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The role of cultural assimilation when working with adult immigrants in social work

Jennifer Reyes

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By

Jennifer Reyes

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

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Abstract

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Introduction

Cultural assimilation is defined as an immigrants' adjustment of their attitude to the dominant culture (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015). In other words, an immigrant's acceptance and ultimate imitation of the mainstream culture. Immigrants will encounter assimilation expectations from both themselves and others. It is an inevitable part of the immigrant experience. Thus, how immigrant clients relate, navigate, and confront assimilation will play an important role in confronting their reshaped or new identities. Hence, social workers have a responsibility to understand the role of cultural assimilation when working with adult immigrants in social work.

This thesis will review the history of immigration as well as present-day immigrant populations. Additionally, classic assimilation theory has long gone hand-in-hand with immigration. However, classic assimilation does not take into account the several factors that play a part in assimilating or establishing a life in the United States. Furthermore, it does not take into account an immigrants' cultural identity. Thus, the alternative, bicultural integration identity (BII) offers a more holistic understanding of an immigrant's experience in the United States. Finally, supported by bicultural integration identity, best practices include understanding an immigrant's identities, both as they relate to their home country culture and their new identity in the United States. Thus, best practices include stepping out from the dominant White culture and viewing immigrants through a lens that includes their cultural identity and experience in their home country. Viewing immigrants from just the classic assimilation theory ultimately hinders both the immigrant and the practitioner from tapping into the strengths and tools available to multicultural clients.

Literature Review

Culture

Culture is a part of everyone's identity and it is indistinguishable from the individual (Akresh et al, 2014). Culture cannot be separated from the person, it intertwines with habits, upbringing, and convictions. Culture is the lens through which people perceive and make sense of the world. It is a set of practices and meanings, which feel natural and authentic (Akresh et al, 2014). These traditions are grounded in the history of *generations* of people (Akresh et al, 2014). The retention of a culture is carried out on the backs of whole groups of people that have "created, carried, maintained, and altered [it]" (Kitayama, 2002, p.92). The tradition of a culture has the power to predetermine actions and reactions within given contexts (Basuchoudary & Cotting, 2014). Again, not only is culture deeply ingrained in individuals, culture is hardwired in such a way that it can predict outcomes.

Cultural Assimilation

By definition, assimilation requires that an immigrant adapt to another culture. A culture which may have different laws, values, or beliefs. Thus, exchanging one culture for another. In other words, it requires that an individual give up or change a part of themselves (Akresh et al., 2014). After all, as previously stated, culture is intertwined with an individual's personality and relationship with society. Hence, by definition, complete cultural assimilation is impossible. However, that does not change the very real expectation that host countries have of immigrants and that immigrants have of themselves.

History

The United States (U.S.) was founded on immigrants. Although this saying runs the risk of becoming cliche, it remains true. Starting 20,000 years ago the first Native Americans crossed over from Asia, during the last Ice Age, to what is now called North America (History, 2018). Additionally, in the early 1600s, immigrants from Europe steadily started making their way to the United States (History, 2018). At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Africans were brought to the United States against their will and enslaved (History, 2018). Then, in 1790 Congress declared that only free Whites were able to migrate to the U.S and become naturalized citizens (Hirschman, 2014). The term “free Whites" referred to any immigrant from Europe (Yang & Koshy, 2016).

In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented Chinese immigrants from entering the U.S. (History, 2018). Afterwards, the Immigration Act of 1917 established a literacy requirement and almost completely halted immigration from all Asian countries (History, 2018). Shortly afterwards, the Immigration Act of 1924 created national quotas; the law favored Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany-- they accounted for 70 percent of all available visas (History, 2018). That same year Border Patrol was established to address illegal immigration through Canada and Mexico, which at the time, were mostly Asian immigrants that been previosuly bared (History, 2018). Overall, there was strong opposition to immigrants in the 1920s, but especially from China and Japan (Hirschman, 2014).

However, in the years following World War II, significantly less Europeans arrived (Hirschman, 2014). Instead, in the Post-1965 Wave of Imigration, most immigrants came from

Latin America and Asia (Hirschman, 2014). Within this new wave, the U.S opened its doors to Cold War refugees, which included Cuban asylees fleeing Castro's regime, and Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees (History, 2018).

