

Acculturation, Social Identity, and Social Cognition: A New Perspective

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The authors argue in this article that new approaches are needed in the study of psychological acculturation. They posit that a new model of psychological acculturation should incorporate contemporary work in social and cognitive psychology. The model they present builds on previous research in the areas of social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social stigma. Each of these perspectives is discussed in accordance with its relevance to the acculturative processes operating in immigrants. They hypothesize that acculturation is more difficult for those persons who must cope with the stigma of being different because of skin color, language, ethnicity, and so forth. Finally, the authors believe that the theoretical framework present here will lead to more productive insights into the adaptation process of immigrants than has heretofore been the case.

Keywords: *acculturation; social cognition; identity; stigma*

In this article, we discuss psychological acculturation, by which we mean the internal processes of change that immigrants experience when they come into direct contact with members of the host culture. Our intent is not to attempt to revive older models of acculturation but to present a schema of a new model of acculturation that incorporates contemporary work in social and cognitive psychology. To discuss this new model of acculturation, it is first necessary to present a brief overview of the current status of acculturation research. Our review of acculturation research is not intended to be exhaustive. Our goal is merely to point out the current deficiencies in acculturation research as we see them. Following this, we will present our model of acculturation that rests on four pillars: social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social stigma. Each of these will be discussed from a perspective that shows their relevance to the acculturative processes operating in immigrants and their American-born offspring. In our general model of

acculturation, social stigma holds center stage; thus, we will point out ways in which individuals cope with the stigma of being different because of skin color, language, ethnic background, and so forth. Finally, we conclude this article with a new approach that we hope will encourage theoretical and empirical work in the area of acculturation.

Overview of Acculturation Research

Throughout most of the 20th century, social scientists theorized about the process by which newcomers to America become incorporated into mainstream culture. This work was first the province of sociologists at the University of Chicago, with Robert Park the best known of the melting pot theorists. Beginning in 1914, Park undertook the study of what happens to people from diverse cultures and languages when they come into contact with one another. For answers, Park drew on the ecological framework that was the hallmark of the Chicago school of sociology and advanced a three-stage model—contact, accommodation, and assimilation (Persons, 1987). According to this model, contact between peoples from different cultures forces them to seek ways to accommodate to each other to minimize conflict. Thus, contact shapes intergroup relations between different ethnic communities. Furthermore, the essential element in the model was the process by which newcomers to America learn to accommodate the dominant culture of the United States. According to Park, as immigrants learned to accommodate the dominant group, a process of cultural assimilation ensued culminating in intermarriage and amalgamation. For Park, the process leading to cultural assimilation was progressive and irreversible and contributed to the ethos of America as a country of immigrants. Park's three-stage model has in one form or another remained a cornerstone in our thinking about how newcomers adjust to the dominant culture following immigration.

Anthropologists were the next group of social scientists to expand on the three-stage model. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936), in explaining the process of accommodation, made heavy reference to acculturation as a key construct in their theorizing. According to Redfield et al., acculturation occurs when groups of individuals from different cultures come into continuous contact with each other, and subsequently, there are changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.

Redfield et al. (1936) were clear about the importance of “continuous first-hand contact” between individuals of different cultures as the essential ingredient of acculturation. These authors also pointed out that change in cultural patterns is essential for at least one of the two groups in contact; how-

ever, Redfield et al. held that acculturation did not imply that assimilation would ensue automatically.

Nearly 20 years later, another group of social scientists under the auspices of the Social Science Research Council expanded on the Redfield et al. (1936) model of acculturation by adding a psychological dimension to the process of acculturation. Their definition stated,

Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modifications induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors. (Social Science Research Council, 1954, p. 974).

According to this expanded view of acculturation, we see the inclusion of value systems, developmental sequences, roles, and personality factors as contributing to how individuals accommodate when they come into contact with each other. This model was an advance because it specified important culture-related information that changes with intergroup contact and what aspects of culture might be more resistant to change (e.g., values) with intercultural contact. The significance of this definition is that it provides for choice in the acculturation process—the change from one cultural orientation to another can be “selective,” and persons involved in intergroup contact can decide what elements of their culture they wish to surrender and what cultural elements they want to incorporate from the new culture.

