

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF ACCULTURATION: JOHN BERRY'S THEORY AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

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Abstract. This paper examines the psychological model of acculturation developed by John Berry and its relevance in contemporary research on migration, cultural adaptation, and intercultural relations. Berry's theory identifies four acculturation strategies—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—based on individuals' orientations toward maintaining their heritage culture and engaging with the host society. The study reviews recent empirical findings that expand and critically evaluate Berry's framework, emphasizing the influence of contextual factors such as discrimination, social support, identity development, and public integration policies on psychological well-being and sociocultural adjustment. Contemporary studies demonstrate that acculturation is a dynamic, multidimensional process rather than a fixed outcome, shaped by interactions between individuals and their social environments. While integration is generally associated with more positive psychological and social outcomes, its effectiveness depends on inclusive institutional and societal conditions. The paper highlights both the enduring significance and the limitations of Berry's model in explaining the diverse experiences of migrants in increasingly globalized and multicultural societies. It concludes that Berry's theory remains a foundational framework for understanding acculturation while benefiting from recent theoretical and methodological developments.

Keywords: Berry model, acculturation, multiculturalism, self-awareness, social identity

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Introduction

In the modern world, where globalization is rapidly advancing, intercultural interactions have become an increasingly important focus of psychological research. Phenomena such as migration, refugee, international student movement, diaspora communities, and the spread of multinational corporations clearly demonstrate the relevance of the acculturation process in the modern context. When individuals encounter new cultural environments, they face complex choices about how to adapt themselves psychologically, socially, and behaviorally, and reduce aggression by developing emotional intelligence (Jabbarov, et al, 2023).

Although the concept of acculturation has been studied in many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science, its psychological dimension has attracted significant scientific interest, especially in the last half century. One of the most prolific researchers in this field, Canadian psychologist John W. Berry, has developed a systematic theory of the various adaptation strategies of individuals exposed to cultural influence since the 1970s (Berry, 1997). This theory has fundamentally changed the approach of psychology to the concept of multiculturalism, and has given a strong impetus to the formation of the field of migrant psychology in particular. The aim of the study is to comprehensively examine the history, theoretical foundations, empirical evidence, modern criticisms, development perspectives and practical application areas of acculturation models. At the same time, the article analyzes the importance of acculturation theory in the context of Azerbaijani society, since Azerbaijan is historically located in a geographical space where different cultures intersect and is among the states that implement an active multiculturalism policy in the modern era.

Literature review

The term “acculturation” first appeared in American anthropology in the 1880s. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) formally defined acculturation as “the change in the original cultural



patterns of one or both groups resulting from direct, sustained contact between groups of individuals with different cultures” (Redfield et al., 1936). This classic definition characterized acculturation as a group-level phenomenon. Over the following decades, the concept of acculturation was gradually reshaped in terms of individual psychological processes. Berry led the way in examining acculturation not as a macrocultural change but rather in terms of the individual’s subjective experience, psychological adjustment, and strategies of cultural contact. This approach paved the way for the birth of the concept of “psychological acculturation.” The theoretical framework of the field of psychological acculturation has been shaped by the successive advancement of various models. In early studies, acculturation was often conceived of as a one-way process, that is, as the movement of migrants toward the host culture. According to this view, successful acculturation was considered to be complete when migrants abandoned their own culture and fully assimilated the dominant culture (Gordon, 1964).

Since the 1970s, serious objections to this one-sided assimilation perspective have begun to arise. Researchers have shown, based on empirical evidence, that migrants can maintain their cultural identity while successfully integrating into a new culture. These findings have paved the way for Berry’s multidimensional model of acculturation.

Berry explains acculturation strategies through a two-dimensional framework that arises from two main questions. The first question is: “Does the individual consider it important to maintain his or her cultural identity, values, and customs?” The second question is: “Does the individual desire to establish contact with members of the host country and to join their culture?” Depending on the combination of “yes” and “no” answers to these two questions, he has identified four different strategies: integration, assimilation, separation (or segregation), and marginalization. By placing these four strategies in a single framework, Berry has created an analytical tool that serves to understand the behavior of migrant groups in societies with different cultural contexts.