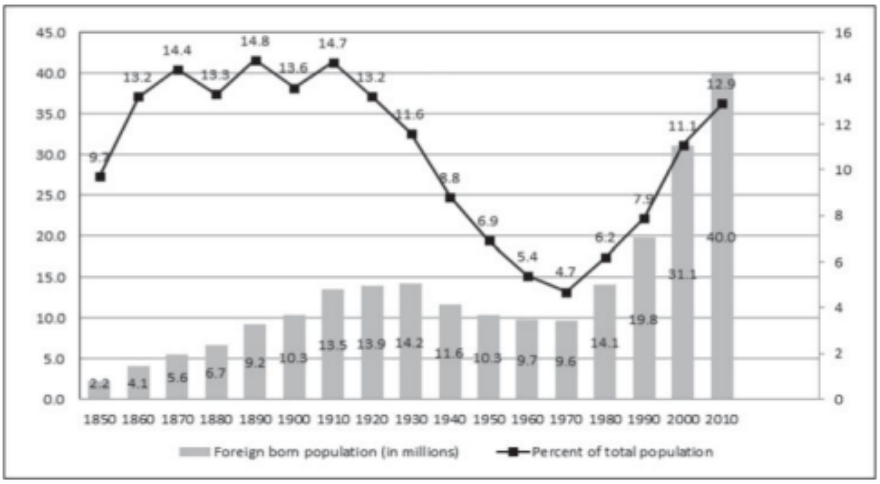
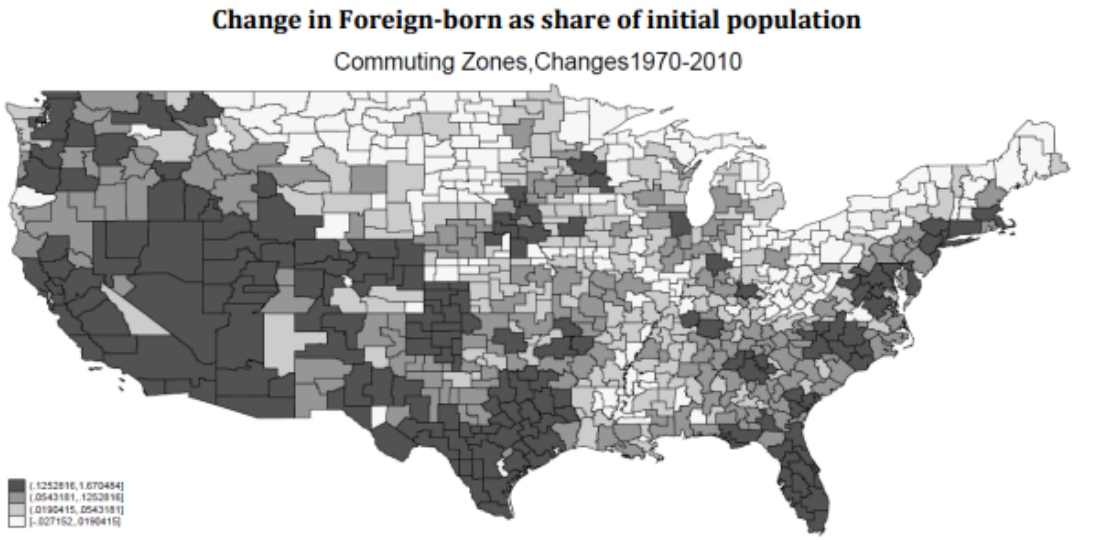


Figure 1. Foreign born population and percent of total population for the United States, 1850–2010

Source: US Bureau of Census, Census of Population, 1850–2000 (in Gibson and Jung, 2006), and American Community Survey, 2010.

It is important to note that with the "newer" waves of immigrants, in the 1970s and 1980s, most immigrants settled in the West and East coast states (Hirschman, 2014). In total, "about 40 percent of all immigrants lived in California and New York" (Hirschman, 2014, p. 4). While, in the 1990s and 2000s, "immigrants increasingly began settling in new destinations including smaller towns in the Midwest and Southeast" (Hirschman, 2014, p. 4). Overall, the opportunities available in the United States continue to draw immigrants, ranging from technology sectors and universities to agriculture, food processing, and manufacturing industries (Hirschman, 2014).



Note: Our calculations based on Census and ACS data from Census 1970, 80, 90, 2000 and 2010. The definition of the variable represented is given in the text. Units are 722 Commuting Zones.

