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Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective

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On the basis of existing theory and research regarding ethnic identity and immigration and our own empirical work in four immigrant-receiving countries, we suggest an interactional model for understanding psychological outcomes for immigration. Specifically, the interrelationship of ethnic and national identity and their role in the psychological well-being of immigrants can best be understood as an interaction between the attitudes and characteristics of immigrants and the responses of the receiving society. This interaction is moderated by the particular circumstances of the immigrant group. The strengths of ethnic and national identity vary depending on the support for ethnic maintenance and the pressure for assimilation. Most studies show that the combination of a strong ethnic identity and a strong national identity promotes the best adaptation.

This article reviews current theory and research regarding ethnic identity and immigration and the implications of ethnic identity for the adaptation of immigrants. The article focuses on the broad questions of how ethnic identity and

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identification with the new society are related to each other, how these identities are related to the adaptation of immigrants, and how these relationships vary across groups and national contexts.

We propose that ethnic and national identities and their role in adaptation can best be understood in terms of an interaction between the attitudes and characteristics of immigrants and the responses of the receiving society, moderated by the particular circumstances of the immigrant group within the new society. Specifically, immigrant groups, as well as individual immigrants, arrive in a new country with differing attitudes about retaining their culture of origin and becoming part of the new society. In the new society, these attitudes interact with the actual and perceived levels of acceptance of immigrants and with official policies toward immigration. Ethnic identity is likely to be strong when immigrants have a strong desire to retain their identities and when pluralism is encouraged or accepted. When there is pressure toward assimilation and groups feel accepted, the national identity is likely to be strong. In the face of real or perceived hostility toward immigrants or toward particular groups, some immigrants may downplay or reject their own ethnic identity; others may assert their pride in their cultural group and emphasize solidarity as a way of dealing with negative attitudes.

The relationship of these identities to adaptation will likewise be influenced by the interaction of characteristics of specific immigrant groups with those of particular settings. Where there is pressure to assimilate and immigrants are willing to adapt to the new culture, national identity should be predictive of positive outcomes. When there is a strong supportive ethnic community, ethnic identity should predict positive outcomes. Outcomes will also be influenced, however, by the ways in which particular groups and individuals perceive and interpret their circumstances. Consequently, processes of adaptation are highly variable. We assume, nevertheless, that there are some processes that transcend specific groups and situations. The task for researchers is to discover relationships and processes that may be broadly applicable while also identifying characteristics of groups and settings that moderate these relationships and processes.

In this article we review theory and literature on ethnic and national identity and their interrelationship as part of the larger process of acculturation. In addition, we explore the role of these identities in the psychological well-being of immigrants and in the school adjustment of immigrant youth. We illustrate the relationships among identity, immigration, and adaptation with findings from a study of immigrant youth in four countries that provides general support for an interactional approach.

Ethnic Identity and Acculturation

Ethnic identity becomes salient as part of the acculturation process that takes place when immigrants come to a new society. The distinction between the

constructs of ethnic identity and acculturation is unclear (Liebkind, 2001; Phinney, 1990, 1998), and these two concepts are often used interchangeably (Nguyen, Messé, & Stollak, 1999). We consider acculturation to be a broader construct, however, encompassing a wide range of behaviors, attitudes, and values that change with contact between cultures. Ethnic identity is that aspect of acculturation that focuses on the subjective sense of belonging to a group or culture (Phinney, 1990).

As an aspect of acculturation, ethnic identity can be thought of in terms of the theoretical framework that has been used to understand acculturation. Current thinking emphasizes that acculturation, rather than being a linear process of change requiring giving up one's culture of origin and assimilating into a new culture, is best understood as a two-dimensional process (Berry, 1990, 1997; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Nguyen et al., 1999; Sayegh & Lasry, 1993). Two-dimensional models of acculturation, based largely on the work of Berry (1990, 1997), recognize that the two dominant aspects of acculturation, namely, preservation of one's heritage culture and adaptation to the host society, are conceptually distinct and can vary independently (Liebkind, 2001). On the basis of this distinction, Berry suggests the following two questions as a means of identifying strategies used by immigrants in dealing with acculturation: Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's cultural heritage? Is it considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society?