Integration strategy: In this strategy, the individual both maintains his/her own cultural identity and actively engages with the culture of the host country. Integration means that the individual lives in two cultures in complementary ways. Studies have consistently shown that this strategy is



associated with the highest levels of psychological well-being (Berry et al, 2006). Integration enriches personal identity, develops bilingual skills, and strengthens the ability to empathize.

Assimilation strategy. In this case, the individual chooses to completely adapt to the culture of the host country, abandoning his/her own cultural identity. Although assimilation offers certain advantages in terms of short-term adaptation, it has long-term. It has been found that integration lags behind in terms of psychological consequences. In particular, problems such as nostalgia, alienation, and identity fragmentation caused by cultural loss are more frequently observed in individuals who choose the assimilation strategy (Birman & Trickett, 2001).

Separation strategy: Here, the individual maintains his/her cultural identity, but tries not to establish contact with the host culture. When it is voluntarily chosen by the migrant, it is called “separation”, and when it is a result of pressure from the country of residence, it is called “segregation”. This strategy generally leads to social isolation, inability to learn the language of the country of residence, and difficulties in economic integration (Bourhis et al.1997).

Marginalization strategy: This is the least desirable of the four strategies. Here, the individual neither maintains his/her cultural identity nor assimilates the new culture. Marginalization manifests itself as a frequent identity crisis, a sense of social isolation, depression, anxiety disorders and low self-esteem (Berry and Ssaba, 2011). This condition often arises in situations where psychological trauma, social pressure and discrimination are constant.

Results

The influential study by Berry et al. (2006) called ICSEY comparatively tested the psychological outcomes of four strategies among immigrant youth. The results of this study constitute one of the strongest empirical supports of the model. Thus, young people who chose the integration strategy demonstrated the highest self-esteem, life satisfaction, positive cultural identity, and the least anxiety and depressive symptoms. Those who chose the assimilation strategy showed a moderate



degree of adaptation, but their concerns about identity loss were higher. Young people in the separation strategy reported a strong sense of ethnic identity, but they expressed that they were socially isolated. Young people with marginalization strategies exhibited the highest levels of psychological distress (Berry et al., 2006).

In their study, Nguyen and Benet-Martinez (2013) systematically examined the relationship between biculturalism and psychological adjustment using meta-analysis. They concluded that integration strategy was consistently associated with the highest psychological well-being across different cultural contexts, age groups, and migration typologies (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013).

In a study of European migrants, it was found that language skills indirectly had a significant positive effect on the acculturation process, with increasing language proficiency facilitating the transition to the strategy. These provisions highlight the need for language learning to be an integral component of acculturation programs. Research has shown that acculturation outcomes depend not only on the strategy chosen by the individual, but also on the interactions in the country of residence, the nature of intergroup relations, whether migration is voluntary or involuntary, socio-economic status, and the strength of religious identity (Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, it is more correct to evaluate acculturation strategies as dynamic processes that are contextually shaped.

The most serious criticism of Berry's model is that its two-dimensional framework cannot fully reflect the complexity of reality. Rudmin (2003) emphasized that the categories in the model's division are not always clearly distinguished from each other, and that in real life individuals often switch from one strategy to another, and even experience several strategies in parallel at the same time (Rudmin, 2003).

The first area of criticism covers measurement problems. The questionnaires used to measure acculturation strategies have largely simplified respondents' choices and have been divided into binary categories that are not consistent with them. However, individuals can simultaneously have a strong ethnic and national identity, as well as an active relationship with the culture of the country in which they live. This does not fully fit into the classical integration strategy.



The second area of criticism concerns power dynamics. This model does not sufficiently take into account the power differential between migrant groups and the host country. Acculturation is largely determined by factors such as structural conditions, discrimination, social exclusion, and legal restrictions, rather than the free choice of the individual.

