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The New Immigration and Ethnic Identity

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THE NEW IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

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KEY MESSAGES

This knowledge synthesis examines the literature on acculturation and the social identities of post-1965 immigrants in Canada and the US. The report conveys the following key messages:

- The assimilation or integration of immigrants has become more irregular and problematic as the composition of immigrants and their children has shifted from European to non-European countries. The racial background of post-1965 immigrants complicates the acculturation process.
- The context of immigration is a major determinant of the successful adaption of immigrants. This includes the racial status of immigrants and their reception in their host communities.
- The social identities of immigrants are a fundamental dimension of their adaptation, since these identities reflect their sense of attachment to or alienation from the mainstream culture. Promoting the attachment of immigrants and their children is essential for preserving social cohesion.
- The ethnic/social identities of immigrants develop through their interactions with members of the host community. When these interactions are positive, immigrants tend to assimilate or integrate. When negative, immigrants feel marginalized or develop racialized identities that associate with ethnic balkanization and intergroup conflict.
- First generation immigrants tend to prefer national-origin identities (e.g., Chinese), while their children tend to adopt hyphenated (e.g., Chinese-Canadian) identities. This suggests the acculturation of immigrants is an intergenerational process.
- For both first and second generation immigrants, a national-origin label remains important. Few second generation immigrants are adopting a purely national identification (e.g., Canadian), which suggests that the process of acculturation is ongoing.
- Strong ethnic identities are not incompatible with a sense of belonging to Canada.
- Bicultural identities (e.g., Chinese-Canadian) are common among the second generation. There are two explanations for this pattern of self-identification. First, Canada’s multicultural environment encourages the simultaneous retention of cultural distinctiveness and a sense belonging to the host nation. Second, some racial minorities are hesitant to “drop the hyphen” because of subtle perceptions of being less “Canadian” than their White counterparts.
- A strong ethnic identity and a weak “Canadian” identity does not necessarily imply a lack of incorporation. For some immigrants, identifying as “Canadian” simply has little concrete meaning.
- The prospects for integration depend on socioeconomic mobility. Limited economic resources and opportunities tend to increase the likelihood of assimilation into an underclass and the adoption of “oppositional” identities.
- The experience of racism or discrimination discourages a sense of belonging to the host nation. This experience can also lead to “politicized” identities as immigrants react to exclusion through in-group solidary and a rejection of the mainstream.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary

This knowledge synthesis provides an up-to-date assessment of how the acculturation experiences of the children of immigrants influences their social identities. While other factors affect identity development, this synthesis focuses on the interface between identity and intergroup relations. Most post-1965 immigrants encounter economic circumstances and a “color” barrier that complicate the acculturation process. How these structural forces affect the pathway towards becoming a Canadian or an American is a far-reaching issue. For groups that are able to achieve economic parity with Whites and encounter little racism, their “ethnicity” could recede across generations. Hence, recent immigrants could eventually adopt unhyphenated identities based on a sense of belonging to the host community. In multicultural countries, however, such identificational assimilation is unnecessary for successful incorporation. The children of recent immigrants can instead opt for bicultural identities. The troubling possibility are situations where barriers to immigrant incorporation motivate a reactive ethnic solidarity. In these cases, ethnic identity could reflect social divisions and perhaps even ethnic conflict within society.

Key Findings

- First generation immigrants tend to prefer national-origin identities (e.g., Chinese), while their children tend to adopt hyphenated (e.g., Chinese-Canadian) identities. This suggests the acculturation of immigrants is an intergenerational process.
- Bicultural identities (e.g., Chinese-Canadian) are common among the second generation. There are two explanations for this pattern of self-identification. First, Canada’s multicultural environment encourages the simultaneous retention of cultural distinctiveness and a sense belonging to the host nation. Second, some racial minorities are hesitant to “drop the hyphen” because of subtle perceptions of being less “Canadian” than their White counterparts.
- For both first and second generation immigrants, a national-origin label remains important. Few second generation immigrants are adopting a purely national identification (e.g., Canadian), which suggests that the process of acculturation is ongoing.
- The experience of racism or discrimination discourages a sense of belonging to the host nation. This experience can also lead to “politicized” identities as immigrants react to exclusion through in-group solidarity and a rejection of the mainstream.

Background

Prior research questions whether the model of acculturation that European immigrants followed is pertinent for those of the new immigration (Alba and Nee 1997). The “new immigration” refers to the influx of immigrants from non-European countries (visible or racial minorities) that followed the repeal of racist immigration policies in Canada and the US in the 1960s (Massey 1995). Most previous studies on the adaptation of immigrants focus on indicators such as English/French language use, socioeconomic mobility, and spatial assimilation (Wu, Schimmele, and Hou 2012). These are no doubt pertinent factors, but patterns of social affiliation are another aspect of the adaptation of immigrants. Social identities are a reflection
of intergroup relations and associate with the process of acculturation. Ethnic identity and identificational assimilation (e.g., identifying as “Canadian”) are intercorrelated as these outcomes relate to the incorporation of immigrants into the mainstream and their personal commitment to the host community/nation.

This empirical overview focuses on the role of intergroup relations and the context of immigration in the production of social identities. First, do external factors such as discrimination and racism trigger the development of “reactive” in-group identities among racial minorities? Second, do strong in-group identities correlate with feelings of alienation or a weak sense of belonging to the host nation? Third, is there a relationship between ethnic identity and behavioral participation in Canadian/American culture? The process of acculturation can be smooth or turbulent; this depends on the characteristics of immigrants, life-stage at immigration, and the social context of re-settlement (Wu et al. 2010). The theory of segmented assimilation provides a framework for interpreting these differences (Zhou 1997b). This theory posits three possible modes of acculturation. First, the classic straight-line mode of acculturation, which leads to the adoption of “Canadian” or “American” identities across generations. Second, an obstructed mode of acculturation, which leads to assimilation into an underclass and the development of oppositional racial identities. Third, a mode of adaptation that depends on in-group solidarity (e.g., ethnic enclaves), leading to strong in-group social identities or bicultural identities if the experience of discrimination is low.

Main Findings

Ethnicity and ethnic identity should be interpreted as products of intergroup relations. Too often ethnicity is considered to be a cultural phenomenon. Ethnicity should not be reduced to culture for two reasons. First, the assumption that a common culture is the basis for ethnicity ignores the cultural variation that exists within ethnic groups (Chandra 2006). This is particularly the case for national (e.g., Chinese) and pan-ethnic groups (e.g., Asian), which are quite heterogeneous with regard to cultural norms and behaviors. In addition, people that share the same “ethnicity” have different levels of affiliation with their ethnic group, ranging from none to a lot. This includes variation on indicators of culture such as language use, traditions, values, and behavioral norms. Second, ethnicity has little meaning in homogeneous societies; it is a social phenomenon that is exclusive to heterogeneous societies. The classic statement from Barth (1969) is that ethnicity represents the boundaries between groups not the “cultural stuff” inside groups. In this perspective, intergroup contact (power relations) is the primary determinant of ethnic identities. For racial minorities, ethnic identity is an ascribed label that connotes their social distance from Whites.

Ethnic identities are not incompatible with national identities. A major concern in the literature is whether cultural maintenance discourages a sense of belonging with the host nation. This corresponds to the question of whether ethnicity among recent immigrants from non-European countries will fade across generations as occurred for European-origin immigrants. Patterns of self-identification suggest that attachment to the host nation increases across generations. First generation immigrants, regardless of length of residence, tend to prefer a nation-origin label. This largely reflects their foreign-born nativity and socialization. In the 1.5 and second generations, there is an increase in identificational assimilation. For these generations, however, an ethnic affiliation remains important. Being domestic-born has stronger effects on the odds of claiming an unhyphenated or hyphenated label than does length of
residence (Rumbaut 1994). A key feature of the new immigration is the potential to retain ethnic identities alongside national identities. The modal path of acculturation in the second generation is the development of bicultural identities. Having a Canadian identity may indeed involve a multicultural ethos that fosters cultural distinctiveness.