Source: Basso, G., & Peri, G. (2015). The association between immigration and labor market outcomes in the United States

Becoming White Thesis

As previously mentioned, the term “free Whites" referred to European immigrants; yet, not everyone received the same treatment once they arrived in the United States. For example, Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants faced a large amount of stigmatization and descrimmination (Yang and Koshy, 2016). Thus, based on these experiences, the definition of White as it relates to immigrants has recently been contested. The argument is that the non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants previously mentioned were originally viewed as not White, thus as people of color, and then they eventually became White (Yang & Koshy, 2016).

If this argument were to hold validity, it would change how we understand race. It is widely accepted that race is socially constructed (Richeson & Sommers, 2016); however, that does not make it any less real. Race is a large part of how people view the world and relate to

one another. Thus, if racial categories could shift as quickly and seamlessly as the "Becoming White Thesis" (2016) suggested, it would drastically change how immigrants ultimately assimilate to the White majority. It proposes the possibility that people of color could ultimately make the jump to White. Although there is no denying that the reality of many non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants was a harsh one, nor that they were certainly lower on the totem pole compared to their Northern European counterparts, that does not mean they fell into a different racial category (Yang & Koshy, 2016).

Afterall, in addition to race being a social construct, it is also a legal construct (Yang & Koshy, 2016). This means that we reflect racial reality in official classifications. Race is not just carried on from generation to generation or person to person. It is legitimized and institutionalized. Thus, race is present in the U.S census, in naturalization legalisation, and court cases (Yang & Koshy, 2016). Yet, within these legal documents there is no evidence that at any point non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrant groups switched from nonwhite to White (Yang & Koshy, 2016). Thus, the "White" racial category cannot be easily changed, in reality, it is very rigid and it has been for centuries.

For example, the table below lists the racial categories from the U.S census, an official survey that requires that everyone checks off a race. It is evident that the categories grew over time, not because race is necessarily flexible; but, because as previously, immigrants came in waves from several different countries. All meanwhile, the White racial category did not eventually expand to include Italian or Irish immigrants because they already fell into that category. From the very first census in 1970, the European label was extended to non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants.

Table 1. Racial Classifications in the U.S. Censuses, 1790-2010

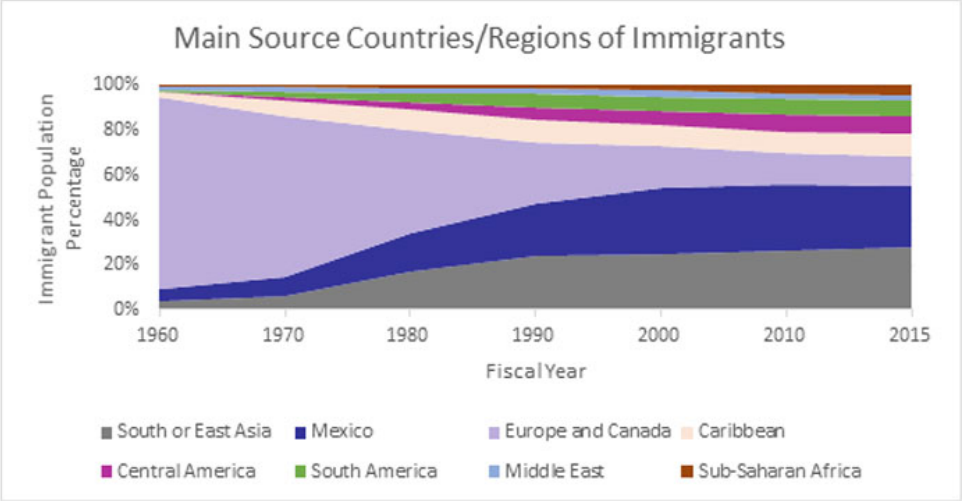
Census	Racial label	Racial Categories
1790	None	Free White males, Free White females, All other free persons, Slaves
1800	None	Free White males, Free White females, All other free persons (except Indians not taxed), Slaves
1810	None	Free White males, Free White females, All other free persons (except Indians not taxed), Slaves
1820	None	Free White males, Free White females, Free Colored persons (except Indians not taxed), Slaves
1830	None	Free White persons, Free Colored persons, Slaves
1840	None	Free White persons, Free Colored persons, Slaves
1850	Color	White, Black, Mulatto
1860[a]	Color	White, Black, Mulatto
1870[a]	Color	White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Indian
1880[a]	Color	White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Indian
1890[b]	None	White, Black, Mulatto, Quadroon, Octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, Indian
1900	Color or race	White, Black, Chinese, Japanese, Indian
1910[c]	Color or race	White, Black, Mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Other
1920	Color or race	White, Black, Mulatto, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other
1930	Color or race	White, Negro, Mexican, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other
1940	Color or race	White, Negro, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, Korean, Other races-spell out in full
1950	Race	White, Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Other races-spell out
1960	Color or race	White, Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Part-Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo, (etc.)?
1970	Race	White, Negro or black, Indian (Amer.), Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Other (Print race)
1980	Race	White, Negro or black, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian (Amer.), Asian Indian, Hawaiian, Guamanian, Samoan, Eskimo, Aleut, Other

Source: Yang, P. Q., & Koshy, K. (2016). The "Becoming White Thesis" Revisited. *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*, *8*(1), 1.

