

Acculturation of immigrants: Dual perspectives from Chinese immigrants and European Canadians

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Introduction

The present study investigated the acculturation of Chinese immigrants from the perspectives of first-generation Chinese immigrants and third-generation or more European Canadians. Since acculturation is a process of mutual change that occurs in both the immigrant group and the receiving society, the dual perspectives from the immigrants and majority members of the Canadian society can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the acculturation process. In addition, for the Chinese immigrants, discrepancy in perspective about the acculturation process from that of the European Canadians were examined for its moderating effect on outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.

Relative Acculturation Extended Model

In the present study, acculturation was examined as preferred acculturation attitudes (the ideal situation) and actual acculturation strategies (the real situation) as proposed by the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) developed by Navas and colleagues (2005). The RAEM model posits that the acculturation process is *complex* and *relative* with different acculturation attitudes being preferred and different acculturation strategies being adopted simultaneously depending on the domains under consideration. These domains can be distinguished in terms of being peripheral/public domains or hard core/private domains. The present study examined acculturation perspectives in the four hard core/private domains of 1) Family relationships, 2) Social interaction, 3) Religious beliefs and customs, and 4) Ways of thinking, principles and values.

Outgroup Hassles and Acculturation

The acculturation process of immigrants has been intimately tied to the notion of acculturative stress or the experiences of stressful events due to living in between cultures. Acculturative stress is considered to be a common phenomenon of migration and has been linked to distress amongst many immigrant groups. Lay and Nguyen (1998) developed a hassles inventory that comprises of general daily hassles that may be encountered by any individual in their daily life, and acculturation-specific hassles that are encountered by immigrants due to their immigrant status and the acculturation process. Acculturation-specific hassles include outgroup hassles and in-group hassles.

Since the acculturation process is contingent on the attitudes of the immigrants and majority members of the receiving society, any discrepancy in acculturation attitudes can potentially influence the experience of outgroup hassles. Research findings on intergroup relations have demonstrated that mismatch in attitudes toward the acculturation process leads to conflict and perception of intergroup threat between the immigrants and members of the receiving society (Bourhis et al., 1997; Piontkowski et al., 2002). Analogously, discrepancy between the perspectives of the immigrants and the receiving society might influence the effect of outgroup hassles on psychophysical distress for the immigrants. The present study examined whether discrepancy in real acculturation strategy or discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude moderated the relation between outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress. Specifically, it was predicted that, when discrepancy in real acculturation strategy or ideal acculturation attitude was high, immigrants with higher level of outgroup hassles would report higher level of psychophysical distress than those with lower level of outgroup hassles. When discrepancy was low, there would be no difference in the level of psychophysical distress.

Method

Participants

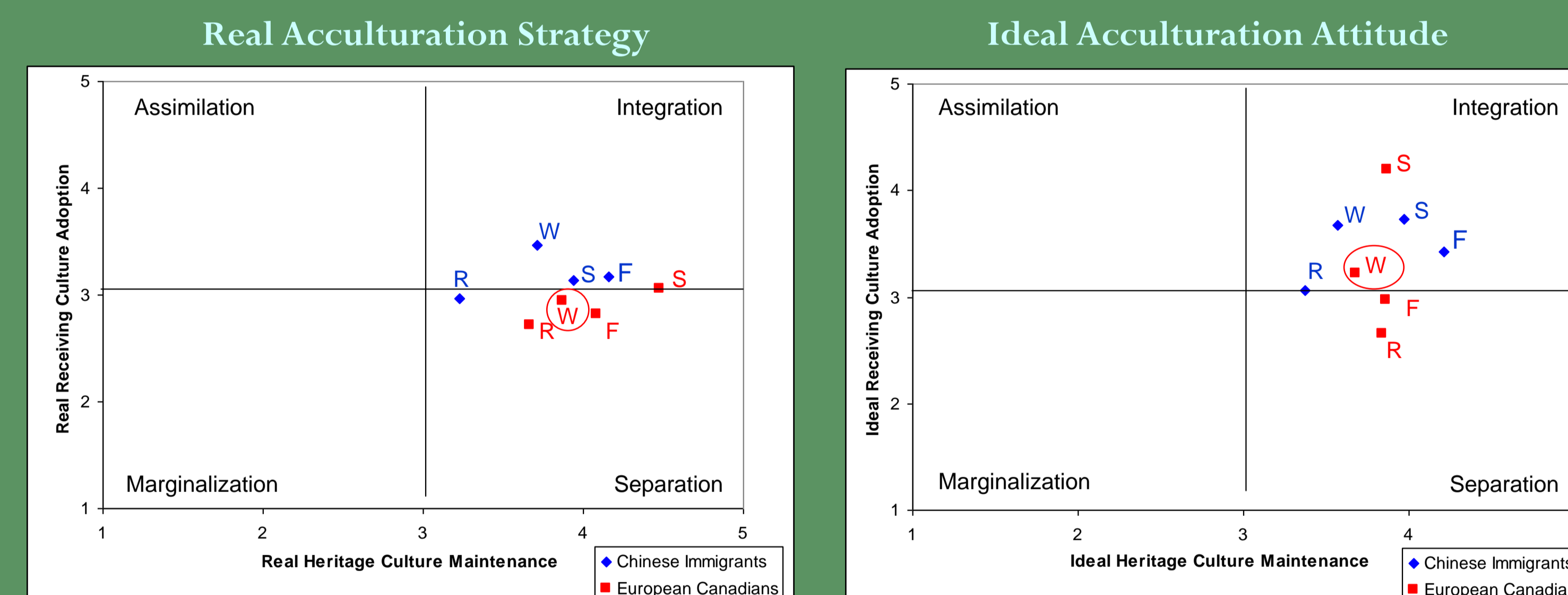
Participants were recruited as community members from Metropolitan Toronto and Guelph/Wellington areas of Ontario or as University of Guelph students.

