

Acculturation Mode, Identity Variation, and Psychosocial Adjustment

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ABSTRACT. The hypothesis that it is the variability of a person's identity—as opposed to the particular combinations of identities—that produces stress during the acculturation process was examined. Two hundred ninety-five native Anglophone students at the University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, provided demographic data and completed the following measures: the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck & Beck, 1972), Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965), the Situated Identity Measure (Clément & Noels, 1992), and the Psychological Stress Measure (Lemyre, Tessier, & Fillion, 1990). Results of ANOVAs contrasting level of identification and variability of identification indicated that an exclusively Anglophone identity was related to a higher level of depression, lower self-esteem, and a higher level of stress than the other modes of acculturation, but only when the variability in identity with the English group was high. Thus, the participants who identified strongly with the English group but were not committed to this identity experienced more psychological adjustment problems.

A BASIC POSTULATE of recent research on the relationship between mental health and culture is that people who are undergoing social and cultural changes experience psychological discomfort because of their changing and perhaps conflictive identity (Berry & Annis, 1974). Empirical and theoretical research also suggest that the salience of cultural identity may vary as a function of situational factors (Clément & Noels, 1992; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Okamura, 1981; Tajfel, 1981).

Borrowing from Berry (1990), Clément and Noels (1992) proposed that ethnic identity can be defined along two dimensions, identification with one's orig-

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inal ethnic group and identification with other relevant ethnic groups. These two dimensions correspond with the endorsement or the rejection of (a) the original culture and (b) the host culture, resulting in a composite of one of four modes of acculturation: integration, deculturation, separation, and assimilation. Because integration involves both maintaining a positive identification with one's culture of origin and developing a positive identification with the new culture, it is presumed to be associated with less stress and less conflict (Berry, 1990). Thus, belonging to two cultures does not necessarily compromise a person's sense of cultural identity. Conversely, deculturation is associated with a higher risk for psychological distress, because it involves rejecting both ethnic groups (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935). Separation, which involves identification with the original culture and rejection of the host group, and assimilation, which involves rejection of the original group and identification with the host group, can also cause stress in a pluralistic society, although less than deculturation.

Building on situated identity theory, Clément and Noels (1992) proposed that ethnolinguistic identity is not static, but dynamic, and situationally dependent. Thus, people can shift from one group membership to another as required by immediate contextual demands, and the key to psychological well-being may well be the ability to develop and maintain competence in both cultures. The more a person maintains active and functional relationships by alternating between both cultures, the less difficult acquiring and maintaining competency in both cultures will be (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Accordingly, people who can identify with both groups and are flexible in their identity should experience less stress, whereas people whose identity is rigid should experience more stress, especially in a multicultural environment.

These ideas deviate from Phinney's (1989) concept of commitment. Borrowing from Erikson (1968), Phinney proposed four stages of ethnic-identity development in a person's original culture, based on the presence or the absence of exploration and commitment. Exploration is a period of experimentation and inquiry into one's culture, and commitment involves the acceptance of the values and attitudes of one's culture. The optimal outcome of this process is an achieved identity that is based on a firm commitment made after a period of exploration. People who have not examined or resolved issues regarding their ethnicity will be at greater risk for adjustment problems (Phinney, Lochner, & Murphy, 1990). Thus, in direct opposition to research on situated identity and adaptation, Phinney proposed that variability in identity is not conducive to psychological well-being—that people experience the most stress when they are undergoing changes coincident with a situationally variable identity and the least stress when they have achieved a stable identity.

Although researchers have expanded such views to include the concept of flexibility in identity, depending on the situation, the variability of identity in the original culture and the host culture has not been studied. Therefore, our goal in the present study was to examine which type of cultural identification—a shift-

ing identification between one's original group and the host group or a stable identification with one cultural group—produces more stress.

Method

The context of the present study was the University of Ottawa, a bilingual (French–English) university in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Although French is spoken by a minority, both in the city (14%) and in the province (6%), the university serves Francophones and Anglophones equally and encourages interethnic contact. We used a sample of Anglophone students because of the wide variation in the amount and intensity of their contact with Francophones.