Immigration Today

Just as immigration is a part of the United States' history, it is also currently a large part of its political and social landscape (Hirschman, 2014). Today, the immigrant population is made up of naturalized citizens, legal noncitizens, unauthorized immigrants, and refugees (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Immigrants make up about 14.5 percent of the total population (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). As of 2015, half of current immigrants were from South or East Asia and Mexico, (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). In comparison, Europe and Canada made up 11 percent (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). While immigrants from the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa made up for 6 percent of the immigrant population (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). People from just about every country, however small or large that population is, call the United States home. Not only does the United States have a substantial immigrant population, it is extremely varied and diverse. "Immigration is, perhaps, the most distinctive feature of American identity. Immigration has had a disproportionate effect on the demographic size, ethnic diversity, culture, and character of American society" (Hirschman, 2014, p. 14).

Furthermore, modern day immigrants confront a very different reality compared to their predecessors. Today, immigrants are able to be a part of two different cultures simultaneously (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015). They can be in continued contact with family and friends from their home country while creating a new life in the U.S. This is a relatively new phenomenon due to the high access to communication technology around the world. Furthermore, travel is relatively quick and affordable to an extent. Thus, many immigrants can return to their home of origin if they wish.



Source: *National Conference of State Legislature*

Yet, at the same time they are still navigating the age-old stressors: legal status, discrimination, language barriers, values, food, and cultural differences (Espinosa et al., 2018). The road to calling a new country is home is not an easy one, even with the advantages of social media and other communication tools. Around the world, more and more cultures are coming in contact with each other. This is especially the case in the United States where one in five people are either a first or second generation immigrant. As a result, entire societies will have to address immigration, which has been highlighted as "one of the most important challenges' faced by western polities[countries]." (Grajzl et al., 2018, p. 97).

Relevance

The reality is that by the year 2044, White Americans will make up only half of the population (Tavernise, 2018). Meanwhile, the portion of the population that is leading that demographic change are modern day immigrants and their immediate descendents. As previously highlighted, there are multiple large ethnic populations across the United States (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez, 2015). The United States is by no means a homogenous country with a

straightforward history with immigrantion. Thus, immigrant clients will have a lot to unpack and many questions as they navigate their ethnic identity and eventually their emerging American identity. Throughout this process, they will confront assimilation one way or another; it is inevitable. Thus, since immigrants are such a prominent part of the population, social workers should have an understanding of what role cultural assimilation plays when working with adult immigrants.

Classic Assimilation Theory

It is important to note that the classic assimilation theory differs from the definition of cultural assimilation. As previously mentioned, assimilation is defined as an immigrant´s adaptation to the host culture (Vasquez, 2011). The classic assimilation theory takes it a step further and proposes how adaptation occurs and its importance. It assumes that immigrants will ultimately take on the host country's values, traditions, and mainstream culture (Vasquez, 2011). It is the only outcome possible and the best option for both the host country and its immigrant population (Vasquez, 2011). Additionally, it approaches assimilation from a white racial framework (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). In other words, it concludes that adapting to the United States' White majority is not only the sole option, it is the best option because minority groups are subpar (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). This is because the classic assimilation theory operates from the racial hierarchy that was established back in the 1600s that centered itself around slavery (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). This racial hierarchy placed Whites at the top and enslaved Africans at the bottom. Thus, whenever "new" groups arrived in the United States, they were viewed through this same lens of white superiority and were placed somewhere on the white-to-black hierarchy (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). In other words, the classic assimilation theory is not unbiased, it is a "commonplace measuring stick of social acceptability for centuries…

