

CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Keywords: Acculturation, acculturation strategies (model of), acculturative stress, acculturative outcome, assimilation, basic (personality) traits, coping, ICSEY, integration, marginalization, personality, separation, segregation

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Summary

A major topic in current cross-cultural psychology is acculturation research on how people coming into contact with a new, often unfamiliar, culture deal with this new situation. Acculturation has become a central issue because the flux of migration has increased worldwide and will continue to increase; this includes international exchange programs, international and transcontinental tourism, and international economic and political cooperation. It may be possible that globalization will cause societies to become more similar to each other in the future, but at present international migrants are confronted with cultural differences. Coming into contact with and living in a new and unfamiliar culture may be experienced as stressful. Migrants frequently have to deal with cultural conflicts, cope with acculturative stress, and develop adequate acculturation strategies. Cultural learning processes will take place, and in time both migrants and migrant-receiving societies will change their sociocultural behavior. In the past, the rather negative outcomes of acculturation were investigated, whereas more recently it has become clear that most migrants adapt to a new culture successfully. The question arises why some people are more successful than others. Cross-cultural psychology research has been able to offer answers to these questions: the acculturation outcome depends on a variety of factors at the societal, group, and individual level and

all exert an influence on the acculturation process. Two groups of relevant factors will be discussed: acculturation styles and personality variables. If we understand better the dynamic relationship between acculturation styles, personality, and acculturation outcome, we will be able to develop more efficient intervention strategies for individuals, create social support systems, and make proposals for a better immigration policy.

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural psychology can be defined as the science of investigating and explaining how human behavior is shaped and influenced by sociocultural factors and how human behavior has an impact on culture. It is concerned with both individual differences and social group-specific behavior patterns. Culture can be described as the way of life shared by people belonging to a social group, including habits, ergology (knowledge of types and use of tools and technical products), language, knowledge, communication styles, social interaction forms, symbols, values and norms, leisure time activities, arts, religious, and philosophical belief systems. In other words, all classes of similarities in behavior and products that are created and acquired by humans belonging to a social group or to a society, as discussed by Adler and Gielen.

Cross-cultural psychology can relate to two main topics: cultural similarities and cultural differences. In both cases, a nomological network of terms helps to elaborate what is similar and what is different in between cultures (a nomological network is a system of basic beliefs useful to describe the world—or culture, in this context—from a subjective perspective). In contrast to this nomothetic approach, we further find a rather idiographic approach that is more interested in the uniqueness of a particular culture. Indigenous psychology refers to what is rooted in a specific culture found in an ethnic group.

Hofstede investigated cultural similarities and differences by collecting data in 50 countries and three regions. He found in his data that different cultures can be described on five dimensions that are labeled as:

- Power distance
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Individualism and collectivism
- Masculinity and femininity
- Long-term versus short-term orientation.

Each cultural group he investigated can be positioned in this five-dimensional space and each dimension becomes manifest in different behavior domains, such as economic, political, scientific, and religious organizations, intercultural encounters, business, social work, therapy, teaching, etc. Hofstede's model of five cultural dimensions allows us to describe what is common to all cultures as well as what makes each culture unique. The model further presents the opportunity to predict what happens when people and groups encounter others belonging to different cultures. What happens if cultural groups that are more or less different in their position on these five dimensions have to communicate and interact can be predicted, and it will be clear which communication problems and conflict situations may arise. If these conflicts can be

anticipated, preventive strategies may be developed and applied. It is obvious that research into cultural similarities and differences—as realized by Hofstede or carried on by Triandis, Schwarz, and others—and the development of training programs for intercultural sensibility and competence has become more and more important in a world of increasing globalization.

Triandis investigated “individualism vs. collectivism,” showing that cultures differ with regard to this dimension. Furthermore, he argues that individualism vs. collectivism can be analyzed at different levels (i.e. the societal, the social group, and the individual level (at this level he calls it “idio-centrism vs. allocentrism”). His research shows that individualism and collectivism when measured at different levels of analysis may differ in a specific social situation. Let us imagine the case of an idiocentric person who is member of a family belonging to an ethnic group with a collectivist orientation that has immigrated and is living in an individualistic country—cultural conflicts should be preprogrammed that have to be resolved. Triandis was also able to show that this dimension is related to different types of diseases (individualism seems to correlate with cardiovascular diseases) and that the status of migrants’ health changes according to the characteristics of the immigration country.