Teske and Nelson (1974) offered the first complete psychological perspective on acculturation. According to these writers, acculturation included changes in material traits, behavior patterns, norms, institutional changes, and importantly, values. However, Teske and Nelson did not go further in their psychological analysis of how members of diverse cultures accommodate to one another. This was left to Berry (1980), who expanded on the view of acculturation to include varieties of adaptation and specifically identified the following four: assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation. The importance of Berry’s model was that it recognized the importance of multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and the fact that individuals have a choice in the matter of how far they are willing to go in the acculturation process. An important advance in Berry’s model is that he incorporated language emanating from the ethnic revival movement beginning in the 1970s and held that a minority person and/or ethnic group could

reverse their acculturation process to the dominant group and revert to their former cultural heritage. Today, there are numerous instances of ethnic groups who have managed to revive their ancestral language and culture (Fishman, 2001). Thus, acculturation was not seen as a strictly unidimensional process of cultural change but as a process forced by intergroup contact with multiple outcomes.

Unlike the earlier qualitative approaches to acculturation, Padilla (1980, 1987) and Keefe and Padilla (1987) presented a multidimensional and quantitative model of acculturation that relied on two major supraconstructs—cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty. According to this model, cultural awareness represents the implicit knowledge that individuals have of their cultures of origin and of their host cultures. Included in this knowledge are such things as proficiency of the languages of each culture, knowledge of significant historical events that have shaped the cultures, understanding and appreciation of the artistic and musical forms of the cultures, and standards of behavior and values that have shaped how persons conduct themselves. If individuals show more knowledge of their heritage cultures than they do of the new contact cultures, the model holds that they are less acculturated; similarly, if the persons possess more knowledge of the host cultures, then they are more acculturated. Ethnic loyalty, on the other hand, is dependent on the self-ascribed ethnicity of the individuals, the ethnic group membership of their friends, and preferences for such things as recreational activities. Padilla and Keefe and Padilla showed that cultural awareness declined from the first (immigrant) generation to the fourth generation of Mexican origin respondents. Furthermore, the steepest decline in cultural knowledge occurred between the first and second generation. However, an important discovery was the finding that ethnic loyalty to the culture of origin remained consistently high from the first to the fourth generation. In other words, although the Mexican heritage individuals possessed limited implicit knowledge of the culture of their grandparents by the third or fourth generation, they still held on to their Mexican heritage identity. In identifying with their Mexican heritage, they preferred friends of the same ethnicity and preferred to engage in Mexican-type activities. These findings have been replicated in other studies with Mexican Americans (Arbona, Flores, & Novy, 1995; Montgomery, 1992) since first being reported by Padilla in 1980.

One of the features noted by Padilla (1980, 1987) in the original model of acculturation was that the greater the perceived discrimination reported by an informant, the more likely he or she was to identify with his or her heritage group. It is important that the discrimination reported by the informant did not have to be directed at him or her specifically; in fact, it was sufficient for the person to merely believe that discriminatory acts had been directed

toward other members of their same ethnic group for the person to report greater loyalty toward his or her group.

Behavioral changes associated with acculturation have been well documented during the past 15 years (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991); however, cognitive referents of acculturation have been more difficult to validate. The reason for this is that cognitive and behavioral changes do not always follow the same time progression when we are examining changes due to intergroup contacts. There are a variety of factors that influence the different ways in which people acculturate. These include family structure and function, adherence to certain religious beliefs and practices, gender, power relationships between the majority and minority groups, personality characteristics, and age of onset of intergroup contact. Moreover, some immigrants experience more social discrimination because of their minority status. Ethnicity, race, religion, language, and/or dress often distinguish many immigrants from the host country's culture. Immigrants from various groups differ on these characteristics. Thus, members of some newcomer groups are likely to be targeted for greater discrimination than others. Some newcomers may be more inclined to undergo cultural changes not because of personal interest or inclination but due to political, social, and/or economic circumstances that may make certain types of cultural adaptation preferable or beneficial (Marin, 1993) or even to a condition of survival. Therefore, acculturation is more complicated and not merely the outcome of two cultural groups being in contact with each other as earlier models hold. In fact, many social and environmental conditions or constraints exist that can largely determine the strategies available to individuals or groups in the process of accommodating to newcomers.

