

ACCULTURATION, CULTURE, SHOCK, SOCIAL DISTANCE

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Abstract: The article focuses on information about culture contact, culture shock, and acculturation contact. Concepts about the impact of cultural shock on the human factor are given.

Key words: Culture shock, psychology, human factor, culture, acculturation.

The concept of “acculturative stress” was introduced (Berry, 1970) as an alternative to the term culture shock (Oberg, 1960). The reasons for coining this new term will be outlined below, following a discussion of the concept of acculturation itself, and how it has come to be employed in cross-cultural psychology. The chapter then presents a framework for understanding how groups and individuals experience and manage the process of acculturation, focusing on the concept of “acculturation strategies” as a way of coping with acculturative change. Then, attention turns to the core notion of “acculturative stress” itself. Finally, we consider the concept of “adaptation”, as an long term outcome of the process of acculturation.

The initial interest in acculturation grew out of a concern for the effects of European domination of colonial and indigenous peoples (Thurnwald, 1927). Later, it focused on how immigrants (both voluntary and involuntary) changed following their entry and settlement into receiving societies. More recently, much of the work has been involved with how ethnocultural groups relate to each other, and change, as a result of their attempts to live together in culturally plural societies. Nowadays, all three foci are important, as globalization results in ever-larger trading and political relations: indigenous national populations experience neocolonization, new waves of immigrants, sojourners and refugees flow from these economic and political changes, and large ethnocultural populations become established in most countries.

Early views about the nature of acculturation are a useful foundation for contemporary discussion. Two formulations in particular, have been widely quoted. The first is: Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups... under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but

one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation... (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, pp. 149-152). In another formulation, acculturation was defined as: Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification 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 (Social Science Research Council, 1954, p. 974). In the first formulation, acculturation is seen as one aspect of the broader concept of culture change (that which results from intercultural contact), is considered to generate change in “either or both groups”, and is distinguished from assimilation (which may be “at times a phase”). These are important distinctions for psychological work, and will be pursued later. In the second definition, a few extra features are added, including change that is indirect (not cultural but “ecological”), delayed (internal adjustments, presumably of both a cultural and psychological character take time), and can be “reactive” (that is, rejecting the cultural influence and changing towards a more “traditional” way of life, rather than inevitably towards greater similarity with the dominant culture). As for all cross-cultural psychology (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002), it is imperative that we base our work on acculturation by examining its cultural contexts. We need to understand, in ethnographic terms, both cultures that are in contact if we are to understand the individuals that are in contact. Thus a linkage is sought between the acculturation of an individual’s group and the psychological acculturation of that individual. For Graves (1967), psychological acculturation refers to changes in an individual who is a participant in a culture contact situation, being influenced both directly by the external culture, and by the changing culture of which the individual is a member. There are two reasons for keeping these two levels distinct. The first is that our field insists that we view individual human behavior as interacting with the cultural context within which it occurs; hence separate conceptions and measurements are required at the two levels. The second is that not every individual enters into, and participates in, or changes in the same way; there are vast individual differences in psychological acculturation, even among individuals who live in the same acculturative arena.

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