Four acculturation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—can be derived from yes or no answers to these two questions. Integration is defined by positive answers to both questions and marginalization by negative answers to both. A positive response to the first and negative to the second defines separation, and the reverse defines assimilation. The model highlights the fact that acculturation proceeds in diverse ways and that it is not necessary for immigrants to give up their culture of origin in order to adapt to the new society. This approach suggests that earlier models recognizing only assimilation or marginalization (e.g., Stonequist, 1935) are too limited. Most importantly, the model allows for multiculturalism, which asserts that different cultures may co-exist in a society. (See also Dovidio & Esses, this issue, and Berry, this issue.)

Berry's (1990, 1997) model of acculturation is a useful starting point for understanding variation in ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990). By analogy with a two-dimensional model of acculturation, ethnic identity and identity as a member of one's new society ("national" identity) can be thought of as two dimensions of group identity that vary independently; that is, each identity can be either secure and strong or undeveloped and weak (e.g., Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). An individual who retains a strong ethnic identity while also identifying with the new society is considered to have an integrated (or bicultural) identity. One who has a strong ethnic identity but does not identify with the new culture has a separated identity, whereas one who gives up an ethnic identity and identifies

only with the new culture has an assimilated identity. The individual who identifies with neither has a marginalized identity.

This model presents a broad theoretical view of possible identity categories that may be evident among immigrants. The interactional approach that we propose in this article suggests that actual identity categories will depend on a number of factors, including characteristics of immigrant groups and of the places where they have settled.

Ethnic and National Identities and Their Interrelationship

Broadly, ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of self in terms of membership in a particular ethnic group (Liebkind, 1992, 2001; Phinney, 1990). Although the term is sometimes used to refer simply to one's self-label or group affiliation (Rumbaut, 1994), ethnic identity is generally seen as embracing various aspects, including self-identification, feelings of belongingness and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes toward one's own ethnic group. The concept of ethnicity itself is defined in many different ways across disciplines (e.g., Hutchinson & Smith, 1996); it is used in the present context to refer to subgroups within a larger context, such as a nation, that claim a common ancestry and share one or more of the following elements: culture, religion, language, kinship, and place of origin.

Ethnic identity is a dynamic construct that evolves and changes in response to developmental and contextual factors, and it is a critical developmental task of adolescents, particularly in complex modern societies (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993). The process of ethnic identity formation has been conceptualized in terms of a progression, with an individual moving from the unexamined attitudes of childhood, through a moratorium or period of exploration, to a secure achieved ethnic identity at the end of adolescence (Phinney, 1989). During adolescence, many youth, especially those from ethnic groups with lower status or power, may become deeply involved in learning about their ethnicity. This process can lead to constructive actions aimed at affirming the value and legitimacy of their group (Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) or to feelings of insecurity, confusion, or resentment over treatment of their group. The stages of this process are not inevitable, but rather depend on socialization experiences in the family, the ethnic community, and the larger setting, and not all individuals reach the stage of ethnic identity achievement.

Ethnic identity can be distinguished from one's ascribed ethnicity, that is, one's ethnicity as perceived by others. Research has shown that ethnic identity changes in response to social psychological and contextual factors, that these responses vary over time, and that there can be considerable variation in the images that individuals construct of the behaviors, beliefs, values, and norms that characterize their group(s), together with their understandings of how these features are

(or are not) reflected in themselves (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Liebkind, 1999; Ferdman & Horenczyk, 2000).

Compared to ethnic identity, there has been far less attention paid to conceptualizing and studying immigrants' identification with the new society. Some researchers have focused simply on the labels used. In the United States, where the label "American" is used to refer to national identity, immigrant groups typically change over time from using a label based on their country of origin (e.g., Chinese) to a compound label (e.g., Chinese American), to, in some cases, the single national label, American (Rumbaut, 1994; Waters, 1990). Like ethnic identity, however, national identity is a more complex construct than is conveyed by a label; it involves feelings of belonging to, and attitudes toward, the larger society (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

According to the two-dimensional model, ethnic and national identities among immigrants are assumed to be independent; that is, they could both be either high or low, and individuals could belong to any one of the four possible identity categories. In contrast, according to the linear or unidimensional model, the two identities are negatively correlated, so that when one identity is strong the other is necessarily weak. In that case, immigrant identities would be limited to either assimilation or separation.

Research generally supports a two-dimensional model of ethnic and national identity among immigrants, in that linear measures of the two types of group identity are usually statistically independent. The relationship may vary, however, across immigrating groups (Hutnik, 1991; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997) and across national settings.

