

ACCULTURATION PROCESS AND ETHNIC  
IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANTS IN GERMANY

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АКУЛТУРАЦИЯ И ЕТНИЧЕСКАТА  
ИДЕНТИЧНОСТ НА ИМИГРАНТИТЕ В ГЕРМАНИЯ

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**Abstract:** In the present study, we discuss psychological acculturation, by which we mean the internal processes of change that immigrants experience when they come into direct contact with members of the host culture. The model we present builds on research in the areas of social and ethnic identity. Each of these perspectives is discussed in accordance with its relevance to the acculturative processes operating in immigrants. We understand ethnic identity as a dynamic state, that is determined by three components: (1) by the degree of inclusion in the group of one's cultural origin; (2) the tendency to assimilate to the ethnic group of origin; and (3) the complementary tendency to differentiate from one's own ethnic group. Social identity conveys belonging of the individual to different social categories and the value as well as emotional significance of this membership.

We have sought to explain how the processes of social categorization, in- and out-group identification and social comparison predetermine the direction of the acculturation process and hence the intercultural interaction and well-being of the youth from immigrant backgrounds in Germany.

Results indicated that immigrants who have more identified themselves with dominant society have expressed the strong preference to integration strategies. The immigrants that had a high degree of ethnic identification have expressed the low preference to the integration as well to marginalization and assimilation. In its turn, the powerful feeling of belonging to an ethnic group and attitude towards the group promotes immigrants segregation choice.

**Key words:** ethnic and national identity, acculturation strategies, intercultural interaction, integration, segregation, marginalization and assimilation.

**Introduction:** Over the last two decades increased mass mobility, international migration and other forms of intercultural encounters have

become frequent in many parts of the world. Every year more than half a million people using illegal channels come to EU countries, and an additional 400 000 officially seek shelter on the European continent.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1990 led to a rapid increase of ethnic German immigrants. In the period from 1990 to 2000 1.630.031 German settlers returned to Germany from countries of the former Soviet Union, and during the period from 2000 to 2006 an additional 218708 ethnic Germans returned. Many of the ethnic Germans had only rudimentary German language proficiency and knowledge about the culture of the host society [17]. Many migrants don't feel that the host country is their home and are surprised why Germany plays that role for their parents [10]. Migrants often want to participate in the culture of the host people, but at the same time do not want to lose their own cultural identity. This ambiguity inevitably makes it difficult for the immigrants to adapt socio-culturally and psychologically to the new country. Although immigrants may acquire language and even obtain citizenship, they often remain «Russian» for the indigenous German population [7].

Migration produces acculturation processes in both migrants and members of the host society. Whenever entering a new social and cultural environment an individual is exposed to the process of acculturation. Acculturation is defined as „the process of cultural change and adaptation that occurs when individuals from different cultures come into contact” [9, p. 19]. Acculturation as a group level concept was later extended by psychological acculturation as a process of changes in individual self-identification, value orientations, and role behaviors [2, 3, 11]. Thus, acculturation can be thought of as both individual and group social responses to inter-cultural contacts [16].

When specifically applied to the context of international migration, acculturation refers to the process of adaptation along two dimensions: (a) adoption of ideals, values, and behaviors of the receiving culture, and (b) retention of ideals, values, and beliefs from the culture of origin [14]. Acculturation can produce either cultural dualism defined as the peaceful coexistence of cultures, or assimilation where the dominance of the host culture prevails. Successful adaptation and cultural integration depends on the immigrants' acculturation orientations (assimilation, integration, separation or marginalization). However, investigations of the dominating cultural groups showed that there are certain expectations about how a

minority should adjust to the majority. These conceptions were described as “acculturation expectations” or “expectations of acculturation” [5, 16].

Harmonious intergroup relations are most likely when members of both groups endorse integration or assimilation. Recent studies have shown that mutually endorsed integration orientations have a positive impact on the intergroup attitudes of immigrants and the host community [17, 18].

In addition to acculturation ethic and national identity is an important issue for immigrant people [15]. Ethnic self-identification of immigrants is a salient and relevant topic in the field of acculturation. National identity is conceptualized as the identification with the larger or dominant society [6]. Ethnic identity is conceptualized as “a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group” [15, p.63].

