Analysis of Acculturative Strategies’ Effects on Asian Adolescents’ Psychosocial Well-Being and Ethnic Identity Development

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Introduction

- **Ethnic Identity Development**: The formation of ethnic identity is an indispensable component to identity exploration, especially for adolescents of color.
- **Ethnic Identity and Psychosocial Well-being**: In addition to providing social benefits and group membership, an established ethnic identity predicts better psychological adjustment outcomes and higher levels of psychosocial well-being.
- **Collectivistic Vs. Individualistic Cultures**: The highlighted difference between the two extremes is how active agents within that culture view the self with regards to their community.
- **Berry’s Acculturative Strategies**: Berry approached cultural research with a bidimensional perspective by incorporating individuals’ enculturation (interactions with the heritage culture) and acculturation (integration into other cultures).
- **Asian Adolescents**: While immigration rates are increasing for Asian populations, much more research needs to be done on ethnic identity exploration and development in underserved populations, such as Asian American immigrants. It is imperative for cultural researchers and policymakers continue to take strides in identifying immigrants’ barriers to attaining bicultural competence, as well as creating the necessary interventions to allow successful integration of immigrants into the dominant culture.

Objective

In this report, I sought to understand how Asian adolescents’ acculturative strategies can influence their psychosocial and identity development.

Methods

- **Integrated findings from 6 different studies**
- **Ages**: 12-55 (most were in high school or college)
- **Sample Sizes**: 83-417 per study (five out of six studies had over 200 participants)
- **Assessments**: Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale
- **Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale**
- **Two studies conducted qualitative interviews**

Summary and Analysis of Findings

- **Assimilated**
  - Characterized as “whitewashed”
  - Refuse to speak their heritage language
  - Have many non-Asian friends and/or date non-Asians
  - Behave and dress according to White culture
  - Unfamiliar with ethnic customs
  - Viewed learning new cultural practices as expected and manageable with no accompanying negative emotion with the expectation of a successful integration into mainstream culture
  - Negative relationship between integration and self-esteem
- **Marginalized**
  - Majority of this group consisted of foreign-born participants
  - All participants resided in the US for an average of 16 years
  - Lower acculturative stress than separated users and higher acculturative stress than integrated users
  - Felt a sense of inability or reluctance to overcome cultural difference and perceived them as unresolvable
  - Worst overall quality of life
  - Feelings of anger, disgust, and alienation
- **Integrated**
  - Bicultural competence
  - Viewed cultural disparities as an opportunity to promote positive personal growth
  - Derived direct psychological benefits from holding positive perceptions about their ethnic group
  - Positive regard towards ethnic culture served as a buffer against stressors
  - Exhibited a positive relationship between self-esteem and integration
- **Separated**
  - Foreign-born participants more likely to utilize this strategy
  - "FOB" or “Fresh off the boat” used as a racial slur against Asian immigrants
  - Speaking with a thick accent
  - Using foreign language in public
  - Poorer mental health, more acculturative stress, and less positive attitudes towards seeking psychological help
  - Saw cultural differences as expected and manageable, but reported confusion or difficulty in understanding Western culture
  - Used compartmentalization as solution to adversity

The joint effect of lowered confidence in integration and the presence of discriminating characteristics may lead to further ostracization. Participants may use this strategy as a protective means against rejection.

Conclusion

While this report served as a condensed analysis of a few studies, much more research needs to be done on ethnic identity exploration and development in underserved populations, such as Asian American immigrants. It is imperative for cultural researchers and policymakers continue to take strides in identifying immigrants’ barriers to attaining bicultural competence, as well as creating the necessary interventions to allow successful integration of immigrants into the dominant culture.

Resources