constructed by Whites from within this centuries-old framework of racial oppression" (Feagin & Cobas, 2008, p. 40). It perpetuates the White dominant society's assumptions regarding minorities; it does not have their best interests at its core (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). It is outdated and rooted in deep racism. It continues to push the idea that any group that is not White is inferior (Feagin & Cobas, 2008). Thus, they must adapt to the White dominant group because any traits or traditions out of the established "norm" are "foreign, uncivilized, and physically ugly" (Feagin & Cobas, 2008, p. 40). This assumption concludes that immigrant groups need to be changed because they are inherently flawed, that there is only one acceptable culture (Vasquez, 2011). It is evident that overall, the classic assimilation theory ignores the very population it targets. It approaches entire groups from a centuries-old dominant white lens. Furthermore, this theory ignores several crucial factors such as gender, class, and host country (Vasquez, 2011). Clearly, this theory is a "one-way adaptation to white hegemony" (Vasquez, 2011, p.70). It seeks to continue patterns of oppression while ignoring the individuals at hand. The classic assimilation theory is entirely based in an outsider's perspective.

Assimilation Factors

Assimilation through the lens of the classic assimilation theory is clearly problematic and outdated. However, it cannot be immediately dismissed because although it is ungrounded, it is still widely circulated. Immigrants are still expected to integrate or assimilate to mainstream American culture, which is the basis of the theory. Yet, it is evident that there are several internal and external factors that influence an immigrant's inclination to call the United States home in more than just the sense of word. Thus immigrants *will* face their own expectations of assimilation. According to van Oudenhove and Benet-Martínez (2015), there are two important questions that will play a large part in the ultimate outcome: What is the value of retaining my

cultural heritage? What is the value of maintaining relationships with other groups? These questions highlight the two different convictions: an ethnic identity and an American identity. Ultimately, how these identities relate to each other or even contradict each other will play a large role in assimilation. Ideally, for overall better outcomes, a successful integration of both cultures is essential (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015). Afterall, both cultures are a part of an individual and their lived experiences. Thus, overall different factors have a role to play in cultural assimilation when working with immigrants, such as home country, English language acquisition, gender roles, skin tone, and individual and external factors.

Home Country

Prior to analyzing the factors that influence assimilation in a host country, it is important to note that assimilation starts prior to arrival. This is often tied to country of origin and an immigrant's social class and the opportunities they had access to while there. First, there is human capital, such as education and occupational skills in home countries, that are not lost upon arrival to a new country (Akresh et al, 2014). These skills ease the transition process because they provide a pathway into mainstream culture through the workforce. Additionally, the availability of English, through classes or media, means an earlier exposure to English and thus a couple steps ahead upon arrival (Akresh et al, 2014). Other factors that determine immigrants' immediate experience upon arrival include region of origin (Akresh et al, 2014). For example, a refugee that spent the majority of his life in a refugee camp has significantly different opportunities and experiences in comparison to someone who lived in a city. Thus, "pre-migration characteristics determine intermediate migratory outcomes" (Akresh et al, 2014, p.202). Immigrants do not start off with a clean slate upon their arrival to the United States, they

have a lifetime of experiences and potentially transferable skills. This can have a significant impact on how they experience the United States and the opportunities that are available to them.

English Language Acquisition

Continuing along the lines of English acquisition and its role, there is no denying that English is the language that the U.S operates in, regardless of the fact that the U.S does not have an official language. "English language ability is a critical link (though not necessarily the most critical indicator) in the process of social and cultural assimilation" (Akresh et al, 2014, p. 202). English connects immigrants to the greater community; however, in order for that to be true, it must be spoken in order to experience cultural and social integration (Akresh et al, 2014). It is entirely possible for someone to have the ability to speak English, but not use it, and thus English could play a minimal role in their assimilation. However, it is important to note that there are "more opportunities there are to speak one's native language the lower the odds of becoming proficient in and using English (Akresh et al, 2014, p. 202).

