at least tridimensional (3D) for many of today's US immigrants, owing to multiple ethnoracial, religious and cultural groupings, as well as multiple community contexts within which they are located before and/or after migration.

Persky and Birman (2005) and Birman, Persky and Chan (2010) illustrated the importance of expanding the acculturation framework to capture three cultures in their studies of US immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) for whom two

cultures – Russian and Jewish – were salient in the home country. These immigrants were already bicultural before emigration and began acculturating to a third culture upon arrival in the US. Nonetheless, Russian Jewish immigrants are generally referred to as “Russian” by Americans – a label that does not acknowledge their ethnicity as they understand it – because being Jewish is conceptualized as an ethnicity in the FSU, but as a religion in the US. In a sample of over 200 youth, Birman and colleagues found that Jewish Russian immigrant adolescents were more likely to include “Jewish” in a bicultural or tricultural self-label compared to Russian immigrant youth without Jewish ancestry (Birman et al., 2010). Moreover, using a tricultural framework (i.e., measuring acculturation to the Russian, Jewish and American cultures) explained more of the variance in Jewish adolescents’ psychological adjustment than did a bicultural framework (Birman et al., 2010). Similarly for adult immigrants, Jewish, Russian and American cultures each made unique contributions to explaining feelings of alienation as a US immigrant (Persky & Birman, 2005).

A 3D acculturation framework is also better suited for immigrants who encounter two potential destination cultures within the receiving society, as is the case for ethnic minority immigrants in the US. Many non-European immigrants arriving in the US are considered, some for the very first time, to be ethnic minorities (Schwartz et al., 2010). The 2D acculturation model falls short in capturing these immigrants’ acculturation because it promotes a monocultural “American” destination and masks the presence of minority cultures as potential destinations alongside the majority culture (Abraido-Lanza et al., 2006). A number of scholars stress the need to account for US racial stratification in the conceptualization of acculturation for non-White immigrants (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Ferguson and colleagues (2012) studied acculturation of Black Jamaican immigrants in the US as a prime case example of 3D acculturation because Black immigrants orient to White European American and Black African American cultures in addition to their own ethnic culture. These researchers found that approximately 40 percent of Jamaican immigrant mothers and adolescents were triculturally integrated (i.e., having high scores for all three cultures) and tricultural integration was the single most common acculturation status. 3D acculturation was replicated in a second cohort of Jamaican immigrant adults in the US with a striking 46 percent of the sample being triculturally integrated (Ferguson, Iturbide & Gordon, 2014).

Qualitative research among other immigrant groups in the US supports 3D acculturation. Nguyen’s (2013) semistructured interviews with Hmong adolescent immigrants and children of immigrants revealed complex three-part ethnic identities that they described using a pencil metaphor – “Yellow on the outside, White in the middle, and Black at the core” (p. 14). Wamwara-Mbugua and colleagues’ (2008) in-depth interviews with Kenyan immigrants indicated that they are initially oriented to the US White mainstream until a race/culture-specific consumer need (e. g., hair care) highlights African Americans as a second destination group and prompts “triple acculturation.”

20.3.2 Expanding the nature of contact in acculturation: the case of remote acculturation ("Americanization") of potential migrants

Remote acculturation refers to acculturation arising from indirect and/or intermittent intercultural contact with a geographically and historically separate cultural group (Ferguson, 2013). With expanding globalization (Berry, 2008), people come into cultural contact across great distance (Arnett, 2002; Jensen, Arnett & McKenzie, 2011) and direct first-hand continuous contact is no longer necessary for acculturation to begin (Ferguson, 2013). Trade, technology and air travel afford many people across the globe indirect and/or intermittent contact with the US and its cultural products, including media, merchandise, fast food and tourists. Given that consuming US foods and discussing US television reinforces an Americanized identity among immigrant youth (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Guendelman, Cheryan & Monin, 2011), the same appears to be true among potential US migrants in other countries. In addition, immigration today does not necessarily represent a permanent break from the country of origin, as immigrants and their relatives back home may easily visit each other physically or virtually (e.g., phone, text, email, Skype). Immigrant remittances to families still in the home country represent a major global economic force and another potential means of remote acculturation to the extent that it fosters a connection to the culture of the sender (McCormick, 2013).