Ethnic and national identity were included in a recent large study of immigrant adolescents, the International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth (ICSEY project).¹ An article based on this project (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001) examined the strength and interrelationships of the two identities in four immigrant receiving countries: the United States, Israel, Finland, and the Netherlands. In each country setting, adolescents from recent immigrant groups were sampled. In the United States, data were collected in Southern California among adolescents from Mexican, Vietnamese, and Armenian backgrounds. The Finnish sample included adolescents from Vietnamese and Turkish families. The Israeli sample included immigrant adolescents from Russia and Ethiopia. In the

¹ The study is part of a larger study, the International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth (ICSEY). The ICSEY project is being carried out in a number of immigrant-receiving countries. Current members of the project, in alphabetical order by country, are C. Fan, R. Pe-Pua, R. Rooney, D. Sang (Australia), J. Berry and K. Kwak (Canada), K. Liebkind (Finland), C. Sabatier (France), P. Schmitz (Germany), G. Horenczyk (Israel), P. Vedder & F. van de Vijver (Netherlands), C. Ward (New Zealand), D. Sam (Norway), F. Neto (Portugal), E. Virta and C. Westin (Sweden), and J. Phinney (United States).

Netherlands, data were collected from Turks, Surinamese of Indian descent, and Antilleans (Afro-Caribbeans with Dutch citizenship). Because of the highly diverse experiences of each of these groups in each context, their identification with their own culture and with the larger society was expected to be quite variable, and the data obtained uphold this.

In each country, ethnic identity was measured with four items assessing ethnic affirmation (e.g., sense of belonging, positive feelings) based on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Identification with the receiving society was measured with four comparable items (based on Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). By combining individual scores on ethnic and national identities, we also computed four identity variables corresponding to the four acculturation orientations, namely, integrated identity, assimilated identity, separated identity, and marginalized identity.

In all countries the scores for ethnic identity were higher than the scores for national identity. Absolute levels, however, varied across settings. Ethnic identity scores were significantly higher in the United States and the Netherlands than in Israel and Finland and significantly lower in Finland than in other countries. National identity scores were highest in the United States, followed by Israel, then Finland; immigrants in the Netherlands showed the lowest levels of national identity.

A central question underlying the two-dimensional model is the relationship between ethnic and national identities. In our samples overall, these two identities were unrelated. The relationship between ethnic and national identity scores varied markedly, however, among countries and among ethnic groups within countries. These differences can be understood in terms of the situations of particular groups and settings. For example, in the United States correlations were positive and significant for the Mexicans, suggesting greater integration, but low and nonsignificant for the other groups. Mexicans form a large part of the population in Southern California and have established a pervasive culture that influences the entire area. Therefore it is easier for them to feel that they are part of both their own culture and the larger society. The existence of a label that incorporates both identities, "Mexican American," also makes this integrated identity readily available.

Examination of the responses of immigrants within each country further highlights the importance of context. In the Netherlands, the correlation between the two identities was negative and significant for the Antilleans, suggesting that they are either separated or assimilated. The Antilleans in the Netherlands are Dutch citizens, but the Dutch government tends to deal with these poorly educated newcomers as if they are non-Dutch. As a result, the Antilleans feel unfairly treated and are likely to have a separated identity (Kromhout & Vedder, 1996). In Israel, a significant negative correlation between the two identities among Russian immigrants may reflect a perception of incompatibility between Israeli and Russian

cultures, a claim quite widespread among Russian immigrants (e.g., Kozulin & Venger, 1995).

The implication of these differences between countries and groups is that although ethnic and national identities may be theoretically independent, the relationship between them varies empirically. Some contexts support the possibility of integration and make it easier to develop a bicultural identity, whereas others make this resolution difficult. Still others may foster separation rather than integration. When immigrants are not encouraged or allowed to retain their own culture while integrating into the new society, some are likely to feel forced to choose between the two options of separation and assimilation.

Immigrant Policies and Identity

An aspect of the setting that may interact with identity choices is the immigrant policy of the host country, in particular, the extent to which a country supports the process of integration by respecting cultural diversity. National policies supporting multiculturalism would be expected to allow immigrants the option of being bicultural, and choice of this option should have an impact on well-being (Grosfoguel, 1997; Icduygu, 1996). Canada presents an example of a positive relationship between policy and acculturation strategies. The Canadian government supports a policy of cultural maintenance among immigrant groups, and immigrants to Canada tend to prefer integration as an acculturation strategy (Berry, 1984).