In extending our view of acculturation as a mutual process in which both dominant and nondominant groups are involved, it is necessary to take into account the cultural differences that distinguish the groups and their power relationship to each other. For example, the dominant group's attitudes toward newcomers and the extent to which they are open to newcomers indicate whether this group will allow members of the subordinated group to maintain their own culture while also participating actively with the dominant group. In contrast, a concern of the subordinate group is the way members of their own group should behave. The general circumstances of majority-minority group relationships in a society are of crucial importance (Ogbu, 1990). Berry prefers to use the term *cultural group* rather than *minority*. Yet, it is fact that minority status of the immigrant is the crux of the matter both in terms of smaller numbers and lower power or status in society.

Triandis, Kashima, Shimada, and Villareal (1986) found that the more power the immigrant group has in its new setting, the less will be accommo-

dated to the new cultural norms. Thus, even within the same geopolitical environment, we expect that different cultural ecologies will lead to different outcomes with respect to the acculturation process. Furthermore, given the diversity of ethnic enclaves that exist in the United States today, some ethnic group members do not necessarily experience a great press to assimilate. Nguyen, Messe, and Stollak (1999) reported an important twist to this. They reported that for Vietnamese youth living in a predominantly White environment, strong identification with Vietnamese culture resulted in high psychological distress. According to these authors, it is difficult to embrace Vietnamese culture in a primarily White American context. It may also be the case that because they are in a predominantly White context, they are stigmatized and experience more discrimination, which leads to psychological distress. To cope with the rejection from the majority culture, these youth identify even more with their Vietnamese background, which in turn results in greater discrimination from the majority group.

Another way to examine acculturation is to conceptualize it as a function of personal characteristics. Beyond group findings of acculturation, individuals may also seek different levels of attachment to and involvement in their host cultures or heritage cultures. Some individuals may actively pursue involvement in either culture, some may try to maintain high levels of involvement in both cultures, and still others decrease their involvement in either or both cultural environments. People may have different reasons for the paths they choose due to the relative importance of identifying with the new cultures or maintaining loyalty to their heritage cultures. Responding to distinct sources of cultural norms, individuals negotiate between cultural contexts and emerge with their own interpretations of appropriate cultural values, customs, and practices. This flexibility in acculturation pathways is very different from earlier views of accommodation and assimilation emerging from intergroup contact (Persons, 1987; Redfield et al., 1936).

None of the major theories of acculturation take into consideration individual differences and personality characteristics that facilitate or retard acculturation. Padilla's (1980, 1987) model of acculturation focuses on the preference of individuals for the majority or minority cultures and the effect of such a preference on the overall acculturative process. His emphasis on the preference of individuals for the dominant or heritage cultures is an important consideration in understanding the overall process, but the model falls short of explaining why people choose one culture over the other. To date, no model has been advanced to explain how it is that individuals from the same educational, socioeconomic, generational, and familial backgrounds differ on willingness and competence to acculturate. Choice to acculturate may be related to personality characteristics such as assertiveness, likeability, socia-

bility, extraversion, and ego control. Differences in attitude and risk taking and level of anxiety tolerance may also lead to differences in the acculturation process. Along this same line, Birman (1994) argued that acculturation theorists need to appreciate and explain individual differences within the demands of different cultural and sociopolitical contexts. We believe that advances in social psychology that rely on social cognition, social identity theory, and social stigma offer a new approach to the complexity involved in understanding both the individual and group processes involved in the acculturation of immigrants. We believe that contact between members of different cultural groups is important, as first recognized by Park nearly nine decades ago and elaborated on in numerous ways by social scientists ever since to explain acculturation. However, we feel that current social psychological research offers us a new set of conceptual tools that can be used productively to rethink how acculturative processes work with immigrant populations. We now turn to this new vision.

A New Vision of Acculturation Research

To understand cultural adaptation from the perspective that we will now present, it is important to adopt new terminology and to see intercultural contact through a new social framework. To shed light on these processes, our model will rely on the following constructs: social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, social dominance, and social stigma. In the next section, we will begin by defining these key concepts.

Social Cognition

Social cognition is foremost a metatheoretical approach to studying social behavior. Its metatheoretical focus is on the mental processes that guide social interaction. Fiske and Taylor (1991) defined social cognition as “how ordinary people think about people and how they think they think about people” (p. 1). In our theory of acculturation, we will follow the tradition of pragmatism in social cognition research (Fiske, 1993) that emphasizes the motivational and intentional bases of perception and cognition (e.g., Heider, 1958; James, 1890).