The acculturation process is on-going. Since 99 percent of racial minorities in Canada are first or second generation immigrants, the process of acculturation is incomplete, since ethnicity is not expected to fadeout before the third generation. At this point, unhyphenated identities remain rare among the second generation. The literature suggests that race is a major factor in the acculturation process. Dropping the hyphen is, perhaps, no longer necessary or desirable. The reasons the children of European immigrants lost their ethnicity are themselves unclear. For recent immigrants, personal preferences and a greater tolerance for cultural distinctiveness in host communities implies that hyphenated identities could persist past the third generation. In addition, internalized perceptions of difference constrain racial minorities from dropping the hyphen and adopting straight “Canadian” or “American” identities. The relationship between a sense of belonging to an ethnic group and adopting an ethnic label is not clear-cut. For example, some minorities adopt an ethnic label despite little emotional identification with the ethnic group (Hiller and Chow 2005). That is, despite feeling more “Canadian” or “American” than ethnic, racial minorities are adopting hyphenated identities because of racial discourses that make them feel less Canadian or American than Whites.

Segmented assimilation is occurring. The relationship between acculturation and the social identities of immigrants is complex, and there are several possible outcomes. The modal outcome is integration. This is a positive indication that numerous immigrants are able to maintain an ethnic identity and incorporate into the host nation. But not all immigrants are willing or able to integrate. The reasons are unclear, but a national-origin identification (e.g., Chinese) is not uncommon in the second generation. In models of acculturation, this represents a separated outcome. It cannot be assumed that a strong ethnic identity in conjunction with a weak national identity (e.g., Canadian) necessarily reflects alienation from the host nation. There are other forms of social affiliation that connect immigrants to the host community besides identificational assimilation. It could be that labels such as “Canadian” are simply too amorphous to resonate for some immigrants. That said, it is also possible that some second generation immigrants adopt a nation-origin label because of being made to feel less Canadian than Whites. There is evidence that some people adopt racialized labels because of their incorporation into an underclass.

Racism influences social identities. Historically, ethnicity has functioned as a basis for social stratification in Canada and the US. This has two major implications for the social identities of immigrants. First, the dominant group places immigrants into ethno-racial categories, which constrains their choices of self-identification. Most US Blacks cannot and do not claim to be “White,” even though most have some White ancestry. This is because society perceives them as “Black” regardless of their personal identity. This color line is not as stark for Asians and Hispanics, but perceptions of difference from Whites still “color” their patterns of identification. For example, treatment as second-class citizens vis-à-vis Whites complicates their national identities. This can discourage the use of unhyphenated labels and promote a preference for pan-ethnic identities. Second, the experience of racism can foster the development of in-group identities. Similarly, it can lead to a rejection of a national label such as “American” or “Canadian” and alienation from the mainstream. These represent politicized
identities that emerge in context of social exclusion and socioeconomic deprivation. Thus ethnic balkanization is a corollary of unreceptive host communities. In contrast, for immigrants with prospects for socioeconomic mobility and few encounters with discrimination, integration is the expected outcome.

Conclusion

Social identities are a reflection of the incorporation of immigrants into the mainstream and their personal commitment to the host community. Strong “ethnic identities are not incompatible” with national attachment. Most second generation immigrants are opting for bicultural identities. Ethnic identity remains important for both first and second generation immigrants, which demonstrates that the acculturation process for recent waves of immigrants is incomplete. When welcomed, immigrants tend to assimilate or integrate with few problems. But immigrants feel marginalized and tend to adopt non-Canadian identities when prejudice and discrimination is rife.
THE NEW IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

The “new immigration” refers to the shift in the place of origin of immigrants that followed the liberalization of immigration policies in Canada and the United States in the 1960s (Lee and Boyd 2008; Massey 1995). These reforms led to an influx of immigration from non-European countries. Through this wave of immigration, Canada and the US have transformed from relatively ethno-racially homogenous to heterogeneous countries in short order (Massey 1995; Wu, Schimmele, and Hou 2010). The inflow of ethno-racial minorities has social and demographic consequences. Within the next 2-3 decades, Canada and the US are expected to become “plurality nations” as the proportional size of the White (European-origin groups) population declines and the sociocultural milieu are recreated. The new immigration raises questions about intergroup relations and the effects of socio-demographic change on social organization and cohesion. A primary issue is the potential for the “identification assimilation” of newcomers, which involves whether immigrants develop a sense of belonging to their host communities/nations (Gordon 1964).

Most previous studies on the adaptation of immigrants focus on indicators such as English/French language use, socioeconomic mobility, and spatial assimilation (Wu, Schimmele, and Hou 2012). These are no doubt pertinent factors, but patterns of social affiliation are another aspect of the adaptation of immigrants. Social identities are a reflection of intergroup relations and associate with the process of acculturation. Ethnic identity and identificational assimilation are intercorrelated as these outcomes relate to the incorporation of immigrants into the mainstream and their personal commitment to the host community/nation (Phinney et al. 2001). Most post-1965 immigrants encounter economic circumstances (e.g., recession) and a “color” barrier that complicate the acculturation process (Alba and Nee 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Zhou 1997a). How these structural forces affect the pathway towards becoming a Canadian or an American is a far-reaching issue. The irregular or segmented assimilation of immigrants – especially if it occurs because of racism or marginalization – has implications for their social identities.

The goal of this knowledge synthesis is to provide an up-to-date assessment of how the acculturation experiences of the children of immigrants influences their social identities as members of non-White groups and members of the host nation. While other factors affect identity development, this synthesis focuses on the interface between identity and intergroup relations. Several broad questions orient our examination of the literature. First, do external factors such as discrimination and racism trigger the development of “reactive” in-group identities among racial minorities? Second, do strong in-group identities correlate with feelings of alienation or a weak sense of belonging to the host nation? Third, is there a relationship between ethnic identity and behavioral participation in Canadian/American culture? These questions are grounded in the assumption that ethnic identity is not a fixed property of ethnic groups (see Nagel 1994). Ethnic identities develop through intergroup relations, which implies that intergroup antagonisms is the context of strong in-group/out-group distinctions between Whites and racial minorities.
Implications

Individual-level characteristics are the main concern in conventional appraisals of the potential for immigrants to adapt (Wu et al. 2010). This emphasis is warranted considering that characteristics such as education and skills, employment prospects, and language abilities are well-established determinants of adaptation. Our attention is on the social context of immigration, however, which is an essential, but often overlooked, factor of adaptation. For our purposes, social context refers to the ethno-racial status of immigrants and the implications this status has for their reception in their host communities. The assimilation or integration of immigrants and their children has become more irregular and problematic as the composition of migration in-streams has transitioned from European to non-European sources (Banting, Courchene, and Seidle 2007; Portes and Zhou 1993; Gans 1992). In Canada, about 45 percent of first generation immigrants are post-1991 arrivals and come largely from China, the Philippines, India, and other non-European countries (Statistics Canada 2011). Visible minorities comprise 19 percent of the Canadian population and most of them (99 percent) are first or second generation immigrants.

Why should policy-makers and the general public be concerned about the ethnic identities of immigrants? Robust ethnic identities can signal the capacity of a society to accommodate cultural diversity and integrate different ethnic groups. However, as John Porter (1965) demonstrates in *The Vertical Mosaic*, ethnicity has historically represented a phenomenon of social stratification. Thus it is also possible the robust ethnic identities signal dissonance or social exclusion within plural societies. As Putnam (2007) observes, rapid ethnic diversification can undermine social cohesion in the short to medium term. This is primarily because the social boundaries between different racial groups discourage the interactions needed for social capital to flourish. The elimination of socially constructed boundaries between racial groups is essential for the reproduction of social cohesion (Wu et al. 2010). If intergroup relations remain anemic or antagonistic, then the likelihood that non-White immigrants will develop a strong sense of belonging to Canada is low.

Approach

This knowledge synthesis focuses on studies on the children of immigrants from non-European countries. Until the 1990s, most studies on the adaptation of immigrants focused on adults and neglected children and adolescents and how their life-course experiences affect their capacity for acculturation and social mobility (Zhou 1997a). An individual’s ethnic identity can change across the life course, but adolescence is a crucial life-stage for its formation (Phinney 1990). Erikson (1968) describes identity development as a primary developmental task of this life-stage. Most studies are unequivocal about the centrality of identity development for the well-being of youth (Costigan, Su, and Hua 2009; Phinney 1990). The challenge for non-White youth involves developing a social identity within an environment where their ethnic groups are underrepresented and marginalized (Phinney 1990). These individuals must develop a sense of self that negotiates the conflicts that derive from their simultaneous membership in a disparaged group and membership in Canadian/American society (Costigan et al. 2009).