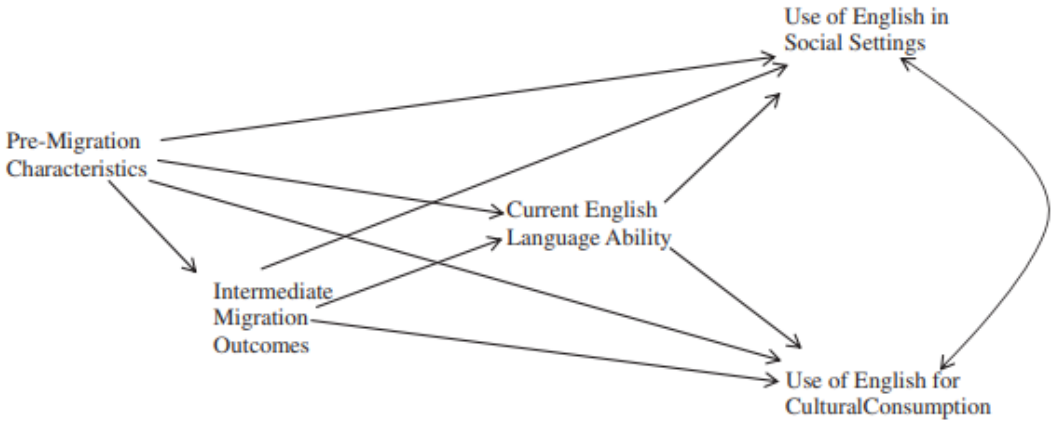


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of English language acquisition and its effects on social and cultural assimilation.

Source: Akresh, I. R., Massey, D. S., & Frank, R. (2014). Beyond English proficiency: Rethinking immigrant integration. *Social Science Research*, *45*, 200-210.

Furthermore, ‘findings suggest that failing to adopt essential skills necessary for integration such as English language proficiency is also related to lower levels of life satisfaction” (Marsiglia et al., 2013, p. 7). Clearly, English plays a bigger role than just communication-- it connects immigrants to public life and increases overall life satisfaction.

Gender Roles

Additionally, gender roles also have an important role to play in cultural assimilation. “Immigrants from a culture with very distinct sex roles who migrate to a culture with greater gender equality often experience acculturation distress” (Chudek, 2015, p.176). Drastically distinct gender roles may be challenged in the United States. Spouses may be expected to fulfill different duties and children may not be as subjected to gender roles in the same ways as origin countries. This shift can complicate adjustment to life in the United States since American expectations could potentially conflict previous held beliefs or values. Along the line of gender, women are the carriers of culture (Vasquez, 2011). Culture continues down from mothers to their children. Thus, the ties and relationship that a mother has with her origin country or ethnicity directly impacts how or if that tradition will be carried down through generations.

Skin Tone

It is not a surprise that the color of someone’s skin matters how they walk through public life. However, someone’s skin tone can go as far as playing an essential role in ethnic retention or assimilation. Vasquez determined that lighter skin people are more likely to adapt to mainstream American culture (2011). For example, Mexican Americans with darker skin more regularly identified as Latino even after generations of living in the United States (Vasquez, 2011). Vasquez argues that this is in part due to the fact that lighter skinned people are less restricted to the negative stereotypes associated with ethnic identities (2011). Individuals that

appear “whiter” or even white are allotted some or all of the privileges reserved for White Americans. In other words, physical appearance plays a major role in determining not only how, or if, someone can claim their American identity, but if others will allow that person to do so. Finally, lighter skinned immigrants have a greater say in what role their ethnicity will play in both their public and private lives.

Individual Factors

Finally, there are a handful of other factors that impact an individual’s assimilation, “empathy, respect, interest in local culture, flexibility, tolerance, technical skill, open-mindedness, self-confidence, sociability, positive self-image, and initiative” all play a critical role (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015, p. 50). In other words, the individual has to play an active role in becoming a part of their host community. They have to take an interest in the new country and continuously push themselves out of their comfort zone. Additionally, everyone is unique; character or personality traits will play out differently and create different experiences and perspectives. After all everyone has their own lived experiences, identities, and varying levels of cultural attachments (Vasquez, 2011).

External Factors

Immigrants’ perceived attitudes of the host country or surrounding community impacts their adaptation to their new home (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015). In this way “immigrants adjust their attitudes to expectations of majority, which influences functioning” (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015, p.408). Perceived attitudes towards immigrants, negative or positive, impact how the level of welcome immigrants feel and thus how comfortable they may feel in their new host country. After all, immigrants are not isolated to just their experience and expectations, they are in contact with their host society which can viewed through Bronfenbrenner’s ecology perspective

(Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015). On a broader scale, human development occurs within the "'changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal'" (Tizmann & Fulingni, 2015, p. 408). Thus, immigrants' response to their new host country will also be influenced by the systems they encounter and ultimately become a part of.

