Acculturation and social adjustment: Are there unique benefits to integration?

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Abstract

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework endorses bicultural integration as the best predictor of adjustment. The assessment of integration used in this research has, however, been criticized on psychometric grounds (Rudmin, 2005). Ryder et al. (2000) directly assessed the heritage and mainstream dimensions of acculturation and found that only mainstream acculturation predicted psychological adjustment.

Given that the effects of integration may be underestimated without direct assessment (Berry & Sam, 2003), various methods to compute integration from separate heritage and mainstream scores have been proposed.

We tested five of these methods using the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA), Acculturation Index (AI; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999), and J. W. Berry's four-fold acculturation measure (personal communication, February 10, 1998) in order to (a) evaluate their psychometric properties and (b) test the hypothesis that integration predicts adjustment.

Only one integration method ("interaction multiculturalism") was independent of the heritage and mainstream dimensions; this method had no relation with social adjustment. None of the other integration methods were related to social anxiety after controlling for mainstream and heritage dimensions. There was no evidence in this sample that integration offers unique benefits above and beyond mainstream acculturation.

Introduction

The acculturation framework of John Berry (1996) proposes that a bicultural integration strategy – identification with the heritage culture combined with participation in the mainstream culture – leads to the best outcomes for mental health. The integration of heritage and mainstream cultural identities remains a compelling hypothesis. Increasing numbers of researchers have criticized Berry's four-fold measurement approach on psychometric and theoretical grounds. The most common proposed solution has been to measure separate dimensions of heritage and mainstream acculturation. However, these researchers often fail to consider how the two dimensions interact with one another; thus, the role of integration remains unclear.

Berry and Sam (2003) argued that one cannot assess the effects of integration unless it is directly measured. Rather than using the problematic four- fold method, Rudmin (2005) has proposed that integration can be measured by combining results from heritage and mainstream subscales. To this end, Rudmin (2005) has suggested several different methods of manipulating subscale scores from standard bidimensional acculturation instruments in order to yield indices of integration. The current study is designed to test these manipulations in a sample of Chinese- Canadian undergraduate students in the context of social adjustment.

Method

Data for this study were drawn from a larger cross-cultural investigation of Chinese-Canadian university students (N=203) who completed a large questionnaire package. The current study uses data from the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA; Ryder et al., 2000), Acculturation Index (AI; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999), J. W. Berry's four-fold acculturation measure, and the Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (SADS; Watson & Friend, 1969). Heritage and mainstream dimension scores were used to generate several integration measures following Rudmin (2005). The heritage and mainstream dimension scores and the integration measures were then

intercorrelated as well as correlated with Berry's measure of integration as well as social anxiety (SAI). Given the considerable correlation among the Berry subscales, partial correlation analyses were performed in order to control for assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Further, partial regression analysis was performed to assess the contribution of each integration measure over and above the heritage and mainstream dimensions.

Measures

Main effects

- Heritage (H): Sum of heritage items on VIA or AI.

- Mainstream (M): Sum of mainstream items on VIA or AI.

Arithmetic transformations

- Summation biculturalism = H + M

- Integration biculturalism = H x M

Note: Although discussed in Rudmin (2005), subtraction biculturalism (H − M) was not included in the analyses because, unlike the other measures, it does not describe a dimension ranging from low to high integration.

Centralized transformations

- Interaction multiculturalism = (H − MH) x (M − MM); MH and MM are the means of the heritage and mainstream scales, respectively.

- Expressed multiculturalism = (H − MptH) x (M − MptM); MptH and MptM are the midpoints of the heritage and mainstream scales, respectively.

- Deviation from biculturalism: using polar coordinates, how many degrees participants' scores deviate from biculturalism; i.e., the theta angle of deviation from an integration reference axis. Scores are reversed such that larger scores indicate more integration.

Results

Across the VIA and AI, significant zero-order correlations and partial correlations with Berry's integration score were observed for Summation biculturalism, Integration biculturalism, and Expressed multiculturalism. Interaction multiculturalism failed to show a zero-order correlation with Berry's integration score on the AI. There was no effect observed for Deviation from biculturalism (Table 1).

The main effects of heritage and mainstream scores as well as all the integration transformations either showed mildly negative or no relation to social anxiety. None of the Berry four-fold acculturation measures were associated with social anxiety (Table 2).

All integration methods, except for interaction multiculturalism, were heavily saturated with heritage and mainstream dimensions (Table 3). Partial regression analyses showed that no measure of integration contributed significantly to the prediction of social adjustment over and above the effects of the mainstream and heritage dimensions. This last finding is likely attributable to the high degree of intercorrelation between most of the integration measures with the heritage and mainstream dimensions, discussed above. Discussion

When methods of measuring integration succeed in predicting social adjustment, they appear to work because they share variance with the mainstream dimension. This finding is in keeping with Ryder et al. (2000), who found that most adjustment effects are carried by the mainstream dimension.

The study is limited by the fact that one particular form of adjustment (i.e., social anxiety) was investigated in a restricted sample population (i.e., Chinese-Canadian undergraduate students). As such, the measurement of integration and the hypotheses associated with it need to be further studied in other samples with other adjustment measures.

That said, there is little evidence in this study to support the unique role of integration in the prediction of adjustment. In general, larger effect sizes were observed for the VIA compared with the AI. The larger implication of this study for acculturation researchers using bidimensional methods is that these methods allow for the assessment of integration. We encourage acculturation researchers to continue using bidimensional measures, and to routinely investigate the effects of integration using these measures. In time, a sufficient cross-method and cross-setting database will exist, allowing researchers to return to the integration-adjustment hypothesis.

References

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