Remote acculturation can be considered the individual-level consequence of cultural diffusion. Cultural diffusion (Berry, 1980b) is a broader concept referring to the spread of a given culture/culture system (e.g., Western culture) to other cultures, and typically occurs at the cultural level and involves most or all members of a culture. Remote acculturation, on the other hand, pertains more to individual psychological change and often occurs among subgroups (Ferguson, Tran, Mendez & Van de Vijver, in press). Unlike cultural diffusion, remote acculturation also requires both geographical and historical separateness of the remote culture (i.e., strictly speaking, the culture of a former colonizer is no longer remote) and targets a specific remote culture (versus nonspecific Western culture).

Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) demonstrated the presence of remote acculturation toward European-American culture among Jamaican families living on the Caribbean island. The influx of tourists, products, media and remittances from the US into Jamaica over the last 50 years far exceeds the influence from other nations (see Bank of Jamaica, 2010; Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2014; Dunn, 2008). Additionally, the US is the primary destination for Jamaican emigrants (Thomas-Hope, 2002), so there are strong transnational ties between Jamaicans on the island and Jamaican immigrants in the US, maintained by social and monetary remittances (Ferguson, 2013). Two studies in urban Jamaica showed that approximately one in three adolescents and one in ten mothers had an *Americanized Jamaican* profile due to significantly stronger European-American affiliations, entertainment preferences and identity, compared to their culturally traditional peers (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012, 2015) (The word "America" is used in Jamaica to refer to the US; Ferguson

& Bornstein, 2014.) Remote acculturation also has implications for family values and family interactions. Americanized Jamaican adolescents had equally low family obligations to a comparison sample of Midwestern European-American youth, and parent-adolescent dyads in which one partner was Americanized but the other was culturally traditional reported much higher conflict than dyads in which both partners belonged to the same remote acculturation group (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). This is consistent with US immigrant family research showing higher rates of conflict compared to nonimmigrant youth (Birman, 2006; Kwak, 2003). What is more, although their construal of US culture is somewhat stereotypical (Ferguson & Iturbide, 2013), Americanized Jamaican youth bear closer cultural resemblance to Jamaican immigrants and European Americans living in the US than to peers on the island (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012).

Acculturation research with some US immigrant groups suggests the presence of remote acculturation before migration. For example, Phinney, Ong, and Madden (2000) found that family obligations of first-generation Mexican immigrant adolescents were as low as those of second-generation youth. The researchers attributed this finding to the fact that "Mexicans are likely to be exposed to American values before coming to the US ... [so] differences between Mexican and US cultures are likely to be less apparent." (Phinney et al., p. 536; see also the discussion of premigration factors and health in Chapter 25.)

20.3.3 Summary, implications and suggestions for future research

Acculturation theory is evolving to keep up with increasingly complex multicultural societies, such as the US. Many US immigrants today are acculturating multidimensionally to three or more cultures simultaneously due to plural sending and receiving contexts. This is particularly true for Black and other non-European immigrants. What is more, acculturation to the US is beginning remotely for some individuals living in other countries, especially youth (including potential migrants). Future US research should utilize a tridimensional (or multidimensional) acculturation model among other US immigrant groups likely to acculturate in 3D (or more) and should investigate the implications of tri- and multiculturalism for immigrant adaptation. Transdisciplinary research (e.g., marrying traditional acculturation psychology to media studies) is best suited to further explore the processes underlying "Americanization" of youth in other countries via remote acculturation. Longitudinal research can explore whether remote acculturation predicts likelihood of emigration and facilitates positive immigrant adaptation.

20.4 Adaptation and adjustment

Acculturation is known to be associated with the psychological health and well-being of immigrants (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012; Yoon et al., 2011). The process of acculturation may lead to acculturative stress (Berry, 1997; Lazarus,

1997), defined as stressful life events thought to be associated with the acculturation process. The process of adapting to the new culture may be stressful in its own right, as new immigrants confront a range of challenges such as poverty, finding work and housing and social isolation. Experiencing discrimination as an immigrant and/or member of a racial minority group is a component of many acculturative stress measures (Vinokurov, Trickett & Birman, 2002). In addition, reconciling the norms and values of the new and the old culture may be difficult (Berry, 1997; Rodriguez, Mira, Paez & Myers, 2007), particularly when these norms and values are in conflict (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001).