Several major databases were used to conduct a comprehensive search of peer-reviewed studies on ethnic identity published in sociology, psychology, and political science journals. These databases included: Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and
PsycINFO. In addition, we searched the Library of Congress database for relevant monographs. Our search criteria were restricted to studies published between 1990 and 2014. Most peer-reviewed studies are from Canada and the US, with little research from other countries. Our search criteria were also restricted to articles on: (a) the definition of ethnic identity; (b) types of ethnic/national identities; and (c) the relationship between acculturation and ethnic/national identities. We situated these studies in the seminal literature (this includes works published before 1990) on the meaning of ethnicity and key studies on the process of acculturation. These latter works are the basis for a rich discussion of the core concepts and explanations of ethnic identity.

This knowledge synthesis is organized into several major sections. The first section provides a thorough definition of ethnic identity. This section also includes a conceptual discussion about how “ethnicity” is a socially constructed category/label and functions as a basis for social stratification. This discussion is based on the literature (e.g., Barth 1969) that argues that ethnicity is defined by the social boundaries that lie between groups rather than the “cultural stuff” that lies inside these boundaries. When ethnicity is approached from this perspective, ethnic identities are seen as products of intergroup relations as opposed to personal choices. The next section outlines the theoretical approaches to ethnic identity and discusses the new migration and how race influences the process of acculturation. The third section focuses on the empirical literature on patterns of social affiliation (in-group and bicultural identities) among the target population and how these patterns associate with their level of acculturation. The synthesis concludes with a summary of the main findings and implications.

WHAT IS ETHNIC IDENTITY?

The concept of _ethnic identity_ is employed in several disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and political science. Given the dissimilar perspectives (and research questions) of these disciplines, ethnic identity has been conceptualized and operationalized in multiple respects (Phinney 1992). Even within disciplines there is confusion and debate about what ethnic identity represents and no consensus about how to define and measure it (Chandra 2006; Harris and Findley 2014; Phinney 1990). There are indeed numerous studies that provide no explicit definition of ethnic identity before analyzing its putative effects. In previous studies, the operational measures of this concept are often broad and amorphous because of this definitional imprecision (Harris and Findley 2014). This lack of definition can be considered a principal limitation of the literature. Measuring the “effects” of ethnic identity is conditional on knowing the properties that comprise this construct (Chandra and Wilkinson 2008). A clear definition is essential for this concept to have analytical value.

As Chandra (2006) argues, a precise definition of ethnic identity is paramount for developing theories about its causal effects. Numerous studies claim that ethnic identity affects individual-level (e.g., self-esteem) and group-level (e.g., social capital) outcomes as well as mattering for macro-level outcomes such as ethnic conflict, economic growth, and democratic stability (see Alesina and Ferrara 2000; Alesina and Ferrara 2005; Ashmore, Jussim, and Wilder 2001; Horowitz 1985; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005; Phinney and Chavira 1992; Rumbaut 1994). A clear definition of ethnic identity is the analytical basis for assessing (rejecting, accepting, or refining) theoretical claims about its effects (Chandra 2006). A definition is also
needed to operationalize this concept and collect the appropriate data (Chandra and Wilkinson 2008). Without reliable measures, the conclusions about the effects of ethnic identity have low face value. In addition, a consistent definition is required for comparative research and evaluating if the importance and implications of ethnic identity are similar or dissimilar between groups and across countries.

**Ethnicity and Ethnic Categories**

Ethnicity refers to membership in an ethnic group, which is determined through descent-based attributes such as origin of parents, language, or skin color (Chandra and Wilkinson 2008; Phinney 1992). Ethnic group membership comes with a social label or an ascribed status, such as Mexican-American or Hispanic. In essence, membership in an ethnic group is dichotomous: a person is either a member of a given ethnic group or is not. Hence, most datasets and studies measure ethnicity as a categorical variable. This glosses over the problematic nature of ethnic categories and heterogeneity within pan-ethnic groups (Nagel 1994; Phinney 1996). The categories used to designate ethnicity have different implications for the boundaries between in-group and out-group members. For example, the label “Hispanic” designates the boundary between the members of this pan-ethnic group and others and the label “Mexican-American” designates the boundary between the members of this ethnic group and other Hispanics in addition to non-Hispanics.

Understanding that ethnicity is a fluid concept is important. The definition and measurement of ethnicity is another contentious issue. Harris and Findley (2014) question the assumption that a person’s ethnicity is easily identifiable by others. People often struggle to identify the ethnicity of others correctly. Ethnicity can also be misspecified in censuses, which use self-reports. Lee and Tafoya (2006) show that the racial/ethnic categories in the US Census have changed numerous times. Until recently, these categories were based on the premise that the population could be categorized into mutually exclusive “racial” groups, such as White, Black, or Asian. Lee and Tafoya remark that this classification scheme reflected the faulty assumption that race is a biological (natural) variable. Most social scientists, however, believe that race/ethnicity is a social construction, and this is indeed the reason for the relationship between race/ethnicity and numerous outcomes (Jacobson 1998; Lee 1993). In almost every US census, the categorization of race has shifted, mainly in response to demographic trends (e.g., influx of immigrants) and political forces (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement) (Lee and Tafoya 2006). Between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, almost 10 million Americans changed their self-reported race, presumably because of shifts in the definition of race/ethnicity (Liebler et al. 2014). Similar changes in the definition of ethnic/racial origin have occurred in the Canadian and other national censuses (Kertzer and Arel 2002).

Chandra (2006) argues that a person’s race/ethnicity is context-dependent. For example, a Black person living in the United States can self-identify or be labelled as an “African-American”. This label and its associated identity are not applicable to a Black person born and living outside the United States. In the United States, the pernicious legacy of the one-drop rule also prevents people of mixed race from claiming a White race/identity. Even if a mixed race person and a White person share a (White) parent, these people are categorized as members of different groups in the US racial context. This example illustrates that it is imperative to conceptualize ethnicity and ethnic identity in relation to social structure. This implies that a person’s ethnic self-identification is subject to social constraints since it is dependent on the
validation and perceptions of others (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2012). As discussed below, ethnic identity can represent something that is imposed on people (an unwanted identity and perhaps even a form of stigma) as well as representing a form of agency. This affects the definition and measurement of ethnic identity, since it points to the negative forces (e.g., racialization) behind the formation of “ethnic” groups and “ethnic” identities.

Nagel (1994) observes that the ethnicity an individual self-selects also depends on social context. Based on the notion that ethnicity is context-dependent, Nagel states that individuals have a repertoire of ethnic identities (labels) that can shift depending on the situation or audience, and each of these identities has a different meaning as well as different implications. To illustrate, a person of Argentinian descent can identify as “Hispanic” when interacting with non-Hispanic Whites. The same person can identify as “White” when interacting with Blacks or Argentinian-American when interacting with Hispanics of different national origins. Similarly, Blacks and Asians can claim pan-ethnic (e.g., African-American or Asian-American), national-origin (e.g., South African or Chinese), or a more refined (e.g., Bantu or Hmong) ethnic identities depending on the circumstance. This observation corresponds to Barth’s (1969) classic exposition that outlines how ethnic identity is relational; that is, ethnicity is not a fixed or innate status, but it is something that is mutable and acquired via social interactions between individuals or groups.