According to social cognition researchers, cognitive processes stem from people’s pragmatic goals, which themselves derive from multiple sources, including person-level variables, situational constraints, societal structure, and evolutionary mechanisms (e.g. Fiske, 1993; James, 1890). Simply put, “thinking is for doing,” a message from James (1890) positing that cognition follows from people’s goals, which vary according to their social situation.

Cultural Competence

Immigrants involved in cultural transitions because of migration must cope with their new cultural-societal pressures and standards. They must make sense of their new social environment and decide how and/or whether they are going to integrate themselves into the host culture. How is it that they develop situated behavior patterns that are adaptive within the larger societal-cultural context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996)? Pragmatism and cultural competence play critical roles in how we theorize about individual and group acculturation. Today, social cognition researchers have used the metaphor “motivated tactician” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) to describe social perceivers. According to this theoretical view, people choose among a wide range of pragmatic cognitive tactics based on their goals, motives, and needs as determined by the power of the situation, and thus most significant cognitive activity results from motivation. People think for the purpose of satisfying their pragmatic motives and tend to think with less effort when their knowledge goals are satisfied (Fiske, 1993). This is equally true for people in a new culture who are striving to be successful in a new country to which they have migrated.

To use our social cognition model to its fullest, we need to first understand what is meant to be culturally competent in one or more cultural contexts. Most simply, cultural competence refers to the learned ability to function in a culture in a manner that is congruent with the values, beliefs, customs, mannerisms, and language of the majority of members of the culture. When members of the culture come to view the person as an “insider,” then we can say the person has attained complete competence in the new culture. However, acceptance as an insider is not a prerequisite for cultural competence per se. The important consideration is for the person to behave within an acceptable cultural band of normative behavior. With this clear, we turn now to social identity.

Social Identity

Social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) stresses that individual behavior reflects individuals’ larger societal units. This means that overarching societal structures such as groups, organizations, cultures, and most important, individuals’ identification with these collective units guide internal structures and processes. Cultural competence lies at the heart of this theory because collective group membership influences and frequently determines individuals’ thoughts and behaviors (Markus et al., 1996). Thus, individuals

are not self-contained units of psychological analysis. Social identity theory states that people think, feel, and act as members of collective groups, institutions, and cultures. The social identity approach reinforces the idea that individuals' social cognitions are socially construed depending on their group or collective frames of reference. For instance, immigrants who see themselves as negatively stigmatized because of their darker skin color or accented English speech may be less willing to acculturate, believing that such negative views will persist regardless of whether they are culturally competent in the dominant culture.

As originally formulated, social identity theory sought to explain intergroup relations in general and social conflict in particular. The theory incorporated three main points: (a) People are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept, (b) the self-concept derives largely from group identification, and (c) people establish positive social identities by favorably comparing their in-group against an out-group (Operario & Fiske, 1999). As such, social identity theorists assume that internal social comparison processes drive intergroup conflict, even in the absence of explicit rivalry or competition between groups. Structural variables such as power, hierarchy, and resource scarcity increase the baseline proclivity to perceive the in-group more favorably than the out-group.

An extension of social identity is self-categorization theory. Here Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) argued that social contexts create meaningful group boundaries and that social identities are socially construed categories that shift depending on situational pragmatics. Thus, the salience of social categories provides perceptual filters for organizing out-groups and in-groups. The consequence is that situational factors guide cognitive processes, and as such, self-categorization theory suggests that these pragmatic cognitive processes form the basis for ensuing intergroup interaction including prejudice and conflict between group members.

Worthy of note is the optimal distinctiveness work of Brewer (1991), who holds that social identifications are guided by two core human motives: the need to be unique and the need to belong. Having a social identity (e.g., ethnic, religious, or national) satisfies individuals' simultaneous needs for inclusion and differentiation. In other words, we need to simultaneously fill the need to belong to a social group (e.g., Latino) while maintaining our distinctiveness from another group (e.g., Jewish). In this way, we are motivated to identify with social groups with which we feel kinship and to separate from groups of which we do not feel a part and from which we strive to remain detached through a manifestation of distinctiveness.