The study discussed earlier (Phinney et al., 2001) examined whether immigrant policies are related to the types of the identities adopted by immigrants. The four countries or regions in the study differ substantially in their policies toward immigrants. The United States has officially welcomed immigrants and refugees in recent years, but individual states are responsible for providing needed services. California, the arrival point for most immigrants today, has traditionally supported integration through education, housing, and financial support, but attitudes vary toward specific programs, like bilingual education. Israel's immigrant policy has traditionally aimed at assimilation, but this policy is slowly being replaced by an integrationist policy. Special measures are taken to facilitate the economic, occupational, social, and cultural integration of immigrants during their first three years in Israel, and new arrivals are urged to participate in Hebrew language classes. However, new immigrants are not strongly supported in maintaining their original language and culture. Although recent legislation in Finland emphasizes integration, Finland's immigrant policy is in practice assimilationist (Matinheikki-Kokko, 1991, 1992). A housing dispersal strategy has been used for refugees, and the message conveyed to immigrants is that they should learn to act like Finns. Overall, Finnish attitudes toward immigrants have become more negative in the past 15 years (Jaakkola, 1999). The Dutch government's immigrant policy, aimed

at integration, can be characterized as outreaching and generous. This policy is being pursued by giving extra funds to schools attended by immigrant children, by providing financial and medical support, and by offering home language lessons for immigrant children. Perhaps the most typical policy measure concerns the right of parents to establish fully state funded denominational schools, such as Muslim or Hindu schools. Other striking differences between the four countries concern the percentages of immigrants. The United States and Israel have large numbers of immigrants. The Netherlands has historically been a country of immigrants, but immigration in the past century has been modest. Finland has only in the last decade had to cope with immigrants, and the numbers are small.

Findings from our study of adolescents in these four countries showed that only in California did the type of identity adopted by most immigrants parallel the state's official immigrant policy; immigrants adopted proportionally more often an integrated identity than an assimilated, separated, or marginalized identity. Finnish immigrants had largely marginalized identities, immigrants in the Netherlands had largely separated identities, and immigrants in Israel were divided almost equally between assimilated and integrated identities.

We also examined within-country variation, in order to better understand possible contextual factors. In the Netherlands, for example, the identity of the Turkish immigrants was predominantly separated, a fact that may reflect the greater concern by the government about the immigrants' ethnic identity than about their acquisition of necessary skills for integration. Thus, immigrants have been encouraged to maintain their own traditional culture rather than become Dutch (Rath, 1991). In contrast, the Surinamese tend to have integrated identities. Members of this group emigrated from the former Dutch colony in the 1980s. They preferred to move to the Netherlands, rather than stay in an independent Surinam. They already spoke Dutch, and they did not need to live together in concentrated areas. In Israel, the Russian immigrants were rather evenly distributed across all identity categories, with a particularly low percentage of respondents exhibiting an integrated identity. This result may be attributed to the views of many Russian immigrants that Israeli and Russian cultures and values are largely contradictory (Kozulin & Venger, 1995).

In summary, evidence for links between policies and ethnic identity is weak. Some studies show that the decisive factors for identity formation and psychological adaptation are not national policies, but more local circumstances (for example, dispersal versus high local concentration of a particular group), personal relationships (family, peers), and activity settings such as school and neighborhood (Crul, 2000; Gold, 1992; Keaton, 1999). These local situations may be independent of the official national immigrant policies (Oriol, 1989).

Ethnic Identity and Psychological Well-Being Among Immigrant Adolescents

Successful acculturation has been defined in terms of mental and physical health, psychological satisfaction, high self-esteem, competent work performance, and good grades in school (Liebkind, 2001). Theoretical frameworks in relation to acculturation have been borrowed from different areas of mainstream psychology, notably the stress and coping literature on the one hand and research on social learning and skills acquisition on the other.

Berry (1990, 1997) proposed that the acculturation strategies adopted by acculturating individuals are central factors moderating the adaptational outcomes of acculturation. Numerous other factors, however, are assumed to influence adaptational outcomes, including moderating factors prior to migration (e.g., age, gender, personality, cultural distance from host society), coping strategies employed by the acculturating individual, experiences of prejudice and discrimination, social support, and contextual factors like demography, immigration policy, and ethnic attitudes of the receiving society (Berry, 1990).