Participants

The participants were 295 native Anglophone students (72.4% women) who ranged from 17 to 55 years old ($M = 20.85$ years). Most of the participants (95.5%) preferred to speak English, and the rest preferred to speak French (3.4%) or were bilingual (1.0%). The participants had studied French for a period of 1–17 years ($M = 8.65$ years).

Materials

The questionnaire was divided into five sections. Following are descriptions of the scales in each section, along with a standardized index of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), when appropriate.

Depression. We used the short form of the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck & Beck, 1972) to assess depressive affect. This scale contains 12 items that measure the extent a person has felt depressed during the past 7 days, on a scale of 0 to 3. A high score indicates a high level of depression ($\alpha = .78$).

Self-esteem. This construct was assessed using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965). A high score indicates a high level of self-esteem ($\alpha = .99$).

Situated identity. Situational identification with members of each language group was assessed with two 5-point scales. The first scale ranged from *not at all Anglophone* (0) to *very Anglophone* (4), and the second scale ranged from *not at all Francophone* (0) to *very Francophone* (4). These two scales appeared on the questionnaire after each of 22 everyday situations (see Clément & Noels, 1992). In accordance with the proposition of situated identity, these items were preceded by instructions indicating that, in any given situation, it was possible to identify with (a) both target groups simultaneously, (b) one group and not the other, or (c) neither group. For example, a participant might indicate that when listen-

ing to music, he or she felt *very Anglophone* (4) and *not at all Francophone* (0), corresponding to a separated identity. This form of assessment permitted the computation of two indices of level of identification, with Anglophones ($\alpha = .93$) and with Francophones ($\alpha = .93$). A high score indicated a high level of identification with the corresponding group.

Stress. We assessed the degree of stress participants had felt within the past 4–5 days, using the short version of Lemyre, Tessier, and Fillion's (1990) Psychological Stress Measure. The participants indicated the extent to which they had experienced 25 symptoms of stress, on an 8-point scale that ranged from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (8) ($\alpha = .92$).

General information. The last section of the questionnaire concerned general information about the participants, including demographic variables, such as age, gender, and length of time the participant had studied French.

Procedure

The participants, who were recruited from compulsory 1st-year philosophy courses at the University of Ottawa, completed a short form requesting that they fill out a questionnaire. The form indicated that the participants would be paid \$10 for 1 hr and that both their decision about whether to participate and their performance were confidential and would not affect their academic records. The students who decided to participate were scheduled for a group testing session.

A member of the research team greeted the participants at the testing session and thanked them. The participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and the voluntary and confidential nature of their participation. The participants were also told that they were free to quit at any time. After the questionnaires had been distributed, the students were given \$10 and asked to sign a receipt. The participants required 1 1/2 hrs, on average, to fill out the questionnaire, which they were allowed to complete at their own pace.

Results

To define groups as high or low on ethnic identification, we performed a median split on the identification scores for both language groups. The median scores for identification were 3.93 for the Anglophones and 1.96 for the Francophones. The participants whose scores were above the median for both scales were considered to be integrated, the participants whose scores were below the median for both scales were classified as having a deculturated identity, and the participants whose identification scores were above the median for the Anglophone group and below the median for the Francophone group were classified as having a separated identity. The assimilated category consisted of those partici-

pants whose identification scores were above the median for the Francophone group and below the median for the Anglophone group.

To assess the variability of identity across situations, we calculated two variability scores for each participant: one with respect to identification with each language group. These scores were used as an assessment of situational identification, given the mean identity score for a language group. Algebraically,

$$\text{Variability} = \frac{\sum(x - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1},$$

where X corresponds to the identity score for each situation, \bar{X} corresponds to the mean identity score for that participant, and n corresponds to the number of situations. We effected median splits on each of the two variability scores, to determine high and low variability of identification with the two ethnic groups.

To determine whether variability in the identity of both language groups resulted in more difficulty in psychological adjustment, we computed a series of $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Anglophone Identity: high vs. low \times Francophone Identity: high vs. low \times Variability of Anglophone Identity: high vs. low \times Variability of Francophone Identity: high vs. low) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on the adjustment indices.

There were significant three-way interactions for stress, $F(1, 253) = 13.25, p < .001$; depression, $F(1, 253) = 10.29, p < .002$; and self-esteem, $F(1, 253) = 5.76, p < .02$. The means and standard deviations of these three variables with respect to ethnic identification and variability of this identity are reported in Table 1.

