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 between the immigrant group and the receiving society, the dual perspectives of 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 postulates that the acculturation process is complex and relative with different acculturation attitudes being preferred and different acculturation strategies being adopted simultaneously depending on the discrepancy in acculturation ideology. These domains are subject to further investigation because they can influence the experience of outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress. Specifically, it was predicted that, when discrepancy in real acculturation strategy or ideal acculturation attitude moderated the relation between outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress.

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 ingroup hassles.

Since the process of acculturation is contingent on the attitudes of the immigrants and majority members of the receiving society, any discrepancy in acculturation strategies or attitudes can potentially influence the experience of outgroup hassles. Research findings on ingroup relations have demonstrated that individuals in that group hold both the cultural belief prophecies and perception of ingroup threat between the immigrants and members of the receiving society (Gourou et al., 1997; Pettigrew 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.

The present study examined whether discrepancy in (real) acculturation strategy or (ideal) acculturation attitude moderated the relation between outgroup hassles and psychophysical distress. 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 heritage or second-generation Canadian born (i.e., they and their parents were born in Canada). The final sample size was 162 participants.

- For the Chinese immigrant group, participants were asked to participate only if they were born in China or Hong Kong, had resided 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.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>European Canadians</th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final sample size</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Female, Male</td>
<td>female, male</td>
<td>female, male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean age: 28.2 (SD = 11.52)</td>
<td>42.12 (SD = 16.70)</td>
<td>42.12 (SD = 16.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.9% between 18-25</td>
<td>21.3% between 18-25</td>
<td>21.3% between 18-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3% between 26-35</td>
<td>22.7% between 26-35</td>
<td>22.7% between 26-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6% between 45-50</td>
<td>28.6% between 45-50</td>
<td>28.6% between 45-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.8% aged 51 and above</td>
<td>12.0% aged 51 and above</td>
<td>12.0% aged 51 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Moderating Effect of Discrepancy in Acculturation for Chinese Immigrants

- For 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’ actual acculturation strategy for the two domains of Family and Social interaction.

High Discrepancy in Ideal Acculturation

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- European Canadians considered Separation to be the immigrants’ actual acculturation strategy for the two domains of Family and Social interaction.

Low Discrepancy in Ideal Acculturation

- In determining 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.

Discussion

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 explanations for this unexpected finding might have been because, the 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 lowered 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 assess or 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 a ideal acculturation ideology which is based on their own ideology of what the immigrants should do. Discrepancy in acculturation ideology can be tolerated and become a point of concede. Discrepancy in perspectives about what the immigrants are supposed to do may not be enough to sufficiently influence a change in acculturation ideology.