MIGRATION LETTERS

Acculturation contexts: Theorizing on the role of inter-cultural hierarchy in contemporary immigrants' acculturation strategies

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Abstract

Recent efforts to expand the theoretical framework of acculturation have drawn attention to a variety of pre-migration and reception contexts that affect how immigrants engage with the culture of their country of destination. Building on John W. Berry's seminal work, this article contributes to the development of acculturation theory by delineating the previously under-explored context of inter-cultural hierarchy. Employing a critical theory stance, the paper argues that immigrants' response to western cultural dominance and the rise of neoliberal imperatives can influence, along with the above mentioned contexts, their acculturative strategies. The paper proposes distinctions between types of assimilation, integration and separation strategies that have the potential to capture immigrant's risk of long-term psychosocial maladjustment in the country of destination.

Keywords: Immigration; acculturation; assimilation; integration; separation; inter-group hierarchy; cultural hegemony

Introduction

In the light of the unprecedented transnational mobility of the 21ˢᵗ century, the concept of acculturation has developed into a distinct and well-recognized field of study. Although the construct carries a primarily psychological connotation, it cannot be divorced from macro-level phenomena, including socio-cultural, political, historical and international determinants. Invitations from cross-cultural psychologists to anchor the concept into larger structural realities, have resulted in an articulation of various *contexts* of acculturation (Berry, 2006a; Schwartz et al., 2010; Samnani et al., 2013). The efforts aim to explain how demographic differences among migrants conspire with the receiving society's orientation towards immigration to shape the acculturation experience. Conspicuously absent from this expanded interdisciplinary theoretical framework has been the context of inter-cultural hierarchy and the relations of economic and cultural dominance that continue to exist between contemporary

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receiving and sending societies. Drawing on critical theory, I delineate this previously under-explored context of acculturation by proposing that immigrants' perceptions of global cultural hierarchies and globally-dominant cultural narratives play an important role in the acculturation-mental health link by shaping long-term psycho-social adaptation to host culture.

Theoretical background: agency and structural constraint in the acculturation process

Prompted by the early waves of European migration to the US, cultural psychologists originally conceptualized acculturation as a straightforward process of adaptive change that immigrants undergo as a result of permanently settling into their country of destination. The expected outcome was complete assimilation of immigrants into the dominant society. Berry's (1980) seminal work on acculturation strategies challenged this conceptualization when he proposed a bi-dimensional theoretical model that simultaneously considered immigrant's orientation towards home culture and receiving culture, thus accounting for practices of biculturalism and resistance. The intersection of these two dimensions, towards which immigrant formulates accept/reject responses, yield four distinct acculturation paths which Berry termed "strategies", thereby conveying a sense of agency: *assimilation* (embrace host culture, shed home culture), *integration* (balance home and host culture), *separation* (maintain home culture, reject host culture) and *marginalization* (reject both home and host culture). The doubly-negative attitudes of the latter point to increased risk of psychological maladjustment; however, because individuals cannot maintain a sense of self outside a group, marginalization is a relatively rare outcome (Schwartz and Zamboanga, 2008).

Recognizing that immigrants may also adopt an "a la carte" approach to acculturation, domain specificity theory proposes that strategies may vary across life domains, as immigrants retain and reject select aspects of both cultures, such as seeking assimilation in organizational culture while opting for separation in family and gender-related matters (Keefe and Padilla, 1987; Arends-Toth and Vijver, 2006). This process of negotiating culture learning and shedding results in various degrees of acculturative stress, ultimately giving way to long-term adaptation, which may or may not reflect a healthy degree of fit with the receiving culture (Berry, 2006b). It soon became important to distinguish between two long-term outcomes of acculturation: socio-cultural competence, that is, the ability to manage daily life in the country of destination, and psychological well-being as a reflection of life satisfaction (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 1999; Arends-Toth and Vijver, 2006; Berry, 2006b).