The categories used to designate ethnicity can be reduced or refined. To reduce the heterogeneity within pan-ethnic groups it is possible to use national-origin or more distinct ethnic categorizations. Entwisle and Astone (1994) suggest that we make our ethnic categories as specific as possible (e.g., Mexican versus Latino) through asking respondents a series of questions that identifies their racial status, national origins, cultural group, and immigrant status. Such refinement is no doubt beneficial for making comparisons within pan-ethnic groups or considering the effects of culture. Besides cultural heterogeneity within pan-ethnic groups, there is also variation within national-origin groups between immigrants and non-immigrants and even between immigrants depending on the period of and life-stage at immigration and socioeconomic status (see Wu et al. 2010). What cannot be forgotten, however, is that sometimes people self-select a higher-order ethnic label (Latino versus Mexican) and that these labels have different connotations than the more refined labels. Hence, although more refined categories capture the cultural aspects of ethnic identity, these can also miss the broader socio-political aspects of ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity

As Phinney (1996) points out, ethnic identity is sometimes conflated with group membership. Unlike membership in an ethnic group, ethnic identity is not something a person has or does not have. Group membership is obviously necessary, but it is an insufficient condition for the development of ethnic identity. Among two members of the same group, the strength of ethnic identity can differ, it can be expressed through different attitudes and behaviors, and its meaning can be interpreted in different respects. In addition, there are between-group differences in ethnic identity. Previous studies demonstrate that ethnicity is a weak or unimportant aspect of the identities of many European-origin Americans, and few of these people regard themselves as “ethnic,” which appears to be a label that is reserved for immigrants and their children and racial minorities (Alba 1990; Phinney 1996; Waters 1990). To understand the importance of ethnicity, according to Phinney (1996), we should dispense with
our focus on ethnic categories, which are too problematic for good analysis. Instead we should examine the meaning of ethnicity, in particular, its association with identity, culture, and minority status.

While ethnicity is a status or a label, ethnic identity refers to the patterns of social affiliation and/or group attachment (symbolic or tangible) that associate with membership in an ethnic group. Tajfel describes it as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (1981: p. 255). Ethnic identity is a multidimensional construct (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004; Phinney and Ong 2007; Costigan et al. 2009). The key components include:

1. **Self-Identification.** Self-identifying or self-labelling as a member of an ethnic group is a prerequisite component of ethnic identity (Phinney and Ong 2007). This can be measured with questions about descent and it can include pan-ethnic (e.g., Asian), national-origin (Chinese), and hyphenated (e.g., Chinese-American) identifications (Costigan et al. 2009). Individuals who use the same ethnic label, however, can differ in their sense of belonging to the ethnic group, their attitudes toward their ethnic group, and their ethnic behaviors (Phinney 1992). These latter variables comprise the fundamental measures of ethnic identity. To some extent, these labels (e.g., Black) are at least partially imposed, considering that the racial structure designates which label a person can or cannot select (Phinney and Ong 2007).

2. **Group Attachment.** Phinney and Ong (2007) suggest that sense of belonging (also referred to as group attachment or affective commitment) is among the most important components of ethnic identity. This component captures the subjective experience of being a member of an ethnic group and one’s emotional attachment or personal investment in that group (Costigan et al. 2009; Phinney and Ong 2007). This can be measured with Likert scales that assess strength of belonging, but it can also be measured with more fine-grained variables that examine aspects of group commitment and solidarity with group members (Phinney 1990). The level of ethnic group attachment can also represent separateness from out-group members or feelings of exclusion from the mainstream.

3. **In-Group Attitudes.** A person can have either positive or negative attitudes about their ethnic group (Phinney 1990). Positive attitudes can be measured with variables that assess levels of satisfaction with being a member of the group. The term **private regard** is used to refer to the cluster of positive attitudes, which evaluate a person’s contentment with being a group member (Phinney and Ong 2007). Private regard is a particularly important component of ethnic identity for members of marginalized ethnic groups, who face negative external evaluations of their group. The discrimination and stereotypes associated with membership in some groups can lead to negative in-group attitudes, such as feelings of inferiority and even a desire to not be a group member (Phinney 1990).

4. **Ethnic Involvement.** This is an umbrella term for social affiliation with co-ethnics and the ethnic-based cultural practices that comprise the primary external expressions of a person’s ethnic identity (Phinney 1992). This can be measured with variables such as: language use; adherence to group customs and cultural norms; participation in ethnic-based social activities and organizations; religious affiliation; the size of co-ethnic social networks; and residing in ethnic enclaves. There is a strong correlation between these behaviors and the strength of sense
of belonging and positive in-group attitudes (Costigan et al. 2009). However, it is also possible to have a strong ethnic identity without ethnic involvement (Phinney and Ong 2007).

This is not an exhaustive list of the components of ethnic identity, but it covers the predominant variables that have been examined in previous studies.

**Psychometric Instruments**

The development of general scales of ethnic identity are a key improvement to the field over the past 20 years (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, and Phinney 2010; Phinney and Ong 2007). In 1990, Phinney remarked that perhaps the most serious limitation that researchers faced was a lack of a valid and reliable instrument for measuring the multiple dimensions of ethnic identity and testing theories about it. Previous studies tended to focus on a specific component of ethnic identity (Phinney 1992). When more comprehensive measures were used, they measured the cultural expressions of ethnic identity among specific ethnic groups. Phinney observes that the various components of ethnic identity have different levels of importance across groups. For example, language use is important for some groups and unimportant for others. This implies that no single measure of ethnic identity is adequate for comparing the strength and implications of ethnic identity across ethnic groups.

Phinney (1992) developed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to determine: whether (a) the observed components of ethnic identity represented a single construct or if these components were weakly correlated and need to be considered separately and (b) whether it is possible to study ethnic identity as a general phenomenon or whether it is not possible to compare ethnic identity across diverse groups. While Phinney recognized that some aspects of ethnic identity are specific to group history and culture, her position that ethnic identity represents a higher-order concept or a general phenomenon is well-grounded. From an extensive review of the literature, she observed that self-identification, sense of belonging, and in-group attitudes were common components of the ethnic identity of the members of all major ethno-racial groups. At the core of ethnic identity is a conscious awareness of oneself as a group member that develops over time (Phinney and Ong 2007).

The MEIM is a 14-item scale that measures three components of ethnic identity: sense of belonging and positive in-group attitudes (5 items); ethnic behaviors and practices (2 items); and ethnic identity achievement (7 items), which includes questions about the exploration of one’s ethnic identity (Phinney 1992). The MEIM also includes an opened-ended question about the ethno-racial status of the respondent’s parents, but this factor is treated as a background characteristic and not factored into the score of the scale. Since the scale is designed to be a general measure, it excludes culturally-specific content (Phinney and Ong 2007). Numerous studies use the MEIM as a single scale, but Roberts et al. (1999) suggest that it consists of two factors, with separate constructs for the commitment- and exploration-related items. Since the MEIM does not consider negative in-group attitudes, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2004) developed an alternative scale. Their Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) is designed to better understand the formation and implications of ethnic identity. The EIS is designed to provide insight into the differential influence of the components of ethnic identity on individual outcomes. The EIS is a 46-item scale used to assess the independent components of ethnic identity. The EIS assesses three components of ethnic identity: exploration (23 items), resolution (13 items), and affirmation (10
items). This scale provides a sense of the process through which individuals develop their ethnic identity and their feelings toward their ethnic group.

THE CONTEXT OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnicity should not be conceptualized as something that is antecedent to ethnic identity. To be sure, at the individual level, membership in an ethnic group is essential for ethnic identity to develop. But at the group level it is ethnic identity that defines the ethnic group (or ethnicity) inasmuch as a shared identity establishes the boundary between it and other groups. The critical feature of an ethnic group, according to Barth (1969), is self-ascription and ascription by others as a group. Barth argues that it is these boundaries that define what an ethnic group is, not the cultural practices contained within it. In a similar vein, Phinney states that “ethnic identity is a virtually meaningless concept” in racially/ethnically homogenous societies (1990: p. 501). The reason is that ascription as an in-group requires the presence of an out-group. What define in-group/out-group boundaries are not simply differences in descent or cultural origin (Barth 1969; Nagel 1994). These boundaries represent a form of social organization (power relations) that emerges through intergroup relations.

Ethnic groups, among other social phenomenon, are “the product of historical events, social forces, and ideology” and their meaning is not fixed (Hacking 1999: p. 2). This is a pertinent observation given that racial/ethnic groups are too often treated as biological or primordial categories (Fearon and Laitin 2000). While most social scientists acknowledge that race is a socially constructed/imposed (not a biological) status, it remains common to associate ethnicity with “natural” cultural differences, without consideration of the social context in which these differences emerge. Ethnic identity is also socially constructed because it develops through intergroup contact and since its implications reflect the terms of this contact (see Cerulo 1997; Fearon and Laitin 2000; Jenkins 1994; Sears et al. 2003; Tajfel 1981). In plural societies, ethnicity tends to serve a similar function as race. As Nagel writes: “ethnicity is created and recreated as various groups and interests put forth competing visions of the ethnic composition of society and argue over which rewards or sanctions should be attached to which ethnicities” (1994: p. 154).

