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**Culture Learning, Acculturative Stress, and  
Psychopathology: Three Perspectives on  
Acculturation**

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Commentary on "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation"  
by John W. Berry

John Berry has offered a comprehensive conceptual model for the study of immigration, acculturation, and adaptation that has evolved over more than 20 years of systematic and innovative work in the field. Elaborating and refining this amalgamated framework, Professor Berry has largely demystified the acculturative process by showing that the process and product of changing cultures can be understood in familiar terms and be interpreted in the light of existing theories in mainstream psychology. These theories are referred to as "points of view" and identified as a culture learning/social skills acquisition approach, a psychological model of stress, and a psychopathology or mental disease perspective.

Berry attempts to integrate these three perspectives into his framework for acculturation research (his Fig. 2) by distinguishing them in relation to the cognitive appraisal of cross-cultural transition. At one end of the spectrum are situations that are not evaluated as posing significant challenges to the acculturating individual. In these instances, the culture learning perspective is suggested as the most useful reference. In circumstances where experiences are judged to be problematic but surmountable, the acculturative stress paradigm is considered more appropriate for analysis. At the other end of the spectrum, when acculturative experiences are appraised as debilitating and result in serious adjustment difficulties, the psychopathology model is recommended for interpretation. Although this method of classification does offer one means of integrating contemporary theories on the acculturative experience, it does not do justice to the burgeoning theory and research in the field. The psychopathology perspective may be readily seen as an extension of the core stress and coping paradigm, influenced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and applied to the acculturation domain; however, the integration of the social skills/culture learning approach within this framework is more problematic.

An historical glimpse at the theoretical developments in the three areas should elucidate this position.

Strongly influenced by psychiatry, many of the earliest works on cross-cultural transition and adaptation did assume a somewhat medical/psychopathological perspective with emphasis on the "inevitable" negative consequences of cross-cultural relocation. Oberg's (1960) original and often cited piece on "culture shock" is a prime example of this line of inquiry which highlighted the emotional distress, shock, and anxiety experienced by sojourners. Contemporary approaches, however, have framed the transition experience in more positive and adaptive terms, one of the most popular perspectives being the stress and coping framework relied on by Berry in his research on acculturative stress. This conceptual framework is suitable for a number of reasons. First, it suggests that any life change, whether positive or negative, may precipitate a state of stress and engage coping strategies. Undoubtedly, cross-cultural relocation involves a large number of life changes; however, the level of stress experienced and the coping strategies employed, depend on a number of factors, including the appraisal of the potentially stressful change situation. Second, the model also acknowledges that coping strategies may be efficacious and result in adaptive outcomes, or that they may be unsatisfactory and culminate in maladaptive or pathological consequences. As coping processes and their consequences for *psychological* well-being are central features of this model, the framework may easily encompass or subsume the more clinical approaches to "culture shock". Indeed, Berry himself has relied heavily on the Cawte, a 20 item shortened version of the Cornell Medical Index which evaluates psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, as a measure of acculturative stress (Berry & Kim, 1988).

The culture learning/social skills approach to cross-cultural transition and adaptation, however, does not sit so easily within the stress and coping inspired acculturation framework. It has emerged from a separate and distinct line of theory development and a rather independent body of empirical research. More importantly, its emphasis lies on behaviour and skills rather than affective or health outcomes. Stated in another way, the culture learning approach focuses on *social* rather than *psychological* inadequacies during culture contact and change. This line of inquiry has been exemplified by Furnham and Bochner (1986) who argue that cross-cultural difficulties arise because sojourners have trouble negotiating everyday social situations and that there is ample evidence to justify regarding second culture learning as a problem of social skills. Consequently, these researchers have highlighted the identification, measurement, and prediction of social difficulty during cross-cultural transitions and in intercultural interactions (Furnham & Bochner, 1982).