Many studies model acculturation as a dynamic process and have used longitudinal studies. They have shown in their studies that most migrants tend to adopt a separation strategy in the first years of their migration, and after a certain period of time, as their language skills, social networks, and perceptions of discrimination change, they move towards an integration strategy.

Ethnic minorities living in Azerbaijan integrate easily into society while preserving their cultural identity. When viewed from the Berry model framework, this is It is observed that the Azerbaijanis, while maintaining high social ties, maintaining their language, customs and traditions, at the same time act in an integration strategy, that is, in the planning of psychological intervention programs aimed at migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities experiencing acculturation stress. Studies have shown that interventions that support the direction of integration significantly increase psychological well-being (Sam & Berry, 2010; Jabbarov, 2018).

Effective psychological intervention programs should include the following components: psychoeducation that normalizes the transition of cultural identity, services that support bilingualism, exchange programs, development of skills to manage acculturation stress, and development of strategies to combat discrimination.

Discussion and Conclusion

John Berry's acculturation model is one of the most widely accepted theoretical approaches to explaining intercultural adaptation. The model is based on the answers to two main questions that individuals give when adapting to a new cultural environment: the desire to preserve their cultural identity and the tendency to establish contact with the receiving society. As a result of this approach,



integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization strategies are formed. Modern research shows that the most successful psychological and social outcomes among these strategies are usually associated with the integration strategy. Integration allows for both the preservation of ethnic identity and active participation in the social and cultural life of the receiving society. People who choose this strategy have higher levels of life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and social adaptation.

However, recent studies have also highlighted some of the limitations of Berry's model. Critics note that although the model explains acculturation in terms of four fixed strategies, in real life the process of people's cultural adaptation is more dynamic and variable. Individuals can switch between different strategies over time and demonstrate different forms of behavior in different social environments.

Globalization, digital communication, transnational migration, and the development of multicultural societies have made the acculturation process more complex. Modern research shows that not only personal choices, but also the attitude of the receiving society, the level of discrimination, the social support system, the state's migration policy and economic opportunities have a significant impact on the adaptation of an individual. Therefore, the acculturation process is formed as a result of the interaction of both individual and socio-social factors. In general, Berry's model is still considered one of the main theoretical frameworks in the fields of cross-cultural psychology, migration psychology and social psychology. Modern research has further expanded its application possibilities by adapting the model to new social realities.

The analysis conducted shows that the acculturation model has an important theoretical significance in explaining the process of psychological and social adaptation of individuals living in different cultural environments. The model demonstrates that acculturation is a complex process that affects not only cultural change, but also personality development, psychological well-being and social relations.

Although modern scientific research confirms that the integration strategy is the most favorable adaptation model, its success directly depends on the inclusiveness, tolerance and social



support mechanisms of the receiving society. (Jabbarov, 2012). At the same time, it has been determined that in the conditions of globalization and increasing migration, the acculturation process is more flexible and dynamic.

Empirical evidence suggests that the integration strategy coincides with the highest psychological well-being outcomes for the individual, both preserving his or her own cultural identity and adopting the culture of the country in which he or she lives. At the same time, migration policy, ethnic minority rights, psychological health services, development programs, and a multicultural education system are of particular importance in this regard. Research shows that self-actualization directions should be identified for a more effective organization of the acculturation process. This will ensure that young people integrate and integrate into the cultural environment by developing self-actualization (Jabbarov and Ibrahimova, 2013; Jabbarov, 2012).

Modern criticisms have revealed the shortcomings of the model, in particular, insufficient consideration of power dynamics, static reflection of categories, and lack of context. However, these criticisms have opened the way for the development of the theory in a more subtle, contextual, and dynamic way. Azerbaijan, as a country with a historical tradition of multiculturalism and an active multicultural policy, empirically examining the Berry model in the local context provides both theoretical richness and practical policy recommendations. promises important prospects in terms of. As a result, John Berry's theory continues to maintain its relevance and, enriched by modern research, serves as a reliable theoretical basis for the study of intercultural relations, migration processes and psychological adaptation. This model can be effectively used in education, psychological counseling, social integration programs and the development of migration policy.

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