Tests of simple main effects, using Tukey's test, indicated that the three-way interaction on stress is attributable to a significant difference between high and low language₁ (L1) identity under conditions of low language₂ (L2) identity and high L1 variability, $q = 8.62, p < .01$; a significant difference between high and low L2 identity under conditions of high L1 identity and high L1 variability, $q = 6.11, p < .01$; and a significant difference between high and low L1 variability under conditions of high L1 identity and low L2 identity, $q = 7.33, p < .01$.

These results suggest that a separated identity was related to higher levels of stress than other modes of acculturation were, but only when the variability in identity with the first language group was high. Thus, individuals who identified strongly and exclusively with their first language group, but did not always endorse this identity to the same extent, experienced more stress. Similarly, the participants experienced more depression and lower self-esteem when they perceived themselves as clearly identifying with the first language group, but their identification was not stable across situations.

Discussion

The present study was designed to examine the effect of situational variations of identity and their relationship to measures of psychosocial adjustment.

TABLE 1
Mean Stress, Depression, and Self-Esteem as a Function of Language₁ Variability,
Language₁ Identity, and Language₂ Identity

L2 Identity	Low L1 variability		High L1 variability	
	Low L1 identity	High L1 identity	Low L1 identity	High L1 identity
<i>Stress</i>				
Low				
<i>M</i>	3.29	3.31	3.03 _b *	5.24 _{abc} *
<i>SD</i>	1.49	1.11	1.06	1.15
High				
<i>M</i>	3.27	3.38 _a *	3.41	3.36 _c *
<i>SD</i>	1.12	1.15	1.22	1.20
<i>Depression</i>				
Low				
<i>M</i>	1.34	1.38	1.36 _b *	1.90 _{abc} *
<i>SD</i>	0.32	0.30	0.28	0.52
High				
<i>M</i>	1.34	1.35 _a *	1.41	1.44 _c *
<i>SD</i>	0.27	0.23	0.29	0.35
<i>Self-esteem</i>				
Low				
<i>M</i>	5.01	5.07	5.17 _b *	4.46 _{abc} *
<i>SD</i>	0.81	0.82	0.79	1.11
High				
<i>M</i>	5.26	5.20 _a *	5.06	5.24 _c *
<i>SD</i>	0.66	0.60	0.79	0.63

Note. Means with the same subscript differ from each other.

* $p < .01$.

The results suggest that a variable and exclusive first-group identity produced more negative psychological consequences than any other acculturation type that was considered in the present study. Anglophones who identified strongly with their first language group but exhibited a high degree of intersituational variation in this identity experienced more stress, more depression, and lower self-esteem.

These results deviate from the predictions derived from the frameworks discussed previously. Contrary to Phinney's proposal, exclusive identification with one group was not related to better adjustment, and contrary to the prediction of LaFromboise and colleagues (1993), variable adjustment was not related to bet-

ter adjustment. Finally, contrary to Berry's predictions, concurrent identification with both the first- and second-language group, whether under conditions of low or high variability, did not result in appreciably better adjustment.

The interrelationship between the present findings and current theoretical formulations seems to lie in the fact that they are considered to be one point in an evolutionary process. For the first time, the less well-adjusted Anglophone students are interacting with minority Francophones in a milieu that promotes a bilingual-bicultural ideology. Post hoc analyses of the present contact data indicated that participants who identified exclusively with their first language group and were variable in this identification had less frequent contact with the second language group and perceived using the second language as a hassle. Therefore, despite their attempts to avoid all contact with Francophones, these Anglophones encounter a bilingual environment that may contribute to the instability of their exclusive Anglophone identification.

The Anglophones' variable unipolar identification may be an initial consequence of living in this novel environment and, as such, may reflect the early stages of Phinney's exploration period. Considering that the other students, who were either at an earlier stage of acculturation (i.e., separated or deculturated and less variable) or at a later stage of acculturation (integrated or assimilated and more or less variable), it seems that none of the coping formulas were associated with appreciably better adjustment.

In summary, the relationship between acculturation and psychological well-being is ambiguous. It appears that the consequences of the psychological dynamics of identification, if there are any, cannot be understood independently of their sociocultural context and evolutionary process.

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