The veracity of this claim is illustrated in Canada’s ethno-racial structure. The sociologist John Porter (1965) demonstrated that Canadian society consists of differentiated ethnic groups. “The aim of differentiation,” as Tajfel and Turner (1979: p. 41) bluntly state, “is to maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimensions.” In Canada, the ethno-racial structure has a hierarchal (or vertical) organization as ethnicity is tied to socioeconomic status and struggles for class power. Porter argued that the British and French (Canada’s charter ethnic groups) were able to dictate the entrance status of subsequent immigrants. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were granted entrance on the basis of accepting menial occupational roles. Thus the context of immigration created boundaries between the charter groups and other European-origin ethnics. With assimilation, the social distance between different European-origin ethnic groups decreased over several generations. As Gans (2014) observes, late-generation European ethnicity has gradually disappeared and whatever ethnic distinctions remain between European-origin groups is largely symbolic and benign.
New ethnic boundaries have, however, emerged between Whites and non-Whites with the influx of immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa and the marginalization of these new immigrants (Lian and Matthews 1991). In Canada, racial minorities are under-represented in higher status occupations and earn lower incomes than warranted from their level of human capital (Hou and Balakrishnan 1996). Canadian multicultural policy encourages integration rather than assimilation. New immigrants are encouraged to retain their cultural distinctiveness, but it is such cultural differentiation that sorts people into different groups and provides a basis for socioeconomic and other forms of discrimination. Tajfel and Turner observe that “the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups – that is, social categorization per se – is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group” (1979: p. 38). While “ethnicity” is disappearing among Whites, it is a salient attribute for people of color, since it associates with processes of racial discrimination and stigmatization. These processes are indeed foundational for the development of ethnic identity, which appears to be a more salient aspect of self-concept for racialized groups than for Whites (Phinney 1996).

In sum, several points about ethnicity must be addressed in discussions about ethnic identity. First, ethnicity represents a social boundary (not a cultural difference per se) between two or more groups (Barth 1969). Second, in-group bias or discrimination is an “omnipresent feature” of social relations between groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Third, “ethnicity” is primarily a social designation (a form of “otherness”) that is reserved for subordinate groups and reflects processes of in-group bias, discrimination, and/or subjectification (Jenkins 1994; Tajfel and Turner 1979). As discussed below, ethnicity is an optional and symbolic status for Whites, whereas it is an involuntary label (e.g., “Black”) for minorities and has pervasive implications for their social identities. The categorization of individuals into ethnic groups tends to be pejorative, stigmatizing, and disempowering. Jenkins remarks that “differentiation and racism should perhaps best be viewed as historically-specific forms of the general – perhaps even universal – social phenomenon of ethnicity” (1994: pp. 208-209). In this perspective, ethnic identity is intercorrelated with social stratification and racialization.

Theoretical Approaches

Two conceptual frameworks predominate explanations of ethnic identity among minorities. Much of our knowledge about this topic is based on social identity theory and the work of social psychologists (Phinney 1990). Marcia defines the concept identity as a “coherent sense of one’s meaning to oneself and others within a social context” (1994: p. 70). The concept social identity refers to the part of self-concept that is based on group membership (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Group membership provides individuals with a sense of belonging and their place in the social environment, and is a source of self-esteem. A corollary of identification with a group (or groups) is distinctions between in-groups (us) and out-groups (them) distinctions and the intergroup tensions that arise from these distinctions. Tajfel and his colleagues developed social identity theory to explain the minimal conditions that are sufficient to produce discrimination or animosity toward out-groups (Reicher, Spears, and Haslam 2010). This theory is a general approach for understanding how identities are created and recreated within the context of intergroup relations and the stereotypes that categorize people into different social groups.

Within this approach, ethnic identity is central to the self-esteem of minorities (Erikson 1968; Tajfel 1978). Minorities (i.e., non-dominant groups) face negative social evaluations
(stereotypes) of their group (Phinney 1990). Tajfel (1978) suggests that these evaluations pose a dilemma or threat to the identities of minorities. Minorities can either acquiesce to the negative evaluations of their groups or reject these evaluations and forge alternative positive identities, such as “Black is beautiful.” One implication is that the members of disparaged groups could internalize these negative implications and become dissatisfied with their social identity (Jenkins 1994; Tajfel 1978). There is no definitive evidence that minorities internalize these negative evaluations – e.g., Blacks have high self-esteem, despite negative stereotypes – but it is clear that these evaluations are a factor in the formation of their social identities and self-concept (Phinney 1991). Previous cross-sectional and longitudinal research demonstrates that the experience of discrimination and racism is an impetus for ethnic identity exploration and development (see Quintana 2007).

Ethnic identity can function as a group-level response to counteract the threat that negative evaluations can pose for individual-level self-esteem and psychological well-being (Phinney 1990). The origins and persistence of ethnicity identity among racial minorities associates with a shared experience (a common fate) of living in a society that disparages non-Whites (Sears et al. 2003). Discrimination and racism are, therefore, catalysts for the development of robust in-group identification. A strong in-group identification can develop through two processes. First, it can emerge as a form of collective resistance (e.g., Black consciousness) against negative evaluations of their group (Jenkins 1994). In addition, group-level solidarity is a form of social capital that helps minorities and immigrants overcome the constraints that discrimination places on their social and economic opportunities, and thus co-ethnic networks foster the adaptation of immigrants to the host community (Bauder and Sharpe 2002; Chiswick and Miller 2005; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Such “bounded solidarity” emerges in circumstances that promote group-oriented behavior, collective interests and values, and other factors that contribute to in-group identification.

Another framework for understanding ethnic identity is based on acculturation theory and is concerned with how minorities/immigrants relate to the dominant group or host community (Phinney 1990). The focus in this approach is on how minorities/immigrants define themselves as members of the larger society and members of a sub-group. Acculturation occurs through prolonged intergroup contact and the resulting changes in the attitudes and/or behaviors of one or more of the groups involved (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits 1936). The concept acculturation refers broadly to the modes of adaptation of newcomers to the host community and their level of accommodation within it, and the process of acculturation usually involves members of small groups adapting to an environment where a larger group and its cultural norms are dominant. In this regard, the terms “dominant” and “non-dominant” refer to power differentials in plural societies that correspond to differences in group size and unequal distributions of political and economic capital (Berry 1997).

The position of non-dominance affects how immigrants adapt and their mode of adaptation has implications for their identities. Berry (1997) outlines four strategies of acculturation that immigrants can follow:

1. Assimilation. This involves strong identification with the dominant culture, without preserving cultural distinctiveness.
2. **Integration.** This involves identification with the dominant culture, while maintaining some level of cultural distinctiveness.

3. **Separation.** This involves the retention of cultural distinctiveness and limiting social relations with the dominant or other out-groups. Separation can also be imposed, as occurs with segregation.

4. **Marginalization.** This occurs in situations where there is little personal desire or possibilities for developing relations with the dominant group or for retaining cultural distinctiveness.

The acculturation strategy that is followed depends on the preferences of the individual, but there are structural constraints on these preferences. For example, a strategy of integration is only possible in societies with low levels of racism and a multicultural ethos. Similarly, a strategy of separation is not possible in host communities which have insufficient numbers of co-ethnics to interact with.

Figure 1 depicts the consequences of these acculturation strategies for a person’s social identity. Integration occurs when a person claims strong identification with both the host community and their ethnic group. In these cases, a person has a bicultural identity, which reflects their ties to their country/culture of origin and ties to the host community. This is dependent on the host community accepting them as equals and accommodating some degree of cultural difference. A person is assimilated when identification with the in-group is weak and identification with the host community is strong. In contrast, a person is separated or segregated when identification with the in-group is strong and identification with the host community is weak. Whether a person opts for assimilation or separation depends on their value of their in-group versus the value of establishing social relations with the host community. Strong in-group preferences can motivate some groups to self-separate (e.g., ethnic enclaves) to avoid unwanted contact with other cultures and its consequences for the socialization of younger group members. A lack of economic opportunity or social acceptance in the host community can also motivate separation.