Alternative

Bicultural Integration Identity

Bicultural Integration Identity (BII) offers that alternative approach suggests that individuals can switch between cultures, so they do not have to choose between a native identity and a global or multicultural identity (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez, 2015). BII acknowledges that people can belong to more than one culture simultaneously. It considers how clients view themselves in relation to the society in which they live (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez, 2015). There are three types of biculturalism: blended, separated, and alternating (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez, 2015). Individuals with a blended identity embrace their biculturalism, they identify with their both ethnic background and the mainstream culture they reside (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015). Thus, they are reluctant to pick one culture or identity over the other (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015). On the other hand, alternating identities do not offer the same fluidity as blended identities. The two cultures are distinct and separate (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015). In other words, individuals with alternating identities see their two cultures as conflicting and in tension with one another.

Finally, individuals with separated identities solely identify with their ethnic culture and do not feel that they have a space in mainstream society (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015).

The other side to this framework is how an individual's identity shapes and is shaped by mainstream society. People with a high bicultural identity, previously identified as blended and alternating identities, experience a protective factor to their identities (Mok & Morris, 2013). They are more likely to be grounded in their identities, they understand where they stand in relation to the world and their place in it. Meanwhile individuals with a low identity integration are more likely to experience cultural disidentification, which is defined as a "motive to defy a group's norms or avoid being associated by others with the group" (Mok & Morris, 2013, p. 176). In other words, the ethnic or mainstream groups a person belongs to can be in conflict with their identity, they may wish to not be a part of one of those groups. Additionally, "these individuals have more negative acculturation experiences, such as discrimination" (Mok & Morris, 2013, p. 176). Thus, low BII individuals experience mainstream culture very differently than high BII individuals;their cultural identity is threatened more easily (Mok & Morris, 2013). The common factor among low and high BII individuals is the creation of self-protection motives (Mok & Morris, 2013), which are carried out differently and thus vary in effectiveness.

Overall, biculturalism has a lot of moving parts to it and it focuses on an individual's identity and experiences. By looking at these it is evident that an individual's ethnic identity is just that, part of their identity. It cannot be dismissed or erased, instead it ought to be incorporated into social work practice. Ethnic identity can serve as a protector against "mental health issues and predict positive psychological and sociocultural adjustment" (Espinosa et al, 2018, p. 156). When an individual has a strong ethnic identity, it increases their self-esteem which plays out as an increased ability to cope with the stressors they will certainly be exposed

to (Espinosa et al, 2018). Afterall, immigrants can experience an abundance of stressors as they are introduced to a new environment, language, and customs (Hodges, 2013). Additionally, mental health takes a hit; immigrants experience confusion, anxiety, depression, marginalization, alienation, and identity confusion (Hodges, 2013). It is the social worker's responsibility to be "aware of ethnic identity's stress reducing potential, and encourage their clients to maintain or reaffirm their ethnic identity when struggling with a large amount of perceived stress" (Espinosa et al 2018, p. 160). Thus, creating a space for a client's ethnic identity is a powerful tool that can ultimately shape their perception of their host society and how they fit into it.

Best Practices

Mental Health and Life Satisfaction

Overall, retaining an ethnic or cultural identity is beneficial to immigrants. Through this retention they can eventually identify with two cultures simultaneously, and as bicultural individuals, they are more likely to have better mental health outcomes and greater life satisfaction (Flavio, 2013). These are psychological strengths that can serve as defenses against future life stressors (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). Thus, social workers should not ask or expect clients to give up a part of their identity. Instead, social workers ought to have a foundation in assimilation factors and how clients will have a range of experiences. As discussed above, a client's experiences in their home country will carry over into life in the United States. Social workers need to inquire about those experiences in order to get a comprehensive picture of who a client is outside of their new immigrant identity in the United States.

Therapy

Social workers will encounter immigrant clients in just about every context, including in a therapeutic setting. With this in mind, it is important to note that "modernist/scientific