Social Dominance

Sidanius (1993) posits that all social institutions and cultures involve some form of hierarchy. Unlike most other social identity theories that focus on situational explanations, this theory of intergroup relations rests on individual differences in social dominance. Individual orientations toward social dominance are pragmatic insofar as hierarchies are functional for the collective unit. Social hierarchies are validated through cultural ideologies that sustain the legitimacy and centrality of hierarchy within the larger society. This theory accounts for large-scale examples of intergroup dominance that occurs in the absence of overt conflict, such as ethnic, religious, or gender oppression. Social dominance theory differs in form from the cognitive and motivational analysis of self-categorization and optimal distinctiveness theories, stressing both the inevitability and functionality of consensual hierarchies, such as legitimized social class distinctions and gender roles, as a function of individual differences in social dominance.

In sum, these socially derived constructs (i.e., social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social dominance) are critical to the theory that we will advance in this article to explain the processes involved in acculturation. We believe that acculturation is more difficult for those persons who are more distinct (e.g., by skin color, physiognomy, religious practices, and so forth) from the dominant in-group. Thus, we also need to address the question of social stigma in understanding cultural change. This is due to the fact that persons who are more identifiable as outsiders are more likely to be targets of prejudice and discrimination by the socially dominant in-group. As a consequence, they may endure more physical and psychological hardships as outsiders that call into question their motives for wanting to adapt to the host group; they may also experience fewer opportunities for contact with “insiders,” thereby limiting their chances for successful adaptation; and they may be implicitly or explicitly excluded from entry into groups and/or institutions that offer privileges to their members (McIntosh, 1988). Accordingly, we will turn next to a discussion of social stigma.

Social Stigma

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1963) reasoned that if other people’s reactions influence our behavior and identity, then reasonable people try to control the reactions of others by manipulating what they reveal about themselves. He further stated that in their interactions with others, people often expose or hide certain beliefs, ideas, or behaviors to manipulate the perceptions these people hold of them. According to Crocker,

Major, and Steele (1998), social stigma is a function of having an attribute that conveys a devalued social identity in a particular context. More specifically, possession of a particular attribute might lead individuals to be stigmatized in one context but not in another. Thus, stigmatization is not inextricably linked to something essential to the stigmatized attribute or the person who possesses that attribute. The essential distinction is in the unfortunate circumstance of possessing an attribute that in a given social context leads to devaluation. Attributes that may cause negative stigmatization include skin color, accented speech, certain religious apparel, gender, homosexuality, homelessness, mental illness, and so forth. It is important that these attributes are generally associated with minority standing and powerlessness. The flip side of this is that high social standing and power is associated with decreased vulnerability to being stigmatized (Fiske, 1993). We must emphasize, however, that “high social standing and power” is relative and may vary from one country or culture to another. For example, in the United States and Western Europe, White men hold high social standing and power; thus, a White man who finds himself in a context in which he is devalued because of his power status is astutely aware that in most social contexts, that same identity is highly valued. This awareness mitigates the psychological consequences of being negatively stigmatized in other contexts (Fiske, 1993).

A dimension of social stigma of critical importance in understanding the subjective experience of stigmatized individuals is visibility. Visible stigmas such as race, certain physical handicaps, accents, or severe malnourishment due to poverty cannot be hidden easily from others. Thus, for people with visible attributes, the stigma can provide the primary schema from which others make assumptions about the person (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). The awareness that others judge us because of our visibility may influence our thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Visibly stigmatized individuals cannot use concealment of the stigma to cope with stereotypes and prejudice that their stigma may trigger. For example, people with dark skin and middle-eastern features may be second- or third-generation American, yet in the eyes of nonstigmatized and socially dominant Americans, they may be perceived as Arabs and discriminated against.

People with a concealable stigma such as certain ethnicities, religious groups, or sexual orientation have different concerns. Because their stigma is not visible, they can interact with others without their negative social identity filtering how everything about them is understood. But they are aware they could be stigmatized if their devaluing attribute is discovered—they know they are “discreditable” (Goffman, 1963). Thus, some individuals may carefully monitor the way they speak, dress, and behave to maximize their chances of “passing” with the dominant group. Other individuals may actu-

ally make a conscious decision to display their stigma by wearing signs or symbols that convey their stigmatized identity or engage in collective manifestations that demonstrate their identity with a stigmatized group (e.g., gay pride parade).