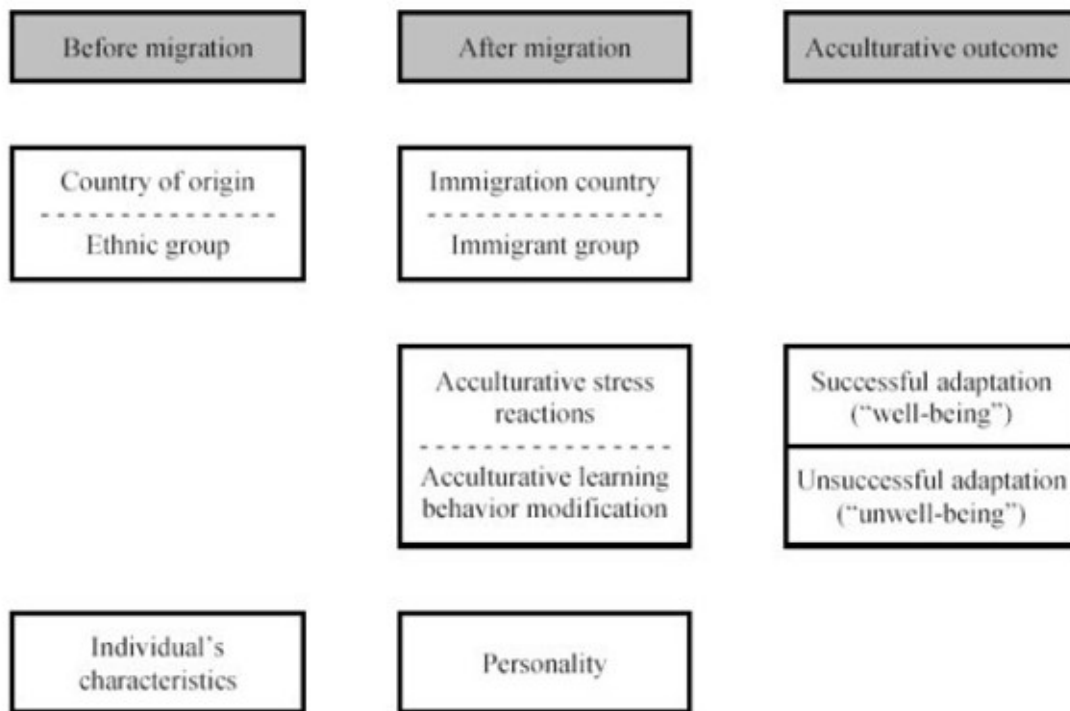


Figure 1. Influence of sociocultural and personality variables on acculturation processes and acculturation outcome

The relevance of cross-cultural psychology is becoming more and more obvious with the increasing numbers of migrants and fugitives. Whereas international businesspeople, diplomats, and international technicians are well trained by specialists in cross-cultural psychology and sociology, migrant workers and fugitives are normally not prepared for their stay abroad and do not receive social, psychological, and medical support to the same extent as the former group of “migrants.” Furnham and Bochner have documented

how, after a first phase of euphoria, both groups of migrants usually experience the contact with a new culture as more or less stressful as each migrant has to deal with new sociocultural surroundings. Additionally, more change may be asked of the migrants, including climate, nutrition, housing, family-related organization problems, etc. The quality of stress—stress events experienced as “eu-stress” (“good stress,” i.e. a positive challenge) or as “distress” (the negative consequences)—the extent of stress, the chronological course or phases of stress-experience differ from one person to another, or they may be different in course and outcome for each immigration group. Thus, individual- and group-specific differences appear, and the empirical findings on these will be discussed later. Cross-cultural research based on a huge amount of empirical data show that acculturative learning and behavior modifications in cultural settings as well as acculturative stress influence the quality of an acculturative adaptation (see Figure 1). The acculturative processes are influenced by a series of moderator and intervening variables. Table 1 gives an overview of the most relevant variables investigated since the early 1980s. Two groups of variables will be discussed in more detail: acculturation styles and personality variables. The aim of the presentation of empirical findings is to illustrate how the acculturative outcome is influenced by these variables. And finally, how the quality of these outcomes can be influenced by adequate intervention strategies will be discussed.

