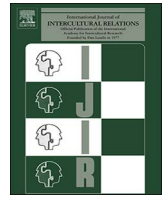


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## Acculturation, discrimination and wellbeing among second generation of immigrants in Canada

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the acculturation, experiences of discrimination and wellbeing of a representative sample of over 3000 adult second generation of immigrants in Canada; 43% were born in Canada, while 57% immigrated before the age of 12 years. Four acculturation profiles were created using two sense of belonging questions: those who have strong sense of belonging to both Canada and own ethnic group (integrated); those who have a strong sense of belonging to Canada only (assimilated); those who have strong sense of belonging to own ethnic group only (separated); and those who have weak sense of belonging to both Canada or own ethnic group (marginalised). In the study sample, 75% are in the integration group, 15% in assimilation, 6% in separation, and 5% in marginalization. Wellbeing is assessed with two questions about life satisfaction and self-rated mental health. Those in the integration group have a significantly higher level on both measures of wellbeing. The experience of discrimination is significantly associated with being in the separation group. The effect of discrimination on wellbeing varied by acculturation profile: marginalization amplifies the effect of discrimination, while assimilation mitigates it. Social and demographic factors also affect wellbeing, particularly having low levels of education, income and employment. Implications for the settlement process are suggested.

## Introduction

The experiences of the generation following immigration have become a matter of public discussion and scholarly research in the past decades in many migrant-receiving countries (Crul, Schneider, & Leslie, 2012; Kobayashi, 2008; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Most studies of the second generation have focused on adolescents who are transitioning between childhood and adulthood as well as dealing with two cultures (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Marks, Ejesi, & García Coll, 2014). The present study examines a sample (aged 15–45 years old) of those who were born in Canada (43%), and those who immigrated before the age of 12 years (57%). It parallels the study of first generation adult immigrants in Canada (Berry & Hou, 2016).

Three issues are of particular interest: the degree to which these individuals engage the larger society while also maintaining ties to their heritage cultures, thereby establishing a sense of belonging to both; their success in adapting to living in the larger society while living interculturally; and the impact of the experience of discrimination on both their sense of belonging and their wellbeing. These three issues have been central to research on acculturation for decades internationally (Berry, 2005; Sam & Berry, 2016), and in Canada (Noels & Berry, 2016). The concept of acculturation refers to the ways in which immigrants, and subsequent generations, change culturally and psychologically in order to adapt to living with the multiple cultural groups that are present in the larger

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society.

#### *How do immigrants acculturate?*

The first issue is conceptualized as the degree to which the second generation of immigrants engage the larger society and also maintain ties to their heritage cultures. Can they engage with and establish a sense of belonging to both? The concept of *acculturation strategies* (Berry, 1980) was proposed as a way to understand these various ways in which individuals seek to acculturate. Four ways have been found, based on an individual's orientation to two fundamental issues: the degree to which they value and wish to maintain their heritage cultures and identities; and the degree to which they prefer to have contact and engage with other groups in the larger society outside their own. When these two issues are crossed, four strategies are conceptualized: *integration* is the strategy when there is a desire to maintain heritage culture and identity and at the same time to engage with others outside the own group; *assimilation* is the strategy when there is little or no desire to maintain heritage culture and identity, and to engage (even merge into) the larger society; *separation* is the strategy when there is a strong desire to maintain heritage culture and identity, and to avoid engaging the larger society as much as possible; *marginalization* is the strategy when there is no desire to maintain heritage culture and identity, and also to avoid engaging with the larger society. In the present study these four strategies are based on the two dimensions of sense of belonging to their heritage culture and to the larger Canadian society. Much international research (reviewed in Sam & Berry, 2016) has shown that integration is usually the most preferred strategy, with marginalization the least preferred, and with assimilation and separation in between.

For example, a study of over 5000 immigrant youth who were settled in 13 societies (Berry et al., 2006), used cluster analysis with a combined sample of first and second generation immigrants to allocate youth to the four acculturation strategies: 36.4% were in the integration cluster, 18.7% were in the assimilation cluster, 22.5% were in the separation cluster and 22.4% were in the marginalization cluster.

In a study with over 7000 first generation immigrants in Canada, Berry and Hou (2016) found that the majority were in the integration group (over 60%). The percentage in the integration group declined from 74% to 60% with length of residence (from arrival in the period 1980–1989, to the period 2000–2012). Over the same period, assimilation increased from 18% to 34%, separation and marginalization remained low and virtually unchanged.

In the present study, we first examine the distribution of acculturation strategies among the second generation, using the concept and measure of sense of belonging to the heritage culture and to the larger Canadian society.

#### *How well do immigrants acculturate?*

The second issue examined is the degree of *wellbeing* achieved by the second generation. The general question here is how well they adapt in terms of their personal wellbeing, often termed psychological adaptation. In the present study we examine this using the concepts and measures of *life satisfaction* and *mental health*.

Considerable research has shown a link between the acculturation strategy and the adaptation of immigrants. In the Berry et al. (2006) study of immigrant youth, psychological adaptation was higher in the integration cluster than in the marginalization cluster; they were intermediate in the assimilation and separation groups. In the study of 7000 immigrants in Canada (Berry & Hou, 2016), those in the integration group had the highest scores on life satisfaction and mental health; those in the marginalization group had the lowest scores on both, with assimilation and separation in between. However, those in the assimilation group did not differ from the integration group on life satisfaction, while those in the separation group did not differ from the integration group on mental health. That study also found that with longer residence, both life satisfaction and mental health were lower. More generally, in a meta-analysis, Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013) confirmed this general relationship between integration and adaptation across 80 studies with over 8000 participants. Those who were integrated (called 'bi-cultural' in their study) had higher levels of psychological adaptation than those using other strategies.

The present study examines this relationship between acculturation strategies and psychological wellbeing among second generation of immigrants in Canada.

#### *Experience of discrimination*

The third focus of the present study is the issue of *discrimination*. In Canada, discrimination has been shown to be variable among second generation of immigrants. High levels have been found in some studies (e.g., Reitz & Banerjee, 2007), but low in others (e.g., Litchmore & Safdar, 2015). In Europe, there is also some evidence that the second generation experience high levels of discrimination (de Vroome, Martinovic, & Verkuyten, 2014). This is particularly the case among young Muslims (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012) and other 'devalued' groups (Kunst & Sam, 2014).

With respect to the relationship between discrimination and acculturation strategy, many studies have shown that the experience of discrimination influences the acculturation strategy adopted by immigrants. The experience of racism in particular discourages a sense of belonging to the receiving country (Paradies, 2006; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). For example, in the Berry et al. (2006) study of immigrant youth, those pursuing integration reported experiencing the least discrimination, while those in the marginalization group experienced the most discrimination, with assimilation and separation groups falling in between. And in Canada (Berry & Hou, 2016), discrimination was higher among those in the separation group than among those in the integration group. This finding in relation to the separation strategy has been interpreted as a form of "reactive identity" (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999); the experience of

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