Although Berry's acculturation model is informed by a rational choice approach, he signaled early on that immigrants do not enjoy unlimited freedom in how they engage in intercultural relations (Berry, 1974). Rather the immigrant's agency interacts with host country's political orientation towards

immigration, which may favor a pluralist, melting pot, segregationist or exclusionary approach, resulting in various degrees of mutual accommodation between immigrants and the native population (Berry, 2006a). Working towards a model with increased explanatory power, recent theoretical developments have placed acculturation strategies at the confluence of *pre-migration* and *reception* contexts to account for the myriad variations in the acculturation experience (Schwartz et al. 2010; Samnani et al., 2013). Strategies are informed by transnationalist practices which place contemporary migrants on a path of circular journeys between sending and receiving cultures (Faist, 2000). The *pre-migration* context includes psychological and socio-economic characteristics of migrants (Berry, 2006a), existing migration flows in the country of destination (Rebhun and Raveh, 2006), and perceptions of conflict and human insecurity in sending countries (Sirkeci, 2009; Sirkeci and Cohen 2016). Evidence has accumulated for the existence of a "migrant personality" that makes certain types of individuals more likely to self-select for the voluntary migration experience and to successfully face acculturative stress (Polek et al., 2011). This idiocentric psychological profile marked by increased self-orientation, higher needs for personal achievement, power motivation and lower needs for affiliation and family centrality (Boneva and Frieze, 2001) is considered functional for immigrants (Polek et al, 2011), some of whom may be cultural "misfits" in their collectively-oriented societies. Moreover, segmented acculturation theory recognizes that the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants, including racial, ethnic, and socio-economic departure status, interact with opportunities and constraints in the country of destination to shape acculturation outcomes (Portes et al, 2005). At the receiving end, the totality of structural forces migrants encounter in the country of destination have been framed under the *reception context* of acculturation (Schwartz et al., 2010). In addition to host country political orientation towards migration (Berry, 2006a), migrants' acculturation strategy is shaped by other environmental factors including economic demands for specific types of labor (George, 2013), governmental policies targeting migrants (Barber, 2008; Creese et al., 2008), real and perceived prejudice and discrimination in area of settlement (Portes et al., 2006), size of existing homo-ethnic networks (Hatton and Williamson, 2005) and their diasporic identities (Georgiou, 2006).

The hierarchical context of acculturation: beyond the newcomer-host dichotomy

Efforts towards an interdisciplinary and integrative theoretical framework of acculturation have focused on the *pre-migration* and *reception* contexts described above, without consideration of complex intercultural dynamics between the sending and receiving cultures. The concept of cultural distance, defined as the level of dissimilarity between sending and receiving cultures, has been associated with the acculturation process, with a smaller distance believed to accelerate assimilation and integration strategies (Rudmin, 2003). The

hierarchical relations that typically exist between contemporary sending and receiving cultures, however, have been under-explored as factors that impact acculturation. When addressed, they remained largely divorced from sociological explanations of global power relations, under conditions where the vast majority of contemporary acculturation paths are predicated on the flow of migrants from non-Western to Western cultures. I argue that in addition to the *pre-migration* and *reception* contexts of acculturation, the context of *inter-cultural hierarchy* constitutes a distinct structural force that further diversifies the acculturation experience and shapes related mental-health outcomes.

Social dominance theory posits that all societies are predisposed to develop group-based hierarchies resulting in various forms of inter-group conflict (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). The divide between immigrants and the native population is often regarded as a salient domain of political and economic conflict. Immigrants' influx into the national labor market further stratifies the receiving society by providing a new "low-status" layer of workers against which most native counterparts can compare favorably within any given socio-economic stratum (Briggs and Dobre, 2014). The observation that the acculturation process is marked by inter-group comparisons and perceptions of inter-cultural status hierarchies has not escaped acculturation theorists (Samnani et al., 2012, Martiny et al., 2012). Inevitably, immigrants make myriad comparisons between their pre-migration and post-migration life stages and the cultures that mark these respective stages. Comparisons may be made between the life immigrants knew at home and the life in the country of destination; between the living standards, resources and opportunity structure of immigrants, "stayers" and the native population; between the net gains and losses achieved in the process of migration; between expectations of a "better life" in the country of destination and actual outcomes; between the vulnerability of their cultural novice status and the comfort natives derive from a culture they can take for granted; finally, between positions that country of origin and host country occupy in political, economic and cultural global hierarchies.