Despite experiencing such stressors, studies in the US have revealed a counter-intuitive finding that first-generation immigrants are doing better than expected on a wide range of outcomes than their counterparts remaining in the country of origin, as well as second- and later-generation immigrants who are born in the US. This finding, variably referred to as the “epidemiological paradox,” the “immigrant health paradox,” and the “Latino paradox” (García Coll & Marks, 2011), suggests that adjustment worsens rather than improves with increasing US acculturation. First-generation immigrants have been found to demonstrate better performance on a variety of physical health, behavioral health and educational outcomes compared to their descendants born in the US (APA, 2012). This pattern has been most consistently found for Latino populations, specifically Mexican Americans with respect to health and mental health (e.g., Escobar & Vega, 2000). In addition, compared to their US-born peers, immigrant students have better adjustment and achievement at school. As a result, some have suggested that acculturation to the US culture is associated with worsening psychological adjustment, particularly for Latinos (Cachelin, Phinney, Schug & Striegel-Moore, 2006; Escobar & Vega, 2000; Torres, 2010), whereas better psychological adjustment is associated with maintaining their heritage culture (Rivera, 2007; Rodriguez et al., 2007; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006; Torres, 2010). In the family domain, heritage culture acculturation has been found to have benefits for family cohesion (Rodriguez et al., 2007; Smokowski et al., 2008) in some studies in combination with acculturation to the US culture (e.g., Sullivan et al., 2007). Even in the academic domain, where as one might expect acculturation to the US culture to be beneficial (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2007), heritage culture acculturation including ethnic identity (Schwartz et al., 2007), familiarity with Latin American culture, Spanish proficiency and Latino activism (Colón & Sánchez, 2010) have also been found to be related to higher grades.

Given the possibility of negative adaptation, especially among assimilated immigrants in the US, research in psychology has addressed the question of whether certain ways that immigrants acculturate may hold advantages. In the US, consistent with the dominant societal views, the assumption in the literature had been that assimilation is the best way for immigrants to acculturate. Today, the bidimensional model of acculturation by Berry, Phinney, Sam and Vedder (2006) has stressed that integration or biculturalism is the most beneficial strategy for immigrants (see meta-analysis of Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). However, while some US studies do

demonstrate benefits of integration (e.g., Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008), findings are inconsistent across studies and immigrant groups (e.g., Rogler et al., 1991). For example, as described above, for Latino Americans, heritage cultural maintenance (corresponding to Berry's strategy of separation) has been associated with positive outcomes. Similarly, Jamaican immigrant youth classified as separated have equally high grades compared to integrated youth (Ferguson et al., 2012).

Moreover, Sue and Chu (2003) have observed, that in the US, while assimilation may have negative effects for Latinos, it may have positive effects for Asians. Studies with Asian samples have consistently found acculturation to the US culture to be beneficial for psychological adjustment (e.g., Kang, 2006), sometimes in combination with heritage culture acculturation. Studies have also found that Asian Americans who were more assimilated report less psychological distress (Oh et al., 2002; Yeh, 2003). In the academic domain, acculturation to the US culture has been found to be beneficial for Asian Americans (Kang, 2006; Nguyen, Messe & Stollak, 1999); whereas heritage culture acculturation has been linked to worse academic performance (Kang, 2006).

20.4.1 A contextual perspective

As these discrepant findings demonstrate, diverse ways of acculturating, including assimilation, separation, and integration/biculturalism, may be adaptive for different immigrant groups in the US. From a contextual perspective, there is no "best" acculturative style independent of context (Birman, Simon, Chan & Tran, 2014). Rather, whether a particular way of acculturating is beneficial depends on the kinds of cultural skills that are needed for successful adaptation of particular cultural groups in specific cultural and community contexts. We conceptualize context using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) influential framework, and view acculturation of individuals as occurring within nested systems, each representing a different level of analysis and characterized by different cultural resources and pressures (Birman & Simon, 2014). These include microsystems in which individuals participate directly, such as home or school; and systems that have an indirect influence such as the mesosystem or the connections between varied microsystems; the exosystem, or important institutions and settings that influence individuals indirectly, such as the surrounding neighborhood; and the macrosystem, or the larger cultural beliefs and practices in society that filter through these other levels to influence the individual. Although there is one macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's original formulation, for immigrants both the culture of origin as well as the American culture(s) exert important influences on each of the other systems, which trickle down to the individual.