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**Figure 1  Acculturation and Group Identification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification with Host Society</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Weak</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Integrated/Bicultural</td>
<td>Assimilated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Separated/Segregated</td>
<td>Marginalized</td>
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Source: Phinney (1990, p. 502)
Ethnic Identity and the New Immigration

Hou and Balakrishnan observe that the acculturation “processes for non-visible minorities and visible minorities are different and distinct” (1995: p. 322). Prior research questions whether the model of acculturation that European immigrants followed is pertinent for those of the new immigration (Alba and Nee 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994). The “new immigration” refers to the influx of immigrants from non-European countries (visible or racial minorities) that followed the repeal of racist immigration policies in Canada and the US in the 1960s (Lee and Boyd 2008; Massey 1995). Before this, Canada and the US limited the amount of immigration from these countries. Place of origin restrictions were implemented to ensure the demographic predominance of Whites and a high degree of cultural homogeneity. In the late 1960s, racial minorities accounted for about two percent of Canada’s population (Cardozo and Pendakur 2008). At present, racial minorities account for nearly one-in-five Canadians (Statistics Canada 2011). US Census data also illustrate that Whites are losing their demographic predominance; their share of the population declined from 85 percent in 1960 to 63 percent in 2011 (Passel and Cohn 2008).

Several generations ago, there were caste-like social boundaries between European-origin ethnics, especially between the first European immigrants (charter groups) and later arrivals from Southern and Eastern Europe (Lee and Bean 2004). European ethnics were highly diverse and separated through socioeconomic inequalities and residential segregation, and intermarriage between them was uncommon (Qian and Lichter 2007). Some groups – such as Italians, the Irish, and Jews – were even perceived as different “races” by members of the dominant European groups (Lee and Bean 2004). For most European immigrants, assimilation was the primary mode of acculturation, which eroded the social boundaries between them (Alba and Nee 1997). The European pattern of assimilation involved the achievement of parity in life chances between groups and spatial assimilation. This process fostered the formation of social networks that crossed ethnic lines, which increased the prevalence of ethnic intermarriage and ethnically mixed children. Today, most people of European descent are simply considered “White” and there is little perceived “ethnic” distinction between them.

With assimilation, a strong sense of ethnic identity disappeared among most European-origin Canadians and Americans (Gans 2014). These groups have achieved what Gordon terms “identificational assimilation” or unhyphenated identities (“Canadian” or “American” or “White”) based largely on a sense of belonging to the broader society. For Whites, ethnicity is an invisible status since their cultural frameworks are the dominant (normal) culture (Chávez and Guido-DiBrito 1999). Ethnicity does not matter for Whites because it no longer associates with their social status (Waters 1996). In addition, involuntary ethnicity (an imposed label) is rare among European-origin ethnics. These people are seldom asked about their ethnicity (where they come from) or labelled as a member of an ethnic group (Gans 2014). Whites can choose to claim an ethnicity (e.g., Italian-American), but this is a personal choice that does not correspond to external factors. Moreover, Whites can choose an unhyphenated identity (e.g., American) because of their membership in the dominant group (Waters 1996).

The fact that ethnicity has become optional for Whites further demonstrates that it is a social phenomenon rather than a fixed characteristic (Waters 1996). In contrast, ethnicity is an ascribed status for racial minorities; it is both a voluntary and mandatory social identity (Nagel 1994; Waters 1996). Ethnicity is voluntary for racial minorities inasmuch as personal choice
accounts for some of the variation between them in the strength and meaning of ethnic identity. But it is mandatory considering that their “ethnicity” influences their life chances. To illustrate, even if a person of African descent does not self-identity as “Black,” the social ascription of them as “Black” affects their social status. At the group-level, these social ascriptions are determinants of socioeconomic status, political representation, and the composition of social networks (Waters 1996). Within their social relations with the dominant group, racial minorities are defined and treated as “ethnic” regardless of their personal choices or attitudes about their putative ethnicity.

Identificational assimilation is regarded as the final stage of the adaptation process; it signals the full incorporation of immigrants into host community (Rumbaut 1994). This stage of assimilation proceeds through the widespread acceptance of immigrants into mainstream social institutions, intermarriage, and an absence of in-group bias or discrimination. Studies on the new immigration suggest that the path of incorporation that European immigrants followed is not applicable to the experiences of recent waves of immigrants (Alba and Nee 1997; Lee and Bean 2004; Massey 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994). European immigrants followed a “straight-line” path of assimilation that occurred with length of residence and across generations (Hirschman 1994). The viability of such intergenerational progress for more recent (post-1965) immigrants and their children is questionable. There is concern about second generational decline or a context of immigration in which the children of post-1965 immigrants are unable to match the success stories of earlier waves of immigrants (Gans 1992; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2009; Rumbaut 1994).

The new immigration contrasts with the waves of migration from Europe in three fundamental respects (Alba and Nee 1997). First, the Great Depression and World War II halted mass migration from Europe. This break provided host communities sufficient time to incorporate the newcomers and it compelled immigrants to intermix through choking the numbers of co-ethnics. The rapid and continual in-flow of immigrants from non-European countries does not permit the gradual incorporation of immigrants. In addition, these in-flows are reducing demographic constraints on interacting with co-ethnics, which is a disincentive to forming social relationships and marriages that cross ethno-racial boundaries. Second, the waves of European immigration paralleled periods of economic expansion, whereas the new immigration is occurring in a climate that provides far fewer economic opportunities for intergenerational progress. Recent immigrants to Canada face barriers to economic success, even though their levels of education exceed the national average (Reitz and Banerjee 2009). Finally, the “color line” is a barrier to assimilation that European immigrants did not encounter. The experience of racism could alienate non-White immigrants from the mainstream (Wu, Hou, and Schimmeele 2011).

How these structural barriers to immigrant incorporation affect their identificational assimilation or ethnic identities is an emerging topic of research. The preliminary research suggests that the differential modes of incorporation between European immigrants of the past and post-1965 arrivals from non-European countries have troubling implications for social cohesion (Rumbaut 1994; Wu et al. 2010). For groups that are able to achieve economic parity with Whites and encounter little racism, their “ethnicity” could recede across generations. Hence, recent immigrants could eventually adopt unhyphenated identities based on a sense of belonging to the host community. In multicultural countries, however, such identificational assimilation is unnecessary for successful incorporation. The children of recent immigrants could
instead opt for bicultural identities. The troubling possibility are situations where barriers to immigrant incorporation motivate a reactive ethnic solidarity. In these cases, ethnic identity could reflect social divisions and perhaps even ethnic conflict within society.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

There are multiple factors that contribute to the formation of ethnic identity, such as family socialization, peer influences, and personal values. This empirical overview focuses on the role of intergroup relations and the context of immigration in the production of social identities. The process of acculturation can be smooth or turbulent; this depends on the characteristics of immigrants (e.g., racial background, socioeconomic status), life-stage at immigration, and the social context of re-settlement (Portes and Zhou 1993; Wu et al. 2010). The theory of segmented assimilation provides a framework for interpreting these differences (Zhou 1997b). This theory posits three possible modes of acculturation. First, the classic straight-line mode of acculturation, which leads to the adoption of “Canadian” or “American” identities across generations. Second, an obstructed mode of acculturation, which leads to assimilation into an underclass and the development of oppositional racial identities. Third, a mode of adaptation that depends on in-group solidarity (e.g., ethnic enclaves), leading to strong in-group social identities or bicultural identities if the experience of discrimination is low.

Acculturation and Identity

The core assumption of classical assimilation theory is that most traces of ethnicity will disappear within three generations (Hiller and Chow 2005). This assumption is based on the experience of European-origin immigrants and may not reflect the experiences of recent waves of immigrants. With the repeal of immigration policies that discouraged non-White immigration, new patterns of acculturation are emerging (Alba and Nee 1997; Portes and Zhou 1993). The evidence suggests that, regardless of generational status, the racial background of post-1965 immigrants complicates the acculturation process. In addition, pan-ethnic identities have emerged as minorities with similar phenotypes (e.g., skin color) have been lumped together despite the cultural differences between them (Le Espiritu 1992; Okamoto and Mora 2014). These racialized labels – imposed via the gaze of the dominant group – have created categories such as “Asian” and “Hispanic” (Hiller and Chow 2005; Kibria 1997; Park 2008). These categories exist largely within the context of immigration to White-dominated societies. There is, for example, no “Asian” ethnicity or identity in China, Japan, Korean, or other countries in Asia. These labels are invoked to describe a non-European place of origin.