According to social identity theory, perceptions of inter-group hierarchy can shape acculturation strategies through identity management. To build a sense of self, individuals place themselves in categories - including cultural, racial, national or ideological - to which they attach various degrees of importance (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Thus, the salience of an immigrant's original culture identity becomes especially relevant to the acculturation process. More than the desire to preserve cultural heritage, the concept captures the extent to which original culture was central to the immigrant's identity in the pre-migration stage (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). As immigrants come in contact with the receiving culture, they experience a sense of threat to their original culture identity due to the inherent social status hierarchy between the *arriving* immigrant group and the *native* population group. The social-psychological emphasis on the *new arrival*

- *native* dichotomy, however, reveals a hierarchical context only insofar immigrants are treated as a numerical minority whose "newcomer" status automatically places them in a low-status, low-power group. By contrast, the dominant majority is regarded as a high-status group by virtue of its "host" position. In other words, the relatively powerless *immigrant-joiner* encounters the culture of a *host majority* understood as a powerful founder. To reconcile cultural differences, the latter is in a position to impose cultural transaction costs on the newcomers (Newman et al., 2014). As perceptions of status differentials intensify, the immigrant seeks to maintain a positive sense of self (Van Knippenberg, 1989) by engaging in a variety of identity management strategies ranging from original culture identity deletion or concealment to derogation of the threat-posing dominant group or individuation (Petriglieri, 2011).

Notably absent from this strictly social-psychological framework are structural and historical explanations of the status hierarchy between the customary group of sending and receiving countries. I argue that treating these power differentials as a mere function of the "newcomer-founder" dichotomy does not adequately capture the intensity of identity threat and resulting coercive effects that immigrants may experience in the process of acculturation. Rather the identity management strategies contemporary immigrants employ to restore self-esteem are embedded in global and historical patterns of cultural domination that have traditionally existed between sending and receiving countries. In the section below I employ a critical theory framework to draw attention to larger socio-political and culturally hegemonic forces that conspire to reinforce the low-status position of the immigrant group relative to the native population, above and beyond their "newcomer" role. Moreover, I explain how these forces inform identity management strategies leading to a more nuanced nomenclature of acculturation strategies, with important implications for long-term psychological adaptation and mental health.

Delineating layers of cultural hierarchy: perceptions of host culture's high-status legitimacy and the neoliberal paradigm

The perceived high-status of weird cultures

From a critical theory standpoint, acculturation can be conceptualized as a process of exposure to the culture of a country whose economic and political developments have been historically marked as more "successful" than those of the immigrant's country of origin. Simply put, most contemporary migrants do not merely come in contact with a *new* culture that belongs to a dominant *majority*. Equally relevant is the fact that they join powerful nations whose position in the global politico-economic hierarchy is superior to that of their country of origin. In the acculturation process, immigrants are compelled to formulate judgments against the culture of such globally dominant nations. For most contemporary immigrants, therefore, the host culture is not simply *new*,