Ethnicity is an ambiguous and evaluative category focusing on the difference of self-determination and determination through others. An ethnic group may be defined as “a grouping of people who are generally recognized by themselves and/or by others as a distinct group, with such recognition occurring on the basis of social or cultural characteristics” [12, p.14]. By ethnic group, Phinney refers to individuals sharing at least one of the following elements: culture, phenotype, religion, language, kinship, or place of origin.

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 [1, 4]. Ethnic identity is composed of the cognitive, affective, and evaluative components. As a dynamic construction ethnic identity develops and changes with development in response to social psychological and contextual factors [3].

The cultural context is seen by some as of primary importance in the formation of ethnic identity [12]. Such social factors as prejudice, discrimination, cultural and social support produce different social contexts that frame the development of ethnic identity. In the situation of real or perceived discrimination some immigrants may downplay or reject their ethnic identity whereas others may assert pride in their cultural group and emphasize solidarity as a way of dealing with hostility [13].

However, some studies show that the perception of discrimination results in a decrease of the ethnic identity intensity. Other research show

that ethnic identity grows under the influence of discrimination. Ethnic identity is important in the acculturation process and in the psychological well-being of ethnic minorities [12, 14]. Research results also show that ethnic identity is related to an immigrant's positive adaptation to the new host country [12]. In the current study the intensity of ethnic identity are examined a related to acculturation strategies and hostility.

The *purpose* of present article is to explore the role of social identity including ethnic and national identities on intercultural adaptation.

### **Questions and hypothesis**

**Research Question I:** Research in cross-cultural psychology has shown that where two interacting cultural groups that have different preferences in acculturation strategies, the dominant host majority will have problems in interaction with minority groups [16]. Research shows that the host majority members can to some degree shape the acculturation orientations of immigrant groups.

*Hypothesis 1:* Acculturation goals with which a sample of the host society in Germany identifies will significantly differ from the acculturation strategies adopted by the minority group.

**Research Question II:** Research in social-cultural individual and group adaptation has focused on the description of acculturation strategies. The current research adds to this tradition by including the role of ethnic identification in the acculturation process. Previous social research has confirmed the importance of social categorization in individual adaptation to the new social-cultural conditions [5, 15]. On this basis the relationship of ethnic, national and bicultural identity to differences in cross-cultural adaptation are examined across four acculturation strategies of people with immigrant backgrounds in Germany. National identity is conceptualized as identification with the larger or dominant society [6]. However, ethnic and national identity among immigrants is assumed to be independent variables.

*Hypothesis 2:* Strong ethnic identification will be negatively associated with a strategy of integration whereas identification with the host culture is positively associated with a strategy of integration.

**Participants:** Participants were native German undergraduates from Passau University and workers in the community (N = 306; 68.3 % female and 31.7% male). An additional sample of Russian-speaking immigrant undergraduates and workers in Passau, Cologne and Hamburg (N = 84; 74.8% female and 25.2% male) participated in the survey. In the

present study, the age range was 18 to 55 ( $M = 25.53$ ;  $SD=9.56$  and the median  $MD=23.5$  years). In the German sample 67.2% were students and 32.8% full time workers. In the immigrant sample 24.7 % of the participants were students and 75.3% workers.

### **Data Collection:**

The results of this study were gathered by administrating anonymous questionnaires:

1). Scales for acculturation strategies (acculturation goals) based on the model of Berry [5]. Variables: acculturation strategies/goals – integration, assimilation, separation/segregation, and marginalization/ exclusion.

2). Scale for measuring hostility towards foreigners [17]. The 14-item Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) [14]. The instrument assesses three aspects of ethnic identity: (a) ethnic identity achievement (seven items); (b) affirmation and belonging, including positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging (five items); and (c) ethnic behavior assessing ethnic customs and practice.

3). Scale for attitudes towards other groups developed by Wenzel et al. (2003). This scale covered four facets involved in positive evaluations of an out-group: sympathy, willingness for intergroup contact, favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group and evaluation of the out-group's difference.