In general, stigmatized individuals are aware of the negative connotations of their social identity in the eyes of others. For example, Mexican Americans believe that many non-Hispanic Whites hold negative views of their group (Casas, Ponterotto, & Sweeney, 1987). The age at which this awareness develops is not always clear, but it is likely to be well established by adolescence. Although having a negative social identity may threaten both collective and personal self-esteem, it does not lead inevitably to having low personal or collective self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989). For example, Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) found that both Asian and Black college students believed their racial groups were evaluated negatively by members of the majority group; nonetheless, both Asian and Black students were as likely to evaluate their respective groups as positively as White students evaluated theirs. Thus, although having a devalued social identity may create a challenge, stigmatized individuals respond to this predicament in a variety of ways. For instance, some "stigmatized" individuals can effectively defend their self-esteem from external threat while affirming their identity with the group, and other individuals seek strategies to minimize their stigma.

Coping With Social Stigma

Stigmatized individuals are sensitive to information in their environment that affects the likelihood that negative reactions or evaluations from others are due to prejudice and discrimination (Crocker, Voekl, Testa, & Majors, 1991). At the same time, some researchers (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995, 1997) suggested that stigmatized individuals are relatively reluctant to blame their negative outcomes on prejudice or discrimination, even when there is good reason to suspect it. Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) argued that participants in their studies were reluctant to attribute negative outcomes to discrimination because there are a number of psychological costs associated with making these attributions. Specifically, attributing negative outcomes to discrimination lowers social self-esteem and decreases perceived control over individuals' outcomes at the same time it may protect self-esteem associated with individuals' performance. In addition, attributions to discrimination may be very costly to interpersonal and working relationships (Crosby, 1982), such as the process that immigrants undergo to acquire competence in the new cul-

ture. Immigrants may be less motivated to attempt acculturation if they believe discrimination exists against their group by members of the dominant social group. If this happens to immigrants, their opportunities for social mobility in the new culture are lessened.

There is evidence that stigmatized groups differ in their willingness to attribute negative outcomes to discrimination (Ruggiero & Taylor, 1997). In this study, Black (mostly Caribbean) and Asian students received a failing grade on a test from an evaluator. The critical manipulation in the study involved giving participants information about the probability that the evaluator would discriminate against them. Regardless of the prior probability that the evaluator discriminated, Black students were more likely to attribute their failing grade to discrimination than were Asian students. This finding supports the notion that members of some stigmatized groups are more willing to make attributions to prejudice and discrimination than others. However, this interpretation must be tempered by the realization that Blacks may be behaving rationally given their history of oppression in this country.

One factor that may influence the willingness of stigmatized individuals to attribute negative outcomes to prejudice and discrimination is the perceived controllability of the stigma itself. Crocker and Major (1994) have argued that individuals who believe their stigmatization condition is under their control, or is their own fault, are less likely to blame negative outcomes associated with stigma on prejudice and discrimination because they feel they deserve those outcomes. Crocker et al. (1998) suggested that ideologies related to personal responsibility may predict which stigmatized individuals and groups are unwilling to blame negative outcomes on prejudice and discrimination. For example, Major et al. (2002) found that the more Black, Latino, and Asian students believed that the American system is just (i.e., believed in individual social mobility, that hard work pays off, and that group differences in social status are fair), the less likely they were to perceive both themselves and members of their ethnic group as experiencing discrimination due to their ethnicity.

Salience of the stigmatized group identity and the degree to which stigmatized individuals are highly identified with their group also affect the extent to which they perceive themselves as targets of discrimination based on their group membership (Major, 1994; Major et al., 2002). Stigmatized individuals who are highly identified with their group are more likely to make intergroup comparisons, notice intergroup inequalities, and label them *unjust*. Consistent with this observation, Major et al. (2002) also found that the more highly identified students were with their ethnic group, the more they said that they and members of their group experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity. However, it is important to recognize that their consciousness

of discrimination may have contributed significantly to their enhanced social identity as a member of a stigmatized ethnic group. Thus, perceived discrimination may be the fuel that triggers the search for greater affinity to a heritage culture among later generation ethnics. This mechanism, then, may explain the adherence to a Mexican heritage identity found even among third- and fourth-generation Mexican Americans (Keefe & Padilla, 1987).