different, or *someone else's*. The global discourse also features it as an inherently "better" culture. As early as late 19th century, anthropologists had injected the concept of acculturation with a flavor of "progress" when they defined it as a process of mutual improvement whereby societies advanced from savagery to enlightenment (McGee, 1898). "Comte's (1868) teleological view that the state of the most developed societies herald the future of all others, continues to inform the historically-tense rapport between the receiving West and the sending Rest" (Acharya, 2014). A cursory look at empirically-identified cultural traits of western nations inevitably conveys a more favorable, albeit atypical, portrait of receiving cultures when compared to sending ones. Notwithstanding significant within-group variations, receiving WEIRD cultures (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) (Talhelm, 2015), stand in stark contrast with sending cultures. The individualism-collectivism dichotomy has been traditionally regarded as the most fundamental dimension of such cultural differences (Dumont, 1982; Triandis, 1995). Introducing more specificity, Minkov's (2013) empirical summary reveals two persistently contrasting cultural portraits, with the important qualification that contemporary western traits are, by and large, a result of economic development. Not only are the individualistic western cultures more likely to extend empathy and tolerance to people outside of one's in-group (universalism and altruism), but they also favor more transparent and equitably applied rules and laws (egalitarian commitment). Developed cultures produce more optimistic, assertive and less cynical individuals (self-expression) who are more likely to perceive control over their own lives (personal freedom) and are less tolerant of corrupt leadership. Counterintuitively, western cultures are also more capable of collective action and less likely to endorse inter-personal competitiveness. This is either due to an abundance of resources or a natural ramification of universal empathy which, at least until recently, may have caused westerners to see ruthless competition as a form of incivility. By contrast, non-western cultures cultivate higher interpersonal competitiveness due to a generalized scarcity of resources. For the same reasons, they are quicker to foster nepotism, various degrees of racism, sexism, xenophobia and neglect of the disabled, while reserving virtues and strong feelings of togetherness for in-group members, on whom they often depend for survival. Despite propositions that such cultural dichotomies are becoming less relevant in a global landscape increasingly subject to cultural hybridization (Hermans and Kempen, 1998), cultural contrasts persist alongside globalized perceptions of WEIRD superiority which now transcend most political persuasions. This enables receiving cultures to continue to dictate the terms of global cultural hybridization and to cast sending cultures in aspirational roles. As a result, cultural survival reactions may occur both among "stayers" in sending countries and among separating immigrants in the country of destination.

In his political role of new arrival in a globally privileged culture, leaving behind an underprivileged one, the contemporary immigrant is in a doubly

vulnerable position relative to their native socio-economic counterparts. Many join the host culture as a perceived sanctuary from which to face the exigencies of a globalized world defined by sharply unequal politico-economic relations. Wallerstein's world system theory (2004) is perhaps best suited to showcase the macro-scale advantages associated with changing residence from a "periphery" or "semi-periphery" region to the "core". Drawing on their colonial past and capital-intensive production, "core" nations maintain global dominance by exploiting peripheral and semi-peripheral ones. As a result, they can offer higher wages to their own citizens, more consumption opportunities, and comparatively less labor exploitation and coercion. These patterns count among "pull" factors that attract immigrants to the host country (Pacheco et al, 2013), although expectations may not always be met upon arrival. Carens (2013) argued that residence in a core nation is the modern equivalent of feudal class privilege - an inherited status that greatly enhances one's life chances. Fully aware of the opportunity to join the global nobility, immigrants often feel compelled to acculturate in ways that seek the approval of the adoptive motherland in the light of the advantages and protections it can offer.

The Neoliberal imperative

Perceptions of host culture high status legitimacy does not constitute the only coercive dimension in the hierarchical context of acculturation. Immigrants must also respond to an increasingly dominant cultural ethos, which some erroneously conflate with the essence of western cultures they join, despite clear distinctions between the two constructs. Not without its critics (Thorsen, 2010), the proposition that the global landscape is increasingly shaped by fundamental tenets of neoliberalism is now pervasive in the social sciences (Bourdieu, 1998; Campbell and Pedersen, 2001; Touraine, 2001; Rapley, 2004; Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Plehwe et al., 2006; Chomsky, 2011; Giroux, 2011; Picketty, 2014). While the process of neoliberalization has escaped precise theoretical definition, consensus points towards a radical revival of free market doctrine that characterized the political economy of 19th century Britain and the US (Clarke, 2005; Gamble 2001). The neoliberal doctrine emanates from western centers of power, spreading rapidly around the world to promote a monolithical global culture whose ultimate logic is to serve the interests of international capital. Neoliberalization is reflected in an onslaught of private sector and governmental reforms resulting in the polarization of overwork and unemployment and the birth of the digitally enabled "gig" economy (Friedman, 2014). From a cultural analysis standpoint, the prescriptions of neoliberal political economy infiltrate culture, gain command over popular consciousness and become unquestionable "common sense" (McGuigan, 2005). At the heart of the neoliberal zeitgeist lies a retreat from the social to the individual (Bauman, 2011), the triumph of interpersonal competitiveness over human solidarity and community goals (Bauman and Donskis, 2013) and an ubiquitous rhetoric of hard work, meritocracy and

