

### **Acculturation: A psychological and sociological adaptation**

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#### **Abstract**

A new culture often challenges immigrant student's values and beliefs. Due to change in language, academic system, loss of family and friends they are subjected to stress. As an individual or group of people immigrate they have to contact with a culture that is different from their own. After the contact there is reciprocal influence of the culture upon both groups. This period of contact with other culture is known as "Acculturation". When an individual experience conflict with new culture, it result into acculturative stress. There is often a particular set of stressed behavior which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level and identity confusion.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Acculturation stress, Marginalization. Integration, Separation

#### **Introduction**

A new culture often challenges immigrant student's values and beliefs. Due to change in language, academic system, loss of family and friends they are subjected to stress. As an individual or group of people immigrate they have to contact with a culture that is different from their own. After the contact there is reciprocal influence of the culture upon both groups. This period of contact with other culture is known as "Acculturation". Individuals face adjustment problems in their life as they move into a new environment because they will have to adjust to new environment, food, traditions and religion. They have to live away from their home and family. That means they will have to survive without the support system. Thus moving from own country to new country and from their family and friends may result in internal stress. Similar situations will be encountered by students who enter a new institution for further study in a foreign country. When a student moves to new environment he has to adjust with new environment, people, cultural and social life of new country. Immigrant students come from different countries and they have their own distinct culture.

A new culture often challenges immigrant student's values and beliefs. Due to change in language, academic system, loss of family and friends they are subjected to stress. As an individual or group of people immigrate they have to contact with a culture that is different from their own. After the contact there is reciprocal influence of the culture upon both groups. This period of contact with other culture is known as "Acculturation". This concept of Acculturation was first introduced by a group of anthropologist in 20<sup>th</sup> century. They defined acculturation "as the phenomenon which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, 1936, P.149) [16]. Social Science Research Council (SSRC, 1954) [19] defined acculturation "as the acculturative change that is a consequence of direct cultural transmission between two or more cultural systems,

which is influenced by ecological as well as demographic factors". Bery (2005) [7] defined acculturation as a sociological and psychological adaptation to a different culture after living in it for a considerable period of time.

However there are two distinct levels of acculturation: group and individual (Graves, 1967) [12]. The group level is a collective process in which there is a change in either the host or new culture members or both. In individual level there is psychological acculturation change with in the individual as a result of contact with host culture. Therefore, the members of group may have different perception about the acculturation process (Berry, 1997; Bochner, 1986) [4]. Subsequent researcher classified psychological acculturation into two dimensions (Berry, 1997; Ward and Kennedy, 1994) [4]. One is the psychological dimension that is related to beliefs, attitudes, ideologies and values. The second dimension is behavioural aspects which is related with adaptation of the individual to new culture.

Berry (1987, 1997) [4] proposed a bi-dimensional acculturative stress model to understand the acculturation processes and outcomes of specific acculturating individuals and groups. According to this theory when an individual or group comes into contact with another culture there is acculturation stress. (Berry, 1997) [4]; Berry and Annis, 1974; Berry 2002) [6]. They define "acculturative stress as a result of collective stressors that occur during the process of acculturation and can result in lowered mental health of the acculturating individual" (Berry *et al.* 1987) [3]. They argued that the relationship between acculturation and stress is sometimes inevitable, and depends on the group of individuals and their characteristics as they enter the acculturation process.

The outcome of this process can be enhancement or destruction of mental health. The individuals experience acculturation to varying degrees from much too little. For some people acculturative changes may be in the form of stressor while other may experience them as opportunities. Berry, *et al.* (1987) [3] explained that the relationship between acculturative experienced, stressors and acculturative stress

depend on a number of factors. The first factor is nature of host i.e. whether it has multicultural ideology or has single cultural standard. The second factor is nature of the acculturating group i.e. whether international students having temporary or permanent contact with host culture. The third factor is mode of acculturation used by an individual, four different modes of acculturation are:

- (a) Marginalization When the acculturating individual or group neither maintain his own culture nor of host culture.
- (b) Separation When the acculturating individual maintains his own culture values but not of host culture
- (c) Assimilation When the acculturating individual maintains values of host culture but do not maintain values of his own culture.
- (d) Integration When one maintains his own values as well as values of host culture.