The social skills approach, in contrast to the psychopathology and stress

models of acculturation and adaptation, is designed to identify, interpret, and explain different dimensions of the adjustment process. This becomes more apparent when long-term adaptive outcomes are considered. Hammer (1987), for example, distinguished “managing stress” from “communication and interpersonal relationship skills” as domains of intercultural effectiveness. Ruben and Kealey (1979) similarly identified “psychological adjustment” and “interactional effectiveness” as outcome measures of cross-cultural adaptation. In my own research, contrasts have been drawn between psychological and sociocultural adjustment. An emerging body of research has consistently demonstrated that these two adaptive outcomes, though interrelated, are theoretically and empirically distinct. Psychological adjustment, defined in terms of psychological well-being and satisfaction and viewed within a stress and coping framework, is strongly affected by personality, social support, and life-change variables. Sociocultural adaptation, assessed in relation to skills deficits and social difficulty and interpreted from a culture learning perspective, is more typically influenced by factors such as length of time in the host culture, past experience with cross-cultural relocation, and amount of interaction with host nationals (Ward, 1996). The prediction of the two adjustment domains and the interpretation of their discrepant fluctuations over time are dependent on the use of *both* the acculturative stress and culture learning approaches to acculturation (Ward & Kennedy, 1996).

This is not to suggest that the social skills approach and the stress and coping perspective on acculturation must be regarded as completely independent. Indeed, one might attempt to reframe the culture learning approach by arguing that this is but one adjustive demand required by an acculturating individual. If this were the case, it may be suggested that the greater this demand, the greater the stress level and the increased probability of negative psychological outcomes. This line of argument gains some plausibility from findings which indicate that cultural distance (perceived difference between home and host cultures) is related to psychological, social and health outcomes (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Ward & Kennedy, 1993a,b). However, reducing a culture learning perspective to this level of analysis neglects both the intricacies and the applications of the approach, and reconceptualising its content to fit a stress and coping paradigm oversimplifies its conceptual contributions.

Professor Berry's limited appreciation of the culture learning approach is further reflected in the brief and passing mention of selection and training issues as potential application areas for his acculturation and adaptation framework. Historically aligned with a social skills approach, the area is currently booming, and not without reason (Landis & Bhagat, 1996). Failure rates of American business personnel, as evidenced by premature return

rates, have been calculated in the 15–40% range (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Copeland & Griggs, 1985), and studies have shown that only a minority (about 20%) of international development workers demonstrate a highly effective performance overseas (Kealey, 1990). Training can assist with affective, behavioural, and cognitive goals, improving work performance and enhancing the emotional satisfaction of cross-cultural sojourners. In fact, Deshpande and Viswesvaran's (1992) meta-analysis of research on training outcomes reported significant positive effects on self-development (psychological well-being), interpersonal skills (interactions with host nationals), cognitive resources (better understanding of host systems and values), adjustability (expected behaviours and culture-specific skills), and work performance. Although this line of inquiry has been based primarily on sojourners, it has potential for application to other types of acculturating individuals, including immigrants and those who live and work in multicultural environments. The benefits of theoretically informed and empirically based training programmes, largely emerging from a tradition of social skills training, should be viewed alongside other application areas of Berry's acculturation framework, such as the formulation of national policies and the initiation of institutional change, which received significant emphasis in his paper.

In conclusion, Professor Berry has presented us with an impressive and integrative model of acculturation. He has offered a comprehensive and credible framework for the synthesis of a vast literature. Strong points of his model include the macro and micro level of analysis, the precise and meticulous definition of terms, and the understanding and appreciation of a cross-cultural perspective on the empirical enterprise. The three "points of view", the culture learning, stress and coping, and psychopathology perspectives, however, are not adequately reconciled in his discussion of immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. The social skills approach represents a valuable segment of acculturation research and should receive recognition of its independent contributions to the field.

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## Rejoinder

### Constructing and Expanding a Framework: Opportunities for Developing Acculturation Research

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Reading the seven commentaries has provided me with an opportunity to reflect further on many of the issues confronting researchers and practitioners in the field of migration studies. Because the area is so complex, it is not surprising that there is great diversity in coverage and in perspectives. However, many of the points made are similar in that they all suggest emphasis, elaboration, or addition to the text and figures that I presented. My reply is that no text (no matter how generous the word allocation), nor figure (no matter how complicated), can represent every aspect of the realities of the acculturation process. I (and others) have