People establish their identities through social comparisons with the people around them, such as perceptions of their social similarities or differences with the dominant reference group (Rumbaut 1994). An acute awareness of one’s ethnicity emerges in social contexts where there are more differences than similarities. The children of immigrants must construct their social identities in context of exposure to the culture of their ethnic group and the culture of the host nation (Phinney and Devich-Navarro 1997). What is the relationship between acculturation and social identity? Are strong ethnic identities among racial minorities incompatible with a sense of belonging to the host country? Prior studies suggest that ethnic identity and acculturation appear to be correlated, but empirically distinct, processes (Cuéllar et al. 1997; Phinney et al. 2001). Most of the literature focuses on how an individual’s behavioral
engagement with their ethnic culture affects their sense of belonging (Costigan et al. 2009). This literature demonstrates that greater in-group involvement (e.g., language use, adherence to traditions, number of co-ethnic friends) associates with a stronger sense of belonging to the ethnic group. Few studies have examined how behavioral participation in the culture of the host nation (mainstream culture) affects ethnic/national identities.

As discussed above, there are several social identities that immigrants can adopt in the acculturation process. This ranges from social identities based on a strong sense of belonging to the host community to identities based purely on national or ethnic origins. In addition, immigrants can adopt pan-ethnic identities, representing identificational allegiance to a broader ethno-racial group. In countries with large proportions of immigrants, a sense of belonging to the mainstream culture is a vital aspect of immigrant incorporation (Wu et al. 2012). This measure of acculturation reflects whether the immigrant feels accepted and secure (at “home”) in the host community. A sense of belonging to the mainstream also correlates with social cohesion considering that perceptions of exclusion discourage personal investments in bridging social capital and common goals and institutions. This is not to suggest that a strong sense of in-group identification is necessarily antagonistic with more cosmopolitan identities. As Figure 1 shows, immigrants can also adopt bicultural identities.

The social identities that immigrants adopt reflect differences between generational cohorts as well as their reception in the host community. Most first generation immigrants are not expected to achieve identificational assimilation because of their origins in a foreign culture, which shapes their sense of belonging (Wu et al. 2010). Previous studies demonstrate that first generation immigrants tend to use national-origin labels (Lay and Verkuyten 1999; Phinney 2003). In contrast, second generation immigrants have been educated and socialized in the host community, which narrows their difference with the dominant group and thus influences their sense of belonging (Wu et al. 2012). Second generation immigrants are more likely than the first generation to adopt hyphenated labels, such as Chinese-Canadian (Phinney 2003). Rumbaut (2004) shows that life-stage at migration also affects identities. About 46 percent of US immigrants aged 6-12 at migration claim a national-origin label compared to 40 percent of those aged under 6 years at migration. The proportion of those claiming a national-origin label is 25 percent among second generation immigrants with two foreign-born parents and 9 percent among those with one foreign-born parent.

Rumbaut’s (1994) study of the children of immigrants from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia offers several notable findings on how nativity and age at immigration shapes identities. National-origin identification (e.g., Mexican) declines from 43 percent among childhood immigrants (immigration at age <12 or the 1.5 generation) to 11 percent among the US-born (the second generation). These two immigrant cohorts are not, however, too dissimilar in the prevalence of pan-ethnicity. Around one-in-five uses a Hispanic, Asian, or another pan-ethnic label. About 32 percent of the 1.5 generation claim a hyphenated-American label (e.g., Mexican-American) compared to 49 percent of the second generation. For both groups, the proportion claiming an unhyphenated American identity is low, although it is substantially higher for the US-born: 3 percent of the 1.5 generation use an “American” label to describe themselves compared to 20 percent of second generation immigrants. In general, these patterns indicate that a generational process of identificational assimilation is unfolding. However, these aggregate figures conceal substantial differences between regional-origin groups in social identification. The members of some ethnic groups (e.g., Mexicans) appear more reluctant to
adopt an unhyphenated American label and national-origin identification remains high across generational cohorts for some Asian-origin ethnic groups.

The evidence is mixed on whether robust in-group identities are incompatible with participation in mainstream culture or sense of belonging to the host nation. This question asks if acculturation weakens in-group affiliation and also whether a strong national-origin identification precludes a sense of belonging to the mainstream culture. There is some evidence that participation in the mainstream culture associates with lower levels of in-group identification (Costigan et al. 2009). The evidence, however, appears to be weighted in support of a bicultural mode of acculturation or the adoption of hyphenated identities. Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus (2000) examined the acculturation of first and second generation Canadian students with East Asian origins. Their main conclusion is that there is not a strong inverse relationship between in-group identification and identification with the host nation. That is, participation in ethnic-based activities and adherence to North American cultural practices and having non-Chinese friends are not incompatible. Costigan and Su (2004) also observe that the level of engagement with Canadian culture does not preclude a strong sense of in-group identification among Chinese-origin youth. In contrast, their results illustrate that, among the second generation, a greater level of involvement with Canadian culture increases their sense of belonging to their ethnic group.

Noels, Pon, and Clément (1996) examined the relationship between engagement with Chinese culture and Canadian culture among a group of first and second generation Chinese university students. The authors used Berry’s (1997) conceptual model (see Figure 1) to examine four modes of acculturation: separation, assimilation, marginalization, and integration. Their study assessed how “Canadian” or “Chinese” the respondents felt in 22 everyday situations. Across these situations, about 35 percent of the respondents reported feeling highly Chinese and not very Canadian (separated), 37 percent reported feeling highly Canadian and not very Chinese (assimilated), 12 percent reported both strong Chinese and Canadian identities (integrated), and 15 percent reported low levels of identification with either Chinese or Canadian culture (marginalized). Noels et al. (1996) also observed that a stronger Canadian identity tends to associate with less behavioral involvement with Chinese culture. Similarly, a stronger Chinese identity associates with greater involvement in Chinese culture and less involvement with Canadian culture. These findings demonstrate the importance of intergroup contact for identificational assimilation, but also raise questions about whether a Chinese ethnic identity can be maintained in this social context.

Ravanera and Rajulton (2009) also applied Berry’s model to patterns of attachment among Chinese, South Asian, and Black Canadians aged 15-24. Among the Chinese respondents, 34 percent identified as integrated, 11 percent identified as assimilated, 38 percent identified as separated, and 27 percent identified as marginalized. For South Asians, the comparable figures are 52 percent integrated, 12 percent assimilated, 22 percent separated, and 14 percent marginalized. Among Blacks, 39 percent are integrated, 13 percent assimilated, 32 percent separated, and 16 percent marginalized. Some context for these figures is illuminative. Among Whites, 28 percent are integrated, 20 percent assimilated, 15 percent separated, and 36 percent marginalized. Given the latter figures, the patterns of attachment among racial minorities cannot be interpreted as a lack of incorporation into Canadian society. Ravanera and Rajulton argue that we should be careful not to overstate what a “Canadian” label means for the social affiliation of racial minorities. The authors observe that 70 percent of those with strong ethnic
identities also have a strong sense of belonging to Canada. In addition, there are other types of attachment besides Canadian identification that connect these youth to the broader society. Their conclusion is that identification assimilation is perhaps not an appropriate measure of the incorporation of immigrants.

Costigan and Su (2004) also observe that an orientation towards Canadian culture associates with a higher likelihood of identifying as Canadian. Their results are not, however, evidence that a Canadian orientation is negatively correlated with the maintenance of ethnic identity. The authors conclude that participation in Canadian culture is unrelated to feelings of ethnic identity or the endorsement of Chinese values. This implies that the separation mode of acculturation is not necessary for cultural maintenance, at least for Chinese Canadians. In addition, Costigan and Su found that a strong identification and involvement with Chinese culture is unrelated to involvement in the mainstream culture. This outcome appears to be dependent on contextual factors since there are contrary patterns as well. Focusing on Mexican Americans, Cuéllar et al. (1997) assessed how different levels of behavioral assimilation affect their sense of ethnic identity. The authors found that increased acculturation into mainstream American culture diminishes ethnic identity among Mexican-Americans. The strongest ethnic identities were observed among the first generation and less acculturated.