The other factors are individual's demographic and socio-psychological characteristics like age, gender, length of stay socio-economic status, cognitive style etc have impact on acculturation and stress. Various studies have validated the relationship between acculturative stress and predictive factors (e.g Berry *et al*; 1987, Kim, Power, Young and Bujabs, 1987; Kotic, 2004; Ward and Rana-Deufa, 1999) [3, 14 13, 21] Sandhu and Asrabadi (1999) [18] in their study stated seven factors that contribute to acculturative stress perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, culture shock, guilt, miscellaneous factors etc.)

Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) [20] found academic life, economic independence etc are stressor, Mori (2002) [15] found demands of cultural adjustment, Yeh and Inose (2003) [22] lack of adequate social connectedness and support, Ying (2005) [23] physical environment (e.g. climate, unfamiliar setting and safety), biological factors (food, diseases), social factors (e.g. homesickness, estrangement, loneliness), cultural factors (e.g. cultural value differences, encounter of racial discrimination) and functional factors (e.g. academic, financial difficulties and transportation problems are the causes of stress.

During the acculturation process an individual experience a type of stress that is called acculturative stress (Sandhu and Asrabadi, 1994) [17] when an individual experience conflict with new culture, it result into acculturative stress. Cross culture integration is found to be most effective strategy as compared to assimilation, segregation and marginalization (Kotic *et al*. 2004) [13] The type of stress that is associated with acculturation called acculturation stress. Acculturative stress is experienced by those who are in the process of acculturation to a dominating society by adapting their culture, language and norms. Berry (1987) [3] described an acculturative stress as reduction in health status (including psychological and social aspects) of individuals who are undergoing acculturation. Berry (2006) [8] defined acculturative stress as "a response by people to life events that are rooted in intercultural contact." Berry *et al*. (1987) [3] stated the concept of acculturative stress refers to one kind of stress, in which the stressors are identified having their source in the process of acculturation, in addition, there is often a particular set of stressed behavior which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level and identity confusion.

Furthermore, acculturative stress occurs with intercultural contact, people can experience uncertainty of how one should live in the new culture; which results in higher levels of depression and anxiety and stress. Coping and adaptation is a main theoretical view of understanding how people deal with the acculturation process.

Acculturation status. (Assimilated, integration, marginalization, and segregation) describe on individual's current position, whereas acculturative stress tells the distress associated with achieving an acculturation process. For example, an individual can seek assimilation to the new culture but not everyone will be accepted into host culture with the same ease, leading to different responses in the individual. Reaction to events that occur in the acculturation process is called acculturative stress (Berry, 2006) [3]. Thus changes in physical, psychological and social aspects should be studied to know the acculturative stress (Berry *et al* 1987) [2]. When one does not have coping skill that can help to deal with acculturative process can result in more negative outcomes. Berry (2006) [8] found that when stressor are not managed well, then stress will have more negative effects like anxiety and depression. The acculturation process could be result of voluntary, involuntary, sedentary or temporary contact with a host culture. There are contextual factors that can influence people's style of acculturation and its adaptation. Some of factors are physical appearance, contact, attitude, policies of host culture etc. (Berry, 2002) [6] other moderating factors that influence acculturation are age, gender, economic, status, education (Berry, 2006) [8]. Some factors change over time that are language, finding employment and house, support in new culture (Berry, 2006) [8]. These moderating factors play a vital role during acculturation which can be named as both protective and risk factors depending on which factors people have experienced (Berry, 2006) [8].

To counter the effect of acculturative stress, immigrant students are advised to be persistent and optimist. They are also advised to initiate contacts with peers and participate in campus activities. Institutions should also take initiative to resolve difficulties faced by immigrant students while adjusting to new culture. If institution will take some steps to help students in adjustment to new culture, it will decrease the effects of acculturation. Being left to fend for they would most likely increase the negative effects of acculturation and thus make adjustment much more difficult and stressful. In order to avoid the feeling of being left alone institutions should offer social support in establishing a relationship with new culture. It includes professional support, regular communication and training programs. All these measures contribute in adjustment to new culture and thus lead to improving their performance.

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