One acculturation model that considers levels of context other than the macrosystem is *segmented assimilation theory*. Sociologists have observed that for the newer non-White immigrants, US culture (i.e., macrosystem) is not homogeneous; rather, it is made up of communities (exosystems) that vary in social class and ethnic makeup. As a result, today's immigrant groups assimilate into different segments of

US society (Gibson, 2001), resulting in segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Some groups, such as European immigrants, can still assimilate and move up economically, politically and socially into the White middle class, and their offspring can intermarry with other Whites, as in the early twentieth century.

However, in today's US labor market, immigrant groups (especially those of color) that arrive without higher levels of education risk *downward assimilation* into communities marked by poverty (Gibson, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993). With their opportunities to move up the economic ladder blocked by racism, children of these immigrants have limited opportunities to join the middle class. For example, for Black Caribbean immigrant youth, downward assimilation into (inner-city) African-American culture has been shown to be associated with poorer academic and behavioral adaptation (Ferguson et al., 2012). Immigrant youth who take this acculturation pathway respond to racial discrimination by assuming a defensive posture toward the White mainstream culture, including deidentification with education (Kasinitz, Battle & Miyares, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters, 1999). This may be the case for Mexican-American and other Latino immigrants who are residentially segregated (Ross, 2011). Although living within an ethnically dense neighborhood can serve a protective function against discrimination from the larger society, it can simultaneously increase the chances of downward assimilation as suggested by Portes and Zhou (1993). In this way, segmented assimilation may represent an example of how macrosystem factors (i.e., the US and heritage cultures) are filtered through exosystem factors (i.e., the nature of communities where immigrants settle) to create different patterns of adaptation for different immigrant groups. Further, these macro- and exosystem factors are filtered through the microsystems where immigrants live their daily lives.

Some groups who although not White may still attain economic success through what segmented assimilation theory calls *selective assimilation*. For example, though Asian Americans experience discrimination, many are highly skilled and are able to succeed educationally and economically. At the microsystem level, non-White well-educated immigrants, such as some South Asians, may acculturate to the US culture selectively, maintaining their heritage culture at home but adopting the US culture in work and educational settings, making it possible to move into the middle class (Gibson, 2001).

For immigrants, microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) or life domains (Birman et al., 2014), such as the home or the school, require knowledge of different cultural repertoires (i.e., macrosystems). In some of these settings, such as within the family or network of coethnic friends, knowledge of the *heritage* language and culture are important for adaptation. In others, such as at school or work, knowledge and comfort with the *host* (i.e., US) culture are important. Consistent with this, Birman et al. (2014) found that both Russian and American acculturation were predictors of reduced symptoms of distress for Soviet émigré adults in the US. Positive effects of American acculturation were mediated by occupational adjustment, and the positive effects of Russian acculturation were mediated by satisfaction with coethnic social support. Thus at the microsystem level of analysis,

acculturation to both their heritage and the US culture can provide immigrants with important cultural skills and repertoires that assist them in different settings. Selective assimilation represents one example of how immigrants may acculturate in one way (e.g., assimilation) in some life domains, such as workplaces or schools; and in other ways (e.g., separation) in their homes. The diversity of acculturation patterns across microsystems is another important advantage of measuring acculturation to US and heritage culture separately in a "bilinear" format described in Section 20.3.