There has been considerable research on ethnic identity and self-esteem. Both social psychological and developmental approaches support the view of a positive relationship between these two constructs. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests strong links between group identification and self-concept. People strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, thus boosting their self-esteem. This positive identity, in turn, derives largely from favorable comparisons that can be made between ingroup and relevant outgroups. In the event of an "unsatisfactory" identity, people may seek to leave their group or find ways of achieving more positive distinctiveness (Brown, 2000). Immigrants in a new country are often viewed in negative or derogatory ways by the larger society and may take a variety of positions in the face of devaluation of their group (Liebkind, 1992). Even subjective perceptions of the ingroup as devalued do not necessarily threaten global self-esteem, if this devaluation is not attributed internally (Liebkind, 2001).

Developmental models of ethnic identity likewise suggest that devaluation of one's group need not result in self-derogation. Children who are exposed to negative stereotypes about their own group may hold conflicting or negative feelings about their ethnicity (Phinney, 1989). Children are also influenced, however, by messages received from the family and community (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993). Parental socialization regarding ethnicity plays an important role in the content and meaning children attach to their own ethnicity (Bernal, Knight, Garza, Ocampo, & Cota, 1990; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Children are influenced as well by messages from other adults and the ethnic community. A vital ethnic community provides a context in which children can form a positive sense of their group (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985; Liebkind

& Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Furthermore, an achieved ethnic identity, involving a secure sense of one's ethnicity and resolution of conflicts about one's group, is assumed to include positive feelings about one's group and to be a source of personal strength and positive self-evaluation (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997).

In summary, both social psychological and developmental perspectives suggest that a strong, secure ethnic identity makes a positive contribution to psychological well-being. Research provides support for this view; maintenance of a strong ethnic identity is generally related to psychological well-being among members of acculturating groups (Liebkind, 1996; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Phinney et al., 1997).

Furthermore, theory and research on acculturation suggest the importance of adaptation to the new society. The literature has generally shown integration, that is, simultaneous ethnic retention and adaptation to the new society, to be the most adaptive mode of acculturation and the most conducive to immigrants' well-being, whereas marginalization is the worst (Berry, 1997; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Berry & Sam, 1997; Howard, 1998). Similarly, with regard to identity, positive psychological outcomes for immigrants are expected to be related to a strong identification with both their ethnic group and the larger society. LaFromboise and colleagues (1993) suggested that a bicultural identity is the most adaptive, although the meaning of being bicultural is interpreted differently across studies. When the contributions of each type of identity (ethnic and larger society) are included as separate variables in analyses of well-being, the results vary. Research with Mexican American adolescents in the United States (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) showed that ethnic identity, but not American identity, was a predictor of self-esteem. The interactional model suggests that these relationships will be influenced by the particular settings and by immigrants' perceptions of their place in those settings.

In our study of adolescents in four countries (Phinney et al., 2001), we explored whether ethnic and national identities, separately and in combination, were related to the adaptation of immigrant adolescents. Our study revealed that immigrant youngsters with integrated identities scored significantly higher than all other groups on measures of psychological adjustment. Adolescents classified as having marginalized identities exhibited the lowest levels of psychological adaptation. The difference of the marginalized from all other categories was statistically significant for mastery and self-esteem. In sum, our research lends support to the notion that an integrated identity, that is, the combination of strong ethnic and national identities, promotes the most healthy psychological adaptation, whereas low scores on these two identities are related to poor adaptation.

The interactional model suggests, however, that these relationships will vary in relation to ethnic group and contextual factors. This is exactly what our study showed. The relationship between identity categories and behavioral problems

differed across countries. For example, in Israel, separation was related to proportionally more behavioral problems than in the other countries, whereas generally a marginalized identity was associated with proportionally more behavioral problems (Phinney et al., 2001).

Ethnic Identity and School Adjustment

An important issue for immigrant-receiving countries and for immigrant families is the ways in which children from these families adapt to schools in their new society. School adjustment is generally regarded as the primary sociocultural and developmental task for children and adolescents. Within many immigrant communities, the importance attributed to school adjustment is particularly high; newcomers tend to see schools as avenues to participation and mobility (Gibson, 1991).