➤ For the European Canadian group, participants were asked to participate only if they were of European ethnicity and were at least second-generation Canadian born (i.e. they and their parents were born in Canada). The final sample size was 142 participants.

➤ For the Chinese immigrant group, participants were asked to participate only if they were born in China or Hong Kong, had socialized in their birth country for at least 10 years before immigration to Canada, and had immigrated with the intention to stay on a long term basis. The final sample size was 97 participants.

European Canadians	Chinese Immigrants
•Final sample size: 142	•Final sample size: 97 (66 from China, 31 from HK)
•Gender: 106 Female, 36 Male	•Gender: 72 Female, 25 Male
•Mean age: 26.28 (SD = 13.51)	•Mean age: 42.52 (SD = 16.70)
•73.9% between 18–25	•23.7% between 18–25
•11.3% between 26–40	•22.7% between 26–40
•5.6% between 41–50	•20.6% between 41–50
•8.5% aged 51 and above	•32.0% aged 51 and above
•68.3% were undergraduate students.	•8.2% were undergraduate students.
•72.5% single, 25.4% married/common law, 2.1% divorced/separated.	•27.8% single, 68.1% married/common law, 4.1% divorced/separated.
•Household Income:	•Household Income:
•11.3% income less than \$19,999	•25.8% income less than \$19,999
•11.3% income \$20,000–39,999	•16.5% income \$20,000–39,999
•31.7% income \$40,000–79,999	•26.8% income \$40,000–79,999
•45.1% income more than \$80,000	•23.7% income more than \$80,000

Results



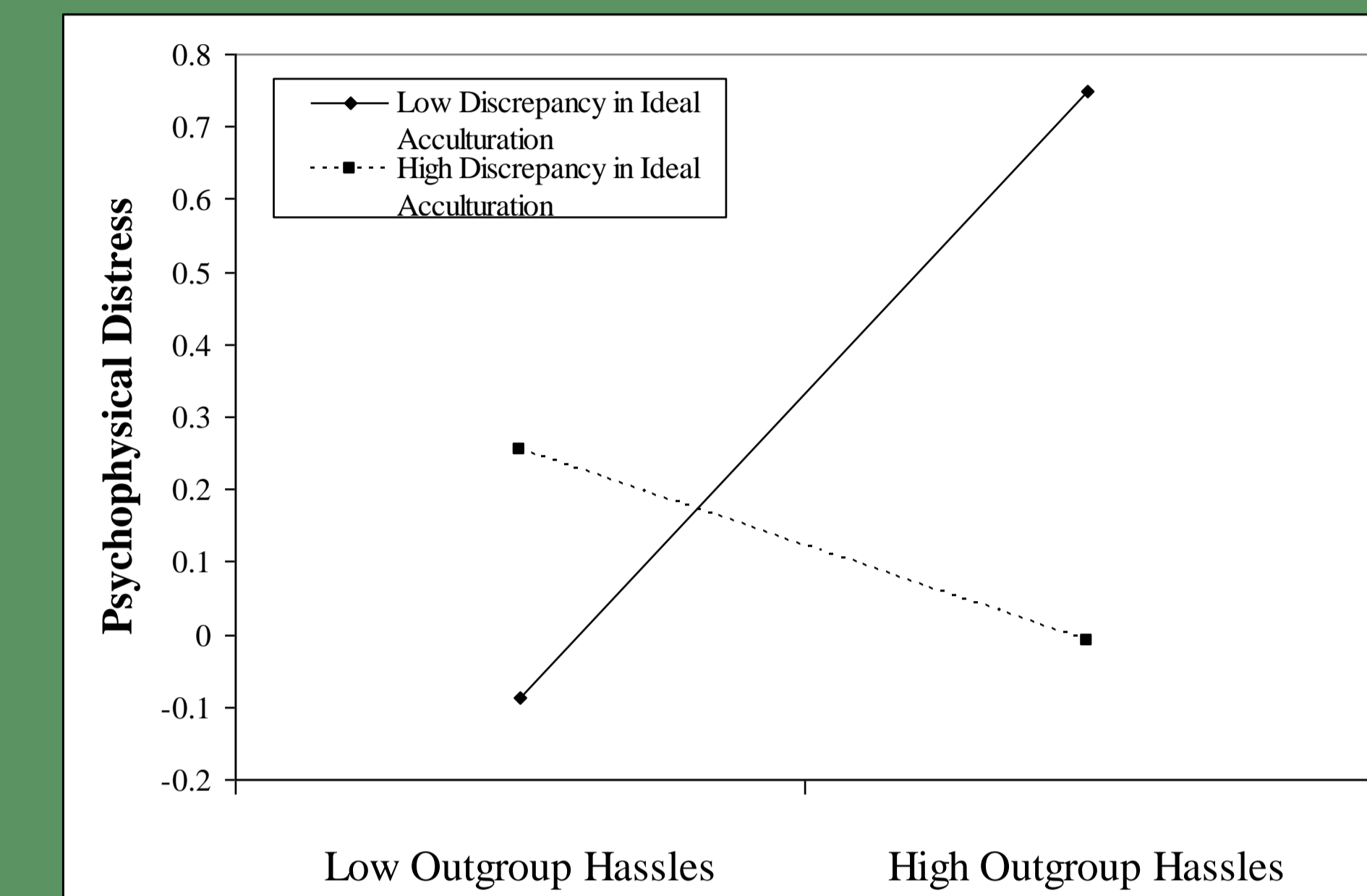
F = Family Relationships, S = Social Interaction, R = Religious Beliefs and Customs, W = Ways of thinking, Principles and Values