essentialized notions of "talent", often conflated with entrepreneurialism (Littler, 2013). Framing education, training and high-skill as the only acceptable ways to overcome under-privilege (Wood, 1999), neoliberal culture reinforces a belief in the desirability and possibility of social mobility in increasingly unequal societies (Littler, 2013). This discourse generates an affective state that Berlant (2011) dubbed "cruel optimism."

Neoliberalism affects immigration policies through mandates to attract "ideal migrants" (Barber, 2008; Creese et al., 2008). These are high skill or low wage workers with profit-generating potential who embody the entrepreneurial, self-reliant, or grit-resistant prototype (Dobrowolsky, 2013). As immigrants are commodified for the purposes of boosting national economic competitiveness, those embracing neoliberal values are praised as best adapted to the prevailing economic and political global climate. By internalizing these values immigrants can also become the psychological beneficiaries of a self-esteem maximization phenomenon that allows them to cope with the acculturative stressors they face. Cialdini et al. (1976) first coined the term *basking in reflected glory* (BIRG) to capture an individual's tendency to display a connection to successful or powerful others, and by extension, with hegemonic ideologies, as a way to maximize self-esteem. Often burdened with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, immigration-induced status loss, comparatively negative national identities, or a youth spent under discredited political systems, many contemporary immigrants' may perceive the endorsement of receiving culture's hegemonic ideologies as an advantageous acculturation mechanism. Samnani et al. (2013) captured a similar adaptation response by proposing that an increased desire for economic rewards can act as an incentive for immigrants to actively seek assimilation and/or integration strategies. This coping mechanism both validates the decision to immigrate and palliates the structural disadvantages encountered in the host country. In critical theory terms, immigrants may be at risk of developing a false acculturative consciousness. For example, overwork and underpay may be rationalized as fair fees to pay for membership in an exclusive club of "core" nations.

Although the neoliberal theme of "hard work" cuts across all immigrant studies, it has rarely been explicitly identified as an acculturative mechanism. Briggs and Dobre (2014) documents how low-wage Romanian immigrants in the UK position themselves against perceived "lazier" factions of the native population who prefer to draw welfare rather than engage in the arduous efforts required for social mobility. Similarly, evidence suggests that high skill immigrants tend to be more productive, on average, than their native professional counterparts despite language-related disadvantages, fewer mentors, less effective professional networks and a paucity of pan-generational resources (Webber, 2013). Not only does the immigrant feel it is possible to secure more tolerance from the native population by recognizing the legitimacy of host culture's high status, but by signaling obedience to the dominant

neoliberal paradigm, he can lay a moral claim on the right to be the citizen of a privileged nation. This earned right can be contrasted with the perceived self-indulgence of a native population whose mere birthright entitles it to historically-established economic and political privileges. In addition, objective and perceived discrimination may encourage immigrants to attribute the precarious conditions left behind to home culture deficits. As a result, some may distance themselves both from "stayers" and from the mainstream native population, whose values they may see as inconsistent with neoliberal imperatives.

Empirical implications

Sirkeci (2009) proposed a conflict-based model of migration that is best understood as an avoidance of material or non-material human insecurity rather than a straightforward search for a "better life". Sources of conflict are not limited to overt ethnic or religious clashes but cover a multitude of situations ranging from latent competitions, feelings of oppression and perceived threats to dignity, to lack of economic opportunity or environmental obstacles. Extrapolating this model to the acculturation stage, migrants' perceptions of host culture high-status legitimacy and the pressures of neoliberal imperatives can act as significant sources of conflict that continue to generate an environment of insecurity in the country of destination, albeit of a different nature.   In this sense, a critical theory approach calls for a cautious interpretation and operationalization of acculturation patterns, replacing the traditional question of why some immigrants fail to assimilate or integrate, with a closer scrutiny of those who do.