Most studies exploring the role of ethnic and national identity in the educational adaptation of immigrants suggest that a bicultural orientation is conducive to better school performance (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). For example, Portes and Schauflier reported that among Hispanic immigrant students in south Florida, fluent bilingualism was associated with higher educational achievement and more ambitious plans for the future. Horenczyk and Ben-Shalom (in press) examined the role of ethnic and national identity in the psychological and school adaptation of Israeli adolescents who immigrated from the former Soviet Union. Three cultural affiliations were measured: Israeli identity, former (Russian) identity, and Jewish identity. Results showed that each of the three identities was positively related to some aspects of psychological and school adjustment; the Israeli identity was most consistently related to the immigrant's adaptation to the educational setting. Furthermore, the greater the number of positive cultural identities reported by immigrant adolescents, the higher their level of school adjustment.

Pressures toward rapid assimilation are seen by some as problematic (Igoa, 1995; Sever, 1999). Portes and Rumbaut (1990), in their review of the topic, stated that "it is not the parents most willing to assimilate—in the sense of 'subtracting' from their cultural background—who seem to motivate their children effectively, but those most inclined to reaffirm their cultural heritage within ethnic neighborhoods" (p. 214). Olneck (1995) concluded that "maintenance of ethnic loyalty, not assimilation, appears associated with stronger school performance among immigrant children" (p. 325). School performance may be enhanced when ethnic identity includes achievement as an aspect of that identity (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995; Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994). Nevertheless, many inconsistencies remain. Some studies (e.g., Nguyen et al., 1999) show school adjustment to be predicted by only one of these identities (often the national identity, but in some cases ethnic identity), whereas other studies report no relationship between adaptation to educational environments and any of the immigrant child's cultural identities (e.g., Rotheram-Borus, 1990).

The interactional approach that we propose provides a possible explanation for these inconsistencies. The process of adaptation to a new society involves intricate communication transactions in which immigrants try to make sense of what they expect and what is expected from them in the new setting (Horenczyk, 1996). For example, students respond differently to particular school environments. Birman, Trickett, and Vinokurov (in press) examined the adaptation of Soviet Jewish refugee adolescents to a school in the United States characterized by strong assimilationist pressures. They report no positive effects of biculturalism on school adjustment, but national identity predicted better grades. In our study cited earlier (Phinney et al., 2001), we found that generally (although not in all cases) both ethnic and national identities were related to school adjustment, but that the relationship was stronger with national than ethnic identity. Perhaps this reflects the fact that schools are more assimilationist than other institutions and social contexts. A stronger national identity may therefore lead to greater congruence between the immigrant and the educational setting.

Ethnic Identity and Adaptation: Additional Considerations

The relationship between identity and adaptation for immigrants is likely to be moderated by a number of additional factors, such as gender, age at time of migration, and generation of immigration (first, second, or later), that should be mentioned, although we are unable to explore them in detail in this article.

Gender has been examined in relation to ethnic identity, but research evidence on gender differences is largely inconclusive. Whereas some studies have reported differences between immigrant men and women in the strength of one or both of these identities (Abu-Rabia, 1997; Dion & Dion, this issue; Eisikovits, 2000; Liebkind 1993, 1996), many investigations have failed to find gender differences in immigrants' cultural identities (e.g., Nesdale et al., 1997; Virta & Westin, 1999). The relationships among ethnic identity, gender, and adjustment may vary in terms of the age of the immigrants. Adult females have typically been seen as carriers of the culture; in a new society, they are more likely to remain at home and maintain traditional practices; younger females, particularly those from traditional cultures that are restrictive toward women, may identify with Western values that allow women greater freedom. These differences may cause stress within the family (Liebkind, 1996).

Generation and age at time of immigration are also related to identity and adaptation. Immigrants generally arrive in a new country with a strong sense of their national or cultural origin and with varying degrees of willingness to adopt the identity of their new society (Berry & Sam, 1997; Liebkind, 2001; Phinney, 1998). Subsequent generations face differing identity issues associated with their sense of belonging to their ancestral culture and to their country of settlement. However, there is relatively little research examining these differences.

Clearly the research to date provides only a beginning to the difficult task of understanding the interactions among ethnic and national identities and adaptation. Interactional models that include gender, age, and generation, along with identity, adaptation, and key aspects of the setting, will help in determining which processes apply broadly and which are limited to particular contexts.