One way in which members of stigmatized groups may protect their personal self-esteem from the potentially painful consequences of upward comparisons with advantaged out-group members is by restricting their social comparisons to others who share their stigmatized status. By coping in this way, the person is more likely to compare with others whose outcomes are also likely to be relatively poor (Crocker & Major, 1989; Gibbons, 1986; Jones et al., 1984; Major, 1987, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, there is substantial evidence that women who work are more likely to compare their personal outcomes (e.g., lower wages) with those of other women rather than with those of men (Major, 1994; Zanna, Crosby, & Lowenstein, 1986). This has the effect, then, of reducing perceptions of wage discrimination between men and women.

One reason people tend to make interpersonal comparisons with in-group rather than out-group members is simple proximity—people who are similar to us tend to be more readily available in our environments and hence more salient for social comparison purposes (Runciman, 1966; Singer, 1981). The greater prevalence of similarly stigmatized individuals in the immediate environment occurs both because of forced segregation due to discrimination (e.g., in housing, schooling, or employment) and because of preferences to affiliate with similar others (Schacter, 1959). Affiliation with others who are similarly stigmatized not only furnishes a potentially less threatening comparison environment but also provides the stigmatized with opportunities to be “off duty” from the attribution ambiguity, stereotype threat, anxiety, and mindfulness that are likely to accompany interactions with the nonstigmatized, socially dominant group. The prevalence of ethnic enclaves and support groups as well as the popularity of ethnically oriented theme houses and social clubs on university campuses are no doubt due in part to the benefits of affiliating with others who share a stigmatizing attribute.

In an investigation of the contextual nature of social stigma and its effects, Brown (1998) assessed self-esteem and “possible selves” (Markus & Nurius, 1986) of students of color (Latino and African American) and White students. Brown reported that the students of color had higher self-esteem and envisioned more positive future selves than did White students. However, in a

follow-up study, Brown asked students to imagine that they would be in a semester-long course with a White student or a student of color as the teaching assistant. In this condition, students of color indicated more positive possible selves when they imagined having a teaching assistant who was more ethnically similar than dissimilar to them. This effect was not found for White students or when the expected interaction was of more limited duration (a single class).

This study suggests that the effects of stigma on self-concept may be much more dependent on the particular features of the social context, resulting in temporary changes in the aspects of the self-concept that are activated. This may help to explain why some stigmatized individuals make greater efforts to identify with the mainstream social group if they experience long-term encounters with similar group role models (e.g., teachers, counselors, physicians) and mentors.

On occasion, stigmatized persons may also experience attribution ambiguity. That is, stigmatized individuals may be uncertain whether friendly or unfriendly behavior directed at them by majority group members is a response to their social identity or to personal, individual qualities (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1991; Major & Crocker, 1993). In addition to these negative effects of attribution ambiguity, ambiguity about the causes of positive and negative outcomes may contribute to the motive to be reserved or to cope by holding back in interpersonal interactions until the causes of other persons' positive or negative signals are known. Often, individuals who are cautious about revealing or displaying their social identity remain "in the closet." In other contexts (e.g., classroom), such individuals are deemed to be shy and to possess a poor self-concept.

Thus, stigma represents a potential threat to individuals' sense of safety. Coping strategies such as in-group social comparisons, attributions to prejudice, and disengagement from the source of discrimination may enable stigmatized individuals to maintain a sense of worth in the face of devaluation. Stigma also denotes how we construe our social world. The construction of social identities and the meanings associated with them is a cognitive, sense-making process. The stereotypes that drive impressions, judgments, and behaviors toward stigmatized individuals are mental representations that make order of individuals' social world. Many of the predicaments of being stigmatized involve awareness of how individuals are thought of by others and construal of the meaning and causes of others' behavior. Likewise, many of the strategies that stigmatized individuals use to cope with their predicaments emerge from interpretations of social contexts and social events.