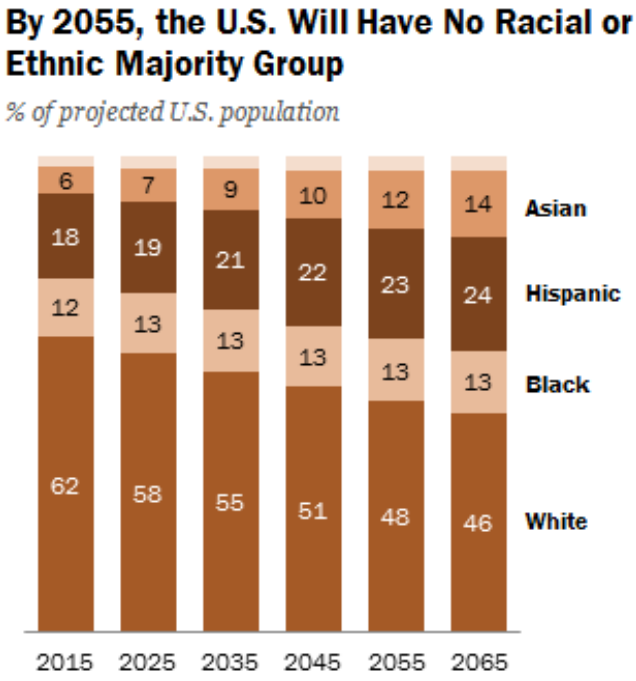
therapies have been particularly harmful to clients of color; they are often pathologized due to not living up to white" (Nyland, 2006, p. 35). Thus, without meaning to, therapists will promote racist practices (Nyland, 2006). This occurs when certain traits are viewed as social and historical (Nyland, 2006). Thus, malleable or not essential to an individual's wellbeing or identity. When in reality they are *essential* characteristics of one or another group of people (Nyland, 2006). Nyland proposes Narrative therapy as an approach that involves listening respectfully and disrupts "dominant cultural norms that are disqualifying of people's lives" (2006, p. 36). It normalizes their experiences, instead of alienating clients because they do fit into the dominant culture.

Critical Multiculturalism

Critical Multiculturalism key aspects includes "critical multiculturalism, critical whiteness studies, which explores the political, social, and historical situatedness of White ethnicities, and the hegemonic processes, which lead to their universalization and normalization" (Nyland, 2006, p. 28). It explores and acknowledges the dominant White society, after all, both practitioners and clients operate within it. No one is independent of the dominant culture and critical multiculturalism seeks to make it seen. Additionally, critical multiculturalism focuses less on "essential differences and more out of all our different histories, life experiences, languages, family and peer cultures, discourses, and values allowing one to illuminate the ways that differences are socially and politically constructed" (Nyland, 2006, p. 28). Practitioners that operate from critical multiculturalism advocate for the recognition of intersectionality and make visible the historical and social construction of whiteness. This promotes the ability to interact and conduct therapy effectively with people from different cultures.

Dominant Majority

As previously mentioned, different cultures are in constant contact with others thanks to modern technology and access to quick travel. Thus, "societies are becoming more multicultural, with less dominant majority cultures and sometimes fading majorities" (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez 2015). In other words, the idea of assimilating to the majority makes less sense as the United States moves toward being an interracial and interethnic society. The "dominant" group is becoming less clear in terms of numbers. As previously mentioned, in the near future White Americans will become a minority in terms of numbers. Thus, it would not make sense to expect all other groups to assimilate one specific group, which is shrinking in size, but one that historically excluded minorities.



Source: Pew Research Center (2015). Chapter 2: Immigration's impact on past and future u.s population change.

Thus, when there is not a clear "dominant" group, to which culture are immigrants expected to acculturate to? (van Oudenhove & Benet-Martínez, 2015). If we still expect immigrants to imitate White lifestyles or practices, social workers would only just continue to the promotion of classic assimilation, which is ultimately one dimensional and excludes the immigrant identity. Meanwhile, there is not an expectation for the current residents of a host country to shoulder some of the work involved in introducing new cultures. The burden of "fitting in" is placed solely on the immigrant. Thus, social workers should carry some of that burden and learn about clients' background and the cultures that they come from.

Conclusion

Ultimately, as social workers we are guided by the NASW Code of Ethics. There is no doubt that it is our responsibility to advocate and serve our immigrant clients in a way that promotes their self-determination. Immigrant clients are one of our most vulnerable populations and it is our duty to promote "sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and culture and ethnic diversity" (NASW, 2021). It is in our Code of Ethics; it is not a matter of if we should do it, but of *how* we will do it. It is in the best interest of our immigrant clients to not only be familiar with their ethnic backgrounds, but also with how each individual incorporates it into their daily lives.

Social workers' responsibilities include promoting immigrants' values and strengths as they find their place in American society. After all, "immigrants and their children are over-represented in a broad range of rare achievements, including Nobel Prize winners, top scientists, American performing artists, and other contributors to the American creative arts" (Hirschman, 2014). In other words, although immigrants face many unique challenges, they have also reshaped American culture. In this way immigrants are inherently a part of American

society, they are as American as apple pie. It is social workers' responsibility not only to immigrant clients, but to the greater American society, to continue to create space for immigrants and the richness and knowledge they bring.

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