Conclusions and Implications

Research on immigration and identity is just beginning to go beyond single-country studies to examine these phenomena in a range of national contexts. The evidence that we have so far points to the complexity of the issues surrounding ethnic identity, immigration, and adaptation. These complex processes can best be understood in terms of an interactional model that takes into account the culture, identity attitudes, and preferences of the immigrants, the characteristics of the place of settlement, and the interaction among these factors.

The acculturation literature has shown clearly that most immigrants prefer integration (Berry & Sam, 1997), that is, retaining their culture of origin while adapting to the new culture. With reference to identity, the equivalent concept is having a bicultural or integrated identity: feeling that one is both part of an ethnic group and part of the larger society. Our own research, however, shows wide variation in the reported identity categories. Although a relatively strong ethnic identity is evident among adolescents across all groups, national identity is more variable. As a result, integration is not necessarily the dominant identity pattern. In each country, the characteristics and preferences of immigrants interact with official policies and attitudes of members of the host society as well as with the local policies actually implemented and the prevailing attitudes in the immediate surroundings of the immigrants. As a result, each of the four possible identity categories (assimilated, separated, marginalized, and integrated) are dominant in some groups and in some settings. This variety supports the two-dimensional model of ethnic identity overall and confirms the view that acculturation does not necessarily result in a linear change from separation to assimilation.

Of greatest practical importance is the question of how ethnic and national identities and the resulting identity categories are related to the adaptation of immigrants. Our study and those of other researchers support the view that a bicultural or integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are the other identity categories. Because of the importance of one's ethnic identity as a defining characteristic of minority and immigrant group members (Phinney, 1990), pressures to assimilate and give up one's sense of ethnicity may result in anger, depression, and, in some cases, violence. Immigrants prevented by an excessive dispersal policy (or strong assimilative pressures) from creating support networks and ethnic communities may also face problems of adaptation.

As to the school adjustment of newcomers, the ways in which attitudes toward cultural pluralism are or are not reflected in everyday educational practices seem to play a central role in the immigrant's adaptation. Although many educational as well as political leaders have adopted some components of the multicultural discourse, a close examination of actual educational and other policies and practices reveals that multicultural education and other multicultural policies have not been consistently implemented. Olneck (1995), for example, reviewed ethnographic research conducted in the United States and concluded that schools continue to seek to assimilate immigrant children into an assumed American mainstream. A recent study (Horenczyk & Tatar, *in press*) showed that Israeli teachers hold pluralistic views with regard to immigrants' acculturation to their new society in general but express assimilationist attitudes when referring more specifically to the educational context. Sever (1999) warned that such assimilationist educational orientations are likely to contribute to the transformation of temporary marginality, which is seen as an almost inevitable phase in the cultural transition process, into permanent nonvolitional marginality among immigrant adolescents. If schools try to hasten assimilation by discouraging children from speaking their native language at school, the result may be alienation from school.

Being bicultural also involves becoming part of the host society. The latter is an important goal for most immigrants, and attaining this goal should contribute to psychological well-being. Yet immigrants' desire to become part of the larger society will be thwarted if they meet discrimination or rejection of their efforts toward inclusion. Immigrants who are forced by circumstances to live in isolated ghettos are unlikely to be satisfied or productive members of the society. If, however, the host society is accepting of immigrants, newcomers will have the choice of being bicultural if they so desire and of proceeding at their own pace in the process of adaptation to a new country.

Clearly societies need to find a balance between encouraging cultural retention and promoting adaptation to the larger society. An important step in finding this balance would be to consider the attitudes and perceptions of the immigrants, so that their preferences can be taken into account. Because of the variability in goals of immigrants and in the ways in which they construct their own identities, it cannot be assumed that the same approaches will be equally beneficial to all groups. Rather, the literature indicates that the best outcomes will result from providing real opportunities for immigrants to make choices as to the way and extent to which they retain their ethnic identity and develop a new identity as part of their country of settlement.

The further understanding of this complex issue depends on research that can examine the generality of theories across contexts and also identify the factors that account for variability among groups and settings. With the increasing numbers of immigrants throughout the world, this research agenda should be a priority in all

countries concerned about the well-being and adaptation of their newcomers as they become part of a new society.

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