Another important adaptation issue for immigrant families at the microsystem level involves the family. As a result of the dual macrosystem influences, the family represents a particularly culturally complex system, because immigrant parents and their children undergo very different processes of acculturation that result in acculturation gaps. Research with a variety of samples has documented that acculturation gaps are linked to child maladjustment and family conflict, including Chinese (Buki, Ma, Strom & Strom, 2003), Asian Indian (Farver, Narang & Bhadha, 2002), Asian Americans (Lee, Choe, Kim & Ngo, 2000), Vietnamese (Ho & Birman, 2010), Mexican Americans (Smokowski et al., 2008) and former Soviet immigrant families (Birman, 2006). For this reason, when individuals' acculturation reduces acculturation gaps, it is linked to better family adjustment. For example, in studies of former Soviet émigrés, acculturation to Russian culture for adolescents was linked to better relationships with parents (Birman, 2006); while for elderly immigrants – that is, their grandparents – acculturation to the US culture was related to better family adjustment (Genkova, Trickett, Birman & Vinokurov, 2014).

Finally, an example of mesosystem factors (i.e., the relationship between microsystems) involves differences in cultural expectations at home and at schools. Immigrant children often struggle with lack of alignment of goals and values between these two important settings in their lives. Parental knowledge and involvement with school has been shown to be related to immigrant children's school achievement (Birman & Ryerson-Espino, 2007); and teachers hold more positive and welcoming attitudes toward immigrant students and their parents when they (i.e., the teachers) are more knowledgeable about their home lives (Huss-Keeler, 1997).

20.4.2 Summary, implications and suggestions for future research

In sum, the kinds of acculturation that are adaptive depend on characteristics of the different layers of contexts, the background of immigrants and the microsystems where adjustment is assessed (Birman & Simon, 2014). Immigrant advocates in the US argue that assimilation is an oppressive force that causes immigrants to give up their culture pride and connection to their cultures of origin. This is particularly harmful when the larger society continues to reject those who are not White despite their efforts to assimilate. While biculturalism seemingly has advantages, the concept may be too broad, and needs to be refined to include understanding of varied specific settings where acculturation and adjustment occur. Thus, while

immigrants may benefit from acculturation to the US culture *in culturally mainstream settings*, such as schools and workplaces, younger generations in particular may benefit from maintaining their heritage culture because of the advantages it offers *at home* in their relationships with their parents and grandparents. Further, for immigrants who are not White or well-educated and resettle in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, separation, or embracing their ethnic identity, may be protective. Importantly, immigrants living in these situations face racism and acculturative pressures located within multiple cultures and subcultures that surround them, making it difficult to find a “best” acculturative style. For example, although triculturalism, or acculturation to European-American, African-American and Jamaican culture had some negative implications for adult Jamaican immigrants (more psychological distress than biculturals and monoculturals/separated immigrants; Ferguson et al., 2014), tricultural youth had better behavioral adjustment (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014). Understanding acculturation in the US context requires a more thorough and differentiated understanding of acculturation patterns and contexts where acculturation occurs.

20.5 Conclusions

The US is a dynamic natural laboratory for the study of acculturation. Immigrants have changed, do change and will continue to change the face of the US. Before 1960, the vast majority of US immigrants came from Europe and that pattern is reversed such that newcomers from Europe are now dwarfed by those from Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean. The type of US migrant has also diversified; immigrants, refugees, sojourners and undocumented migrants have all received some attention in the acculturation literature, although voluntary immigrants claim the lion's share. For many immigrants, psychological acculturation is no longer bidimensional (2D) but tridimensional (3D) and beyond, owing to multiple ethno-racial, religious and cultural groupings, as well as multiple community contexts within which they are located before and/or after migration.

Immigrant adaptation in the US is also multifaceted and nuanced. Many first-generation immigrants benefit from an immigrant paradox of very positive adaptation despite challenging socioeconomic conditions. It is plausible that remote acculturation in the home country may contribute to the positive adaptation of this first generation. However, this positive trend reverses in subsequent immigrant generations. A Bronfenbrennerian contextual perspective suggests that different ways of acculturating are adaptive in different cultural and environmental contexts within the US, and research findings bear this out. Adaptiveness of acculturation strategies also varies across domains (e.g., public/private, school/employment, family), and age groups (adolescents, adults). Thus, a contextual perspective on immigrant adaptation helps to make sense of seemingly cacophonous findings in the US acculturation literature.

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