Summary

We take the position that after three decades of research, the psychological models of acculturation are of limited value because they rest too heavily on (a) a static view of intergroup relations that does not address important concerns related to the motivation to acculturate; (b) a belief that acculturation is more or less a uniform process across all newcomer groups regardless of race, culture, or social status; and (c) a methodology that is limited to its reliance on self-reported language use preferences, entertainment practices, and friendship patterns. We believe that social cognitions, social identity, and social stigma provide us with a conceptual framework that allows for a better understanding and study of the processes involved in acculturation. International migration affects many aspects of the self, requiring significant redefinition and reconstruction of both personal and social identities. Immigrants continuously reorganize the delicate structure of their various social identities in new cultural contexts (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Some identities relate to membership in the host culture, and others reflect attachment to values of their heritage culture. Within their new social context, newcomers form perceptions regarding expectations that members of the dominant group have of them. Perceptions are likely to affect the process of redefining their identity and whether and to what extent they choose acculturation and membership in the host culture.

To date, acculturation research has been confined to correlational studies. This is due in large measure to how acculturation has been operationally defined and to the measurement tools used to assess the level of acculturation. The new vision presented here opens the door to experimental approaches for investigating acculturation. We take the position that acculturation is a social process that occurs in a context in which newcomers and members of the host culture are in dynamic contact with each other. Newcomers, regardless of their heritage culture and whether they are sojourners, refugees, or voluntary immigrants, must in one form or another adapt to their new cultural environment (Ward et al., 2001). The social identities they bring with them and the identities they develop in the new environment influence social cognitions that in turn guide their behavior such as the clothes they wear, the foods they eat, the people with whom they associate, the values to which they adhere, and the strategies used to accommodate to the new culture and its people. As outsiders, immigrants have less political power and influence and are frequently stigmatized in negative ways by the dominant group. Members of the dominant group may view one group of newcomers as hard workers and intelligent but as clannish and difficult to get to know. At the same time, they might view members of another ethnic heritage group as lazy and fun loving

but honest and religious. How closely the newcomer group possesses the physical attributes of the dominant group is also important because it is more difficult to stigmatize individuals who appear indistinguishable from the majority group. Accordingly, to the extent that immigrants become aware and interpret their social stigma, their approach to acculturation and accommodation will reflect their interpretation of the stigma and the cognitions that surround these perceptions.

To understand acculturation, it is important to keep in mind that newcomers are not always free to pursue the acculturation strategy they prefer (Berry, 1997). Furthermore, the expectations that a host culture has of newcomers will likely affect the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants (Taft, 1977). In this article, we take the position that social stigmas affect the acculturation and adaptation of immigrants. The prevailing attitudes, whether positive or negative, have the power of constraining the adoption of the social identity of the host country and thereby the acculturation trajectory of newcomers.

If newcomers are aware their social identity is devalued, this will affect the strategies employed in the acculturation process and, as a result, the cultural competences they are willing and/or able to develop. Tajfel (1978) suggested the following three alternative responses open to the newcomer group when the dominant group fails to positively recognize the social identity of the newcomer group: (a) Newcomers can leave the heritage group physically and/or subjectively through a reduction in their identification with their heritage group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), (b) newcomers can reinterpret their group attributes to justify the negative stigma or to make it acceptable, and (c) newcomers can engage in social action to promote desirable changes both inside and outside the heritage group.

Research is needed to better understand how newcomers' cognitions of in-group and out-group relations, including stigmas, affect the acculturation-adaptation strategy used by immigrants. How these cognitions contribute to the motivation to engage and participate in the new culture is also in need of research. How immigrants cope with social stigmas is a fertile field for study. For example, why does the same social stigma affect one individual in one way and another person in a very different way? It is also important to ask how physical similarity (phenotype) as well as cultural similarity to host culture individuals influence the types of social stigmas that different immigrant groups endure.

In closing, we believe that our model of acculturation based on social cognition offers a new and innovative approach to research on the process of acculturation. We maintain that this approach lends itself to both quasi-experimental and experimental studies in which social stigma and social cognition can be manipulated to assess their impact on social identity and adapta-

tion toward the host culture. For instance, if immigrants who identify strongly with their ethnic group are exposed to a condition in which their social stigma is made salient, will their attitudes toward the host culture shift in the appropriate direction given the type of information to which they are exposed? How will immigrants who possess little identity with their heritage group be affected by a manipulation of stigma affecting them? Similar questions can be asked of majority group members, such as how readily are they willing to engage in more intimate contacts with newcomers depending on the type of information they are given about the new group. We could also extend the question to explore the types of accommodations majority group members are willing to give newcomers to facilitate their transition into the culture of the dominant group. These are a few of the exciting new possibilities we see in the area of acculturation research in the new millennium.

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