Group level variables	Characteristics of the society of origin and settlement: Sociopolitical structures and ideologies Economic situation Geographic and demographic factors Belief and value systems: ideologies, multicultural ideology Ethnic attitudes Social support and health systems
	Acculturative group characteristics: Physical characteristics Biological characteristics Social and organizational Cultural factors
Individual level characteristics	Personal characteristics before emigration: Age, gender Social status Migration motivation and expectations Social contacts Education Professional situation
Immigration- or acculturation-related characteristics	Acculturation experiences (before acculturation) Acculturation attitudes and styles Acculturation-related coping strategies Perception of the own ethnic group Perception of the society of settlement Perceived sociocultural distances Perceived prejudice and discrimination Perceived resources (social support, problem-solving capacities) Phase (length of time)

<p>General personality characteristics before and during acculturation (moderator variables)</p>	<p>Biophysiological characteristics Basic personality dimensions Identity structure Generalized expectations (locus of control, interpersonal trust) Cognitive styles and structures (constructs, beliefs) Intellectual capacities and knowledge Value and need system Reaction forms: coping and defenses</p>
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Table 1. Classification of intervening and moderator variables of acculturative adjustment processes with migrants

2. How Do Migrants Adapt to a New Culture?

Acculturation refers to cultural changes that can be found when different cultural groups come in contact and that can be observed at different levels—societal, group, and individual. Acculturation is experienced by migrants when they are confronted with changes in their surroundings. The term refers to both a process of adaptation and to adaptation as an outcome of this process and includes psychological, social, and cultural aspects. The acculturative process, in most cases, cannot be understood as a simple reaction to changes in sociocultural surroundings migrants are confronted with. It is rather an active and often creative dealing with the challenges of their new sociocultural world. So we find a huge variety of acculturation strategies and acculturation outcomes. Cross-cultural psychologists, aware of these individual differences and according to their research interest, have tried to classify these strategies to investigate the complex relationship between acculturation strategies, factors determining these different forms of acculturative behavior, and acculturation outcomes. Terms such as assimilation, integration, separation, segregation, marginalization, etc. are used in scientific literature and the mass media to describe different types of acculturative strategies. An acculturation model developed by Berry and applied by many researchers has been useful in scientific research and for sociopolitical discussion, as it helps as a first step to define more precisely terms that are used in socioscientific, public, and political discussions. To give an example, the term “integration” is very popular and is often used in political discussion, but the meaning differs widely: integration can be understood as it is defined in Berry’s model or it can be interpreted by others as “assimilation.” The acculturation model refers to two dimensions that relate to different form of cognition, communication, and interaction migrants have with the society and culture of the immigration country or host society as well as their own cultural group (i.e. the one they have been belonging to). Dimension I can be described as “contact and interaction with the host society” and dimension II as “maintenance of the culture of origin.” The former relates to the question “Are the own cultural identity and customs of value to be maintained?” and the latter to the question “Are positive relations with the host society or other sociocultural groups considered to be of value, and are they to be maintained?” Both dimensions are considered continua and individual differences of acculturative behavior are normal-distributed on each dimension. This means that extreme positions on both dimensions are statistically rare, most migrants being positioned in the central part of the normal dimension, and that we can expect a huge amount of different individual acculturation patterns. When we artificially dichotomize each dimension to simplify matters for methodological reasons and combine both

dichotomized dimensions then we will obtain a four-field table and each cell refers to a different “prototype” of acculturation strategy: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (see Figure 2).