- Chinese immigrants considered Integration to be their real acculturation strategy and ideal acculturation attitude for the different domains.
- European Canadians considered Separation to be the immigrants' real acculturation strategy for the two domains of Family Relationships and Religious Beliefs, as well as the ideal acculturation attitude for the immigrants. For the domain of Social interaction, Integration was considered to be the real acculturation strategy and ideal acculturation attitude.
- European Canadians considered Separation to be the immigrants' real acculturation strategy for the domain of Ways of thinking whereas, ideally, it should have been Integration.

Moderating Effect of Discrepancy in Acculturation for Chinese Immigrants

- To determine discrepancy in acculturation from members of the receiving society, Euclidean distances were calculated from individual Chinese immigrants' scores to the mean scores of the European Canadians for aggregate real acculturation strategy and ideal acculturation attitude.
- Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted for the Chinese immigrants to test the moderating effect of discrepancy in aggregate real acculturation strategy or aggregate ideal acculturation attitude on outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.
 - Demographic variables of Birth country (China or Hong Kong), Gender, Marital status, and Income level were entered into the first step of the analyses and were not found to be significant predictors.
 - Discrepancy in real acculturation strategy was not found to be a significant moderator for outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.
 - Discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude was found to be a significant moderator for outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.

Effect of discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude on outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.



When discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude was low, Chinese immigrants with higher level of outgroup hassles reported higher level of psychophysical distress than those with lower level of outgroup hassles. When discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude was high, there was no significant difference in psychophysical distress.

Discussion

Acculturation in Specific Domains

Examination of real acculturation strategy and ideal acculturation attitude revealed that there were considerable differences depending on the domains. The Chinese immigrants considered Integration to be their actual acculturation strategy and ideal acculturation attitude for the different domains. The European Canadians considered Separation as the actual acculturation strategy adopted by the Chinese immigrants for the various domains except for Social interaction which was integration, and Integration to be the ideal acculturation attitude in the two domains of Ways of thinking and Social interaction. Of particular interest is that, in the domain of Ways of thinking, the European Canadians considered the immigrants to have adopted Separation even though, ideally, they should have adopted Integration. This suggested that the European Canadians would like the Chinese immigrants to have adopted more of Canadian society's values than what they considered the immigrants were doing.

Moderating Effect of Discrepancy in Acculturation

The finding that it was low level of discrepancy in ideal acculturation attitude that exerted significant influence on psychophysical distress across the different levels of outgroup hassles was unexpected. Possible explanation for the surprised finding might have been because, for immigrants who have low level of discrepancy, there is little mismatch in their acculturation ideology when being compared to the receiving society. When being confronted with high level of outgroup hassles in everyday life, these immigrants will not be able to attribute the experiences of outgroup hassles to differences in acculturation ideology. In contrast, immigrants with high level of discrepancy will be able to attribute their experiences of outgroup hassles to these differences. It is possible that being able to attribute the experiences of outgroup hassles to discrepancy in acculturation ideology might have lessened the negative effect of outgroup hassles as it provides an explanation for the ongoing conflict with outgroup members.

Discrepancy in real acculturation strategy was not found to moderate the effect of outgroup hassles on psychophysical distress. Perhaps, since Canada is a country that embraces multiculturalism, actual acculturation strategy that differs from the perspective of the larger society is likely to be tolerated since members of the larger society cannot dictate and modify the behaviours of the immigrants. Furthermore, members of the larger society might not have a comprehensive understanding of the actual acculturation strategy of the immigrants unlike ideal acculturation ideology which is based on their own ideology of what the immigrants should do. Discrepancy in acculturation ideology can be debated and become a point of contention. Discrepancy in perspectives about what the immigrants are doing might just likely be steered towards a consideration of acculturation ideology and its differences.