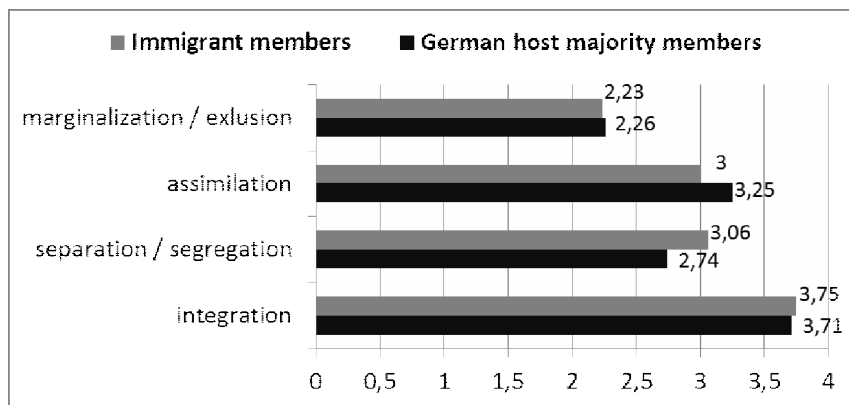
4). Identification with dominant society (national identity): was measured with social identity 16-items scale by Orth, Broszkiewicz & Schütte (1996) [16]. This scale covered three facets of social identity: in-group identity (ethnic identity), outgroup identity (national identity) and bicultural identity (simultaneous identification with the host and the heritage culture).

### **Results**

In order to investigate whether the different acculturation strategies of the Russian-speaking immigrant members corresponded to the acculturation goals preferred by the native German members, Pearson's correlations and t-tests were conducted. Results show that the acculturation goals endorsed by the German host majority for immigrants are integration ( $M= 3.71$ ) and assimilation ( $M= 3.25$ ), while segregation ( $M= 2.74$ ) and exclusion ( $M= 2.26$ ) are least endorsed. In Figure 1, the order of acculturation preferences are different for immigrant. Integration is again most strongly supported ( $M= 3.75$ ). Separation is moderately endorsed ( $M= 3.06$ ), whereas assimilation ( $M= 3.00$ ) and marginalization ( $M= 2.23$ ) are the least approved orientations. The received data attest that the

respondents disposition to intercultural reciprocity of both groups is on the rather high level (integration). However, immigrant preferred separation to assimilation ( $t = -3.926$ ,  $df = 346$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), while host participants preferred assimilation to segregation ( $t = 3.598$ ,  $df = 345$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). This result is consistent with previous research in Germany [18].

The correlational analysis largely support hypothesis 1. Pearson product correlations revealed meaningful negative relationships between immigrant acculturation orientation and host acculturation goals of exclusion, and segregation. Significant negative correlations were also obtained between immigrant acculturation orientation of separation and such host acculturation goals as assimilation and exclusion. The immigrant acculturation strategy of marginalization was negatively correlated with host goal of assimilation and positively with segregation. In turn the immigrants' acculturation strategy of assimilation was positively correlated with the acculturation goal of the host society of exclusion.



**Figure 1. Acculturation strategies of German majority members and Russian-speaking immigrants'.**

In order to understand the mutual relation specific of social categorization and acculturation processes we have used the conduct Pearson correlation between the ethnic identity, its subscales (affirmation-belonging, identity achievement, ethnic behaviors, and other group activities), national identity, attitude towards out-group and acculturation strategies/goals for each grade sample. As can be seen in Table 1, the presence of connections between ethnic identity, national identity, attitude

towards other groups and acculturation strategies/expectations as at the immigrant members so at the host society members.

Small, but significant negative correlations were found for ethnic identity with assimilation strategy and marginalization. Identification with the in-group is associated with integration strategy. National identity correlates with integration strategy. For Germans the results were opposite with German ethnic identity correlated with exclusion.

The results show also that in sample of the host society the integration strategy yields small, but significant correlations with positive attitudes towards other groups, sympathy towards the out-group, willingness for intergroup contact and favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group.

In the Russian-speaking immigrant sample assimilation strategy yield small but positive correlations with attitudes towards other groups, willingness for have intergroup contact, tolerance of out-group differences and negatively with affirmation or belonging. In the German sample the acculturation goal of assimilation positively correlates with sympathy towards the out-group, willingness to have intergroup contact and having favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group.