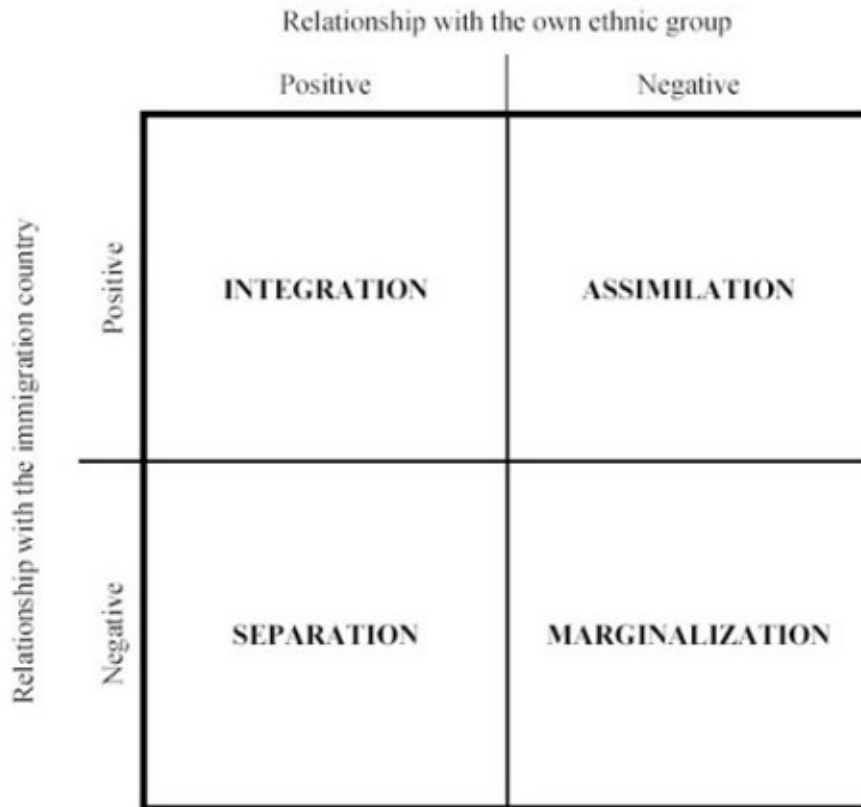


Figure 2. Acculturation styles (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) defined by the quality of the relationship with the own ethnic group and the majority in the immigration country

If, for purposes of presentation, we restrict the answers to our questions to “yes” or “no” we can define the four acculturation strategies as follows: answering “yes” to both questions we call integration. Integration can be defined as maintenance of the own cultural identity to a great extent and an effort towards becoming an integral part of the larger societal framework. Culture and customs of the host society are positively evaluated and parts of it are taken over and integrated in the own behavior and value system. Assimilation means the abandonment of the own culture of origin and the maintenance of positive relations with the host society, with cultural values and behavior patterns being adopted. The aim is often to become a person whose behavior patterns and lifestyle cannot be distinguished from that of a “real” member of the host society.

“Separation” is defined as maintenance of the own cultural identity and showing little interest in building up positive relations with other cultural groups and in taking over customs or accepting the host society’s values. Interactions are restricted to a minimum of communication and social contacts. “Marginalization,” the fourth option in the model, can be described as a reaction form when migrants give up their own cultural

identity and at the same time they are not interested in maintaining close contact with either the host society or other sociocultural groups living in the host country.

Berry's model of acculturation styles offers several advantages:

- First, it can be applied when we investigate differences in acculturation strategies at different levels of analysis: individual, group, and societal. It allows us to look at the phenomenon of acculturation when the same type of acculturative strategy is not chosen and practiced by migrants at different levels and when acculturation styles are also contradictory and conflicting. Individual and social conflicts often arise and solution strategies at different levels have to be developed and applied.
- Second, using the same terms as defined in the model serves as a basis for describing the different types of acculturation strategies preferred and requested by members of the acculturating group as well as by members of the host society. Contradicting expectations shown by both social groups can become apparent and social conflicts can escalate. We will return to this point a bit later.
- Third, the model is also useful when different strategies in different life situations are practiced at the individual as well as the social group levels. Regarding acculturation strategies, it becomes obvious that generalizations are not allowed when comparing individual and group behavior, since individual as well as group characteristics are relevant when looking for consistency. The supposed inconsistencies are often interpreted in a negative way and may reinforce prejudices and may be a basis of cultural misunderstanding and conflicts.
- Fourth, the four acculturation styles presented in the model are very clearly and consistently related to basic personality dimensions, cognitive styles, cognitive structure, conflict solving, and coping strategies. These research findings help us to understand individual migrant's acculturative strategies and develop individual and social intervention strategies.

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genetic, neurological, and psychophysiological factors, and presents empirical findings on its relevance for social behavior.]

Biographical Sketch

Paul G. Schmitz is member of the Department of Social and Personality Psychology at the Institute of Psychology, University of Bonn, Germany. He is also member of the advisory board of the Institute for Cross-Cultural and Cross-Ethnic Studies at the Molloy College in New York, USA. He is active in several international organizations, such as International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP), International Society for the Study of Individual Differences (ISSID), European Association of Personality Psychology (EAPP), and German–Japanese Society for Social Sciences. He is co-editor of the *Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*, he participates in the Program DEPSA (Diplôme Européen de Psychologie Sociale Appliquée), and teaches cross-cultural psychology at universities in France, Portugal, and Spain. Further, he is member of cross-cultural research groups such as ICSEY (International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth) and SOCSUP (International Study of Social Support).