Traditionally, acculturation theorists have assumed that a purposeful embrace of host country values naturally translate into long-term psychological well-being. Yet findings on the association between assimilation/integration strategies and long-term well-being remain equivocal. Assimilation strategies have been associated with certain negative physical and mental health outcomes (Reiss et al., 2015; Oakkar et al., 2015; Behrens et al., 2014), lower educational performance (Fuligni et al., 2005) and decreased social support (Baek and Thomas, 2009; Stephens et al., 2010), while the authenticity of biculturalism has often been questioned due to the difficulty of balancing significantly different cultural loyalties (No et al., 2011; Pollock and Van Reken, 2010).

In the light of the above, I propose a series of distinctions between types of assimilation, integration and separation strategies that take into account the intersectionality of pre-migration, reception, and hierarchical contexts of acculturation. These distinctions aim to capture the intensity of acculturative stress, the authenticity of the acculturation process, and the risk of long-term-psychological maladjustment, which may be present in strategies other than marginalization (Figure 1).

First, I suggest a distinction between *mechanical and opportunistic* assimilation and integration, respectively. The *mechanical* approach encompasses those acculturative strategies whereby the immigrant embraces host culture values relatively effortlessly, while preserving an authentic sense of self. A small cultural distance between original and host culture facilitates the adoption of host values without significant cognitive dissonance or high risk of acculturative stress. Moreover, such immigrants are less likely to face an unfavorable reception context, including racist or discriminatory attitudes, thus further increasing the feasibility of assimilation and integration (Schwartz et al., 2010). Even when the degree of cultural distance involved may be significant, immigrants with an idiocentric personality and low original culture salience may arrive as a "natural fit" for the individualistic environments of receiving countries. In such cases, lower needs for in-group affiliation become functional, facilitating an authentic and largely unproblematic connection with the native culture.

In contrast with the authenticity of *mechanical* patterns, the *opportunistic* approach reflects a potentially dissonant and cumbersome psychological process. Often marked by a relatively large cultural distance, as well as acute cultural, economic and political status differentials between immigrant's country of origin and host country, the opportunistic approach may be driven by a desire to be inducted into the perceived "superior ranks" of the native population. Perceptions of host culture high-status legitimacy may take on a coercive role, leading to identity deletion/concealment and host culture idealization. Opportunistically assimilating immigrants may actively seek membership in the high-status native group to the exclusion of homo-ethnic relations, even when the process turns out to be psychologically unsatisfying, anxiety-ridden, or results in discrimination and exclusion. Alternatively, they may be vocal in affirming perceived host culture values despite socializing mainly with members of their ethnic diaspora. Internalization of hegemonic ideologies, particularly when conflated with host country culture, often relate to a desire to maximize social mobility, thus further encouraging active pursuit of assimilation or integration strategies (Samnani et al., 2013). Although opportunistic acculturation can maximize socio-cultural competencies such as language proficiency and career management, the prevalence of identity deletion/concealment strategies can affect well-being by promoting cognitive dissonance, inauthenticity through denial of original needs for in-group affiliation and even depression (Mori, 2000). Teja and Akhtar (1981) adeptly captured this stressful affective state with the term "counter-phobic assimilation" when observing immigrants who actively severed psycho-social ties with their culture of origin. Their psychiatric observations compel citation from Akhtar's (2014: pg.87-88) more recent work:

"*They adapt the characteristics of their new culture in toto as a way of avoiding feeling different and therefore anxious and sad. They even develop "borrowed prejudices" to buttress*

their sense of affiliation with the host majority of the population. It is all a "manic defense" though; underneath such magical acculturation and the implicit idealization of the new land a wistful sense of loneliness is often discernible. At times, a long interval has to elapse before the suppressed yearning for homoethnic contact comes to surface."
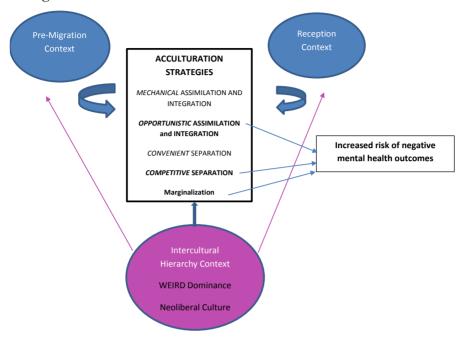
More than a mere strategy to avoid feeling "different", such "borrowed prejudices" are also fueled by the culturally hegemonic forces that immigrants must interpret as they negotiate their place in a globally privileged nation.

Second, I suggest a distinction between *convenient* and *competitive* separation strategies. The former captures a set of circumstances whereby the immigrant does not feel compelled to adopt host country culture beyond minimal efforts required for daily living. Whether due to joining a large and cohesive network of ethnic nationals or securing employment in an ethnic enclave, some immigrants may find it convenient to maintain culture of origin without pressures to assimilate or integrate. In this case, orientation towards host country culture is not predicated on active rejection but rather on the lack of incentives to participate in mainstream society. The *competitive* form, however, points to cultural survival efforts and involves explicit contestation of host culture values, with conflict-driven manifestations ranging from distancing oneself from mainstream culture to hostile attempts to change it.

Paradoxically, internalization of neoliberal prescriptions may lead competitively separating immigrants to make a clear distinction between these and host country values. They may seek to maximize market outcomes by capitalizing on select market-friendly traits of original culture, such as inter-personal competitiveness and grit, while actively rejecting the WEIRD host culture patterns discussed earlier, which may be defined as too lax, self-indulgent or undeserving. A strong original culture salience on the backdrop of internalized meritocratic ideologies can help the competitively-separating immigrant maximize self-esteem, cope with prejudice and discrimination, and gain an economic, political and social foothold in the country of destination.

Empirical evidence has been accumulating on this particular separation path. Immigrants may tap into select home culture practices and collectivistic support systems to reinforce moralizing notions of overachievement and striving, thus contesting the ethno-racial cultural hierarchy imposed by the native population. From high-skill immigrant gateways where hyperbolized notions of academic excellence cast the native population in a "lesser-than" role (Jimenez and Horowitz, 2013; Li and Park, 2006; Li, 2012), to low-skill immigrant enclaves who position themselves against a native population unwilling to embrace arduous physical work (Briggs and Dobre, 2014), these patterns are suggestive of a conflict-driven and psychologically stressful acculturative orientation, conceptually different from one in which the immigrant's acculturation is marked by the convenient availability of large homo-ethnic networks.

Figure 1. Theoretical model

Conclusions

Recent expansions of acculturation theory have addressed how pre-migration factors (antecedents) conspire with the immigration orientation of receiving country (reception context) to shape

acculturation strategies. This paper contributes to the development of acculturation theory by delineating the previously under-explored context of intercultural hierarchy. Employing a critical theory stance, the paper builds on Berry's (1980) seminal work on acculturation by arguing that the way in which immigrants respond to western cultural dominance and the rise of neoliberal imperatives will influence, along with the above mentioned contexts, their acculturation strategies. The paper proposes distinctions between types of assimilation, integration and separation strategies that have the potential to capture immigrant's risk of long-term psychosocial maladjustment in the country of destination, including feelings of inauthenticity, stress, anxiety and depression. This theoretical contribution points to a need for further refinement of traditional measures of acculturation strategies by cautioning against superficial constructs that may elicit socially desirable answers, particularly in the case of assimilation and integration measures. Future studies should examine the relationship between acculturation strategies and immigrants' perceptions of global cultural hierarchies and neoliberal values. Studies will also be needed to increase the practical utility of acculturation

constructs by validating measures sensitive enough to detect levels of acculturative stress and to estimate the risk of long-term negative psychosocial outcomes in the lives of migrants. As rates of international migration reach unprecedented levels, assessing the role of acculturation in the migration - mental health link will hold increasing significance.

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