**Table 1.**  
**Pearson product-moment correlations between variables measuring acculturation strategies/goal and ethnic, national identity and bicultural category.**

		<i>Acculturation strategies and acculturation goals</i>			
		Integration	Assimilation	Separation/ segregation	Marginalization/ exclusion
Ethnic Identity (MEIM)	1		-0.38**		-0.28***
	2				0.23**
Affirmation or belonging (MEIM)	1		-0.34*	0.31*	
	2				
Identification with dominant society (national identity)	1	0.25*		-0.41***	
	2				
Identification with in-group	1	-0.28*			
	2				
Attitudes towards other groups	1		0.36**	-0.40**	
	2	0.31***		-0.31***	-0.39***

Sympathy towards the outgroup	1				
	2	0.33***	0.30***		
Willingness for intergroup contact	1		0.35**	-0.32*	
	2	0.22***	0.17**	-0.21**	
Favorable behavioral intentions towards the outgroup	1			-0.27*	
	2	0.15**	0.17**		-0.17*
Tolerance towards outgroup's difference	1		0.39**	-0.42**	
	2	0.26***			

**Note.** \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ . 1, Immigrant members; 2, Host majority members.

The separation strategy of immigrants is correlated negatively with national identity, attitudes towards other groups, tolerance, affirmation or belonging, willingness for intergroup contact, and favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group. The acculturation strategy of segregation by the German sample has low correlations with social-cultural factors of adaptation. There is also a negative correlation between segregation and attitudes towards other groups, and willingness for intergroup contact. Exclusion correlates with attitudes towards other groups and favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group.

For the Russian-speaking people of immigrant backgrounds the Pearson correlation analysis between subscales of social identification shows that bicultural identity positively correlate with tolerance towards out-group differences and favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group.

Simple regression analyses were used to check for predictor effects of ethnic, national, bicultural identities and psychological characteristics in the acculturation process. The results for immigrant members show (see Table 2) that ethnic identity and a positive orientation towards other ethnic groups are predictors of integration strategy. In its turn, hostility towards foreigners is predicted by lack of in-group identification and ethnic behavior assessing ethnic customs and practice.

Ethnic affirmation and belonging (including positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging) predicts the assimilation strategy. Marginalization is influenced by the negative orientation towards other ethnic groups.

The use of the two regression analyses supports a reciprocal influence of socio-cultural and psychological characteristics. A high degree of



ethnic self-identification by Russian-speaking immigrants is a predictor of the emotional stability, and hostility to foreigners.

**Table 2.**  
**Regression analysis of ethnic, national identification and psychological characteristics in acculturation process.**

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Dependent variables</i>				R <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	Integra- tion β	Assimi- lation β	Margina- tion/ Exclusion β	Hostility towards foreigners β		
Ethnic identity	-0.31				0.32	0.021
Ingroup identification				-0.33	0.39	0.035
Ethnic behavior				-0.49	0.46	0.003
Orientation toward other ethnic groups	0.37		-0.33		0.43	0.02
Affirmation and belonging		-0.36			0.14	0.040

### Summary and conclusions

The increasing interaction and mutual influence of different cultures as a result of intense immigration and other forms of intercultural encounters is a significant component of modern life. However, integration and the successful adaptation of immigrants still remains the exception rather than the rule. Intercultural studies of acculturation and national-cultural identification therefore are becoming more relevant.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the influence of ethnic and national identification on acculturation processes among Russian-speaking immigrants and a German sample. This study supported the hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the acculturation strategies adopted by minority immigrants and that of the native majority.

The German host majority preferred immigrants to be assimilated whereas the immigrants preferred a strategy of separation.

The relationship between patterns of identification and acculturation was examined. The results revealed that immigrants who have identified

with the dominant host society expressed preference for integration strategies. On the other hand immigrants with a high degree of ethnic identification expressed low preference for integration as well for marginalization and assimilation. In its turn, the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group and positive attitudes towards the group promotes the segregation choice by immigrants.

The results suggest that immigrants' assimilation is possible when they have strong positive attitudes towards other groups manifested in their willingness to have intergroup contact, and by having favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group and tolerance towards out-group differences. In German sample result shows that the same attitudes toward the out-group (sympathy towards the out-group, willingness to have intergroup contact, favorable behavioral intentions towards the out-group and tolerance towards out-group differences) predict integration as the acculturation expectation for immigrants.

The influence of the intercultural traits including cultural empathy, open-mindedness, and an orientation to action, emotional stability and flexibility on acculturation strategies was examined. The findings show that individuals high in orientation to action favored participation in the new cultural environment and at the same time disliked the strengthening of psychological ties to the culture of origin.

As a conclusion, this report emphasizes the role that group identity play in the interaction between minority and majority cultural groups. The understanding of the relationships between social identification and acculturation strategies can help society develop and apply adequate acculturation programs.

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