Several studies examine the relationship between level of acculturation and identification with the host nation. Rumbaut (1994) shows that being US-born is among the strongest predictors of adopting an unhyphenated American identification. It also significantly decreases the odds of adopting a purely national-origin label. Berry et al. (2006) examined the adaptation of immigrant youth in Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, and several European countries. The largest group of respondents (36 percent) in their sample fit the integration mode of acculturation. This group developed bicultural identities through their simultaneous engagement with their culture of origin and the culture of their host nation. About 23 percent of their sample fit the separation mode of acculturation. Thus a large proportion of immigrants tend to have a strong in-group affiliation and limited engagement with the host community. Under 19 percent of the respondents in their sample developed a strong identification with strictly the host nation. There are also a large proportion of immigrants (22 percent) that have weak identificational affiliations with both cultures. The latter finding is troubling as it suggests that the immigration experience can be disorienting and a source of anomie for one-in-five immigrants.

In their study of African American and Mexican-American adolescents, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) observe that 90 percent of the respondents adopted a bicultural identification. But the authors demonstrate that simply labelling these respondents “bicultural” does not capture the different connotations of biculturalism within and between ethnic groups. Their findings illustrate that biculturalism is a complex phenomenon, and displays two major patterns: blended biculturalism and alternating biculturalism. The blended bicultural group includes respondents that identify equally as American and with their ethnic group. In their sample, 54 percent of African-Americans and 35 percent of Mexican Americans identified as blended bicultural. The alternating bicultural group consisted of respondents who identified as American, but for whom their ethnicity was a stronger component of their social identities. In school settings, these respondents identified as more American, whereas their ethnic identification was predominant in other settings. This underscores the situational character of
ethnic identities and its shifting nature. About 25 percent of the African-American and 65 percent of Mexican-American respondents self-classified as alternating bicultural.

Hiller and Chow (2005) observe that most second-generation Chinese immigrants adopt bicultural or hyphenated identities, such as Chinese-Canadian (66 percent) or Canadian-Chinese (25 percent). About 17 percent of the respondents in their study perceived themselves in ethnic or racialized terms, such as Chinese or Oriental. Less than one-in-ten identified themselves as just Canadian. This group does not appear to be following a segmented mode of assimilation. They appear to be comfortable with both being Chinese and Canadian. The respondents resisted in-group tendencies, such as identifying as purely “Chinese” or strong preferences for socializing with co-ethnics. Unlike most children of European immigrants, who strove to jettison their ethnic heritage, second generation Chinese immigrants are following a mode of acculturation that involves the retention of their ethnic roots. Hiller and Chow found that the majority of second generation Chinese immigrants are “proud” of their ethnic heritage. Their heritage is perceived as something that should be affirmed rather than jettisoned. This in-group pride partially stems from socialization in the home and co-ethnic community. In addition, it appears to stem from Canada’s multicultural orientation, which accommodates cultural retention. Richards’ (2014) examination of second generation West Indian immigrants in New York City also confirms that the pressure to identify as purely American has waned. A West Indian identification has become “cool” and this suggests that not all Black immigrants are adopting racialized identities.

The experience of biculturalism is dependent on racial status. Lee and Bean (2004) use US Census data to demonstrate that bi-racial identification is lower among Blacks than other racial minorities. About 4 percent of Blacks report a multiracial identification compared to 12 percent of Asians, 16 percent of Latinos, and 36 percent of Aboriginals. What is striking about these figures is that at least three-quarters of African Americans have a mixed race (most White and Black) background. Although younger Blacks are less likely to report a monoracial identity than older Blacks, both groups vastly underreport their bicultural status. This indicates the social nature of identities, and how external social forces, such as the one-drop rule, can circumscribe the choice of identities. The prevalence of multiracial reporting is lowest in the Deep Southern states, where the traditional social division between Blacks and Whites is stronger than in other states. In contrast, the “softer” racial labelling of Latinos and Asians provides greater discretion over their social identities. These groups are also, not coincidentally, less socially segregated from Whites, as illustrated in higher rates of intermarriage and spatial assimilation. The implication is that the “hard” boundary between Whites and Blacks has a definite effect on their social identities.

Portes and Zhou (1993) describe how differential processes of acculturation can lead to considerable variation in identities within ethno-racial groups. There are, for example, almost oppositional identities between recent Mexican immigrants, longer-term Mexican immigrants, and Chicanos (second and third generation Mexican immigrants). The members of the first group retain strong Mexican identities and most consider Mexico their home. This reflects their recent arrival in the US. The members of the second group have bicultural identities, which reflects a combination of their foreign-born status and long-term residence in the US. These Mexican-Americans are proud of their heritage, but also socially distinguish themselves from recent Mexican immigrants and the native-born Chicanos. The latter are indeed perceived as people that have lost their Mexican roots. The Chicanos, on the other hand, define themselves
against successful Mexican immigrants, who are perceived as acting White. The Chicanos have witnessed their parents and grandparents struggle in menial occupations, and their awareness of discrimination has fostered a perception of their group being in conflict with Whites. As a consequence, this group has opted out of the mainstream culture and have developed strong in-group tendencies and oppositional identities.

As Waters (1994) observes, the ethnic label that immigrants select depends on their different perceptions of race relations in the US and their socioeconomic status. In her study of second-generation Black immigrants, three types of social identities were evident: a Black American identity, a hyphenated identity, and an immigrant identity. These differences in social identification correspond to different modes and levels of acculturation. For example, the respondents that adopted Black American identities shared a social affiliation with African Americans. This group rejected the notion (from their parents) that there are fundamental differences between Caribbean immigrants and African Americans, and tended to de-emphasize their ethnicity. This group could be described as being assimilated into a racial underclass through its social identification with poor African Americans and ghetto culture. This group consisted of students from the poorest socioeconomic backgrounds and tended to adopt oppositional identities (e.g., rejection of school achievement, opposition to authority) in response to their perceptions of racism and blocked opportunities. In contrast, another group of Caribbean immigrants embraced their ethnic identities (identifying as hyphenated Americans) and distanced themselves from American Blacks. This latter group tended to be largely middle-class and non-poor.

### Reactive Identities

Racial minorities face stigmatization and discrimination because of their membership in a disparaged group. The concept of stigma comes from Goffman’s (1963) work and refers to the attributes (e.g., racial stereotypes) that are prescribed to individuals or groups to discredit them or assign them an “inferior” social status. Discrimination refers to the unfair treatment or exclusion of an individual based on stereotypes or perceptions about their in-group. The experience of discrimination is common for racial minorities in Canada and the US (Reitz and Breton 1994). According to the 2002 Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey, one-quarter of racial minorities in Canada reported feeling uncomfortable or out of place in Canada because of their racial background (Statistics Canada 2003). About one-third of Black and 21 percent of South Asian and 18 percent of Chinese Canadians reported having been discriminated against within the past five years because of their race. Among first generation immigrants, about 35 percent of immigrants have encountered discrimination (Reitz and Banerjee 2009). This figure increases to 42 percent among the second generation, which suggests that the children of immigrants struggle with segmented assimilation.

At the individual level, the experience of racism initiates ethnic (or racial) identity exploration (Quintana 2007). Ethnic identity exploration refers to thinking about or investigating (e.g., talking to others) the impact of ethnicity in one’s everyday life, which is a precursor to ethnic/racial consciousness and commitment to the in-group (Phinney 1990). In these encounters an individual realizes the role of racism in their social identity and its unjust impact upon their life. The exploration of ethnic identity can occur after a single event or after an accumulation of incidents of racism. Most research on the relationship between racism and the development of ethnic identity has been based on cross-sectional data. This raises questions
about causality since individuals with stronger racial consciousness also tend to be more sensitive to race-related events. However, more recent longitudinal research confirms this relationship. These studies also demonstrate that the relationship between ethnic identity and perceptions of racism is dialectical (Pahl and Way 2006; Sellers and Shelton 2003). This provides evidence that experiences of discrimination cause subsequent exploration of ethnic identity. In addition, ethnic identity can also increase a person’s sensitivity to discrimination.

Allport (1954) suggests that there are two general responses to discrimination: an intropunitive response and an extropunitive response. The intropunitive response occurs when an individual internalizes the negative stereotypes about their in-group and develops negative attitudes toward it (Phinney, Chavira, and Tate 1993). In this scenario, the outcome is deculturation or a decrease in identification with their ethnic group (Fuller-Rowell et al. 2013). If discrimination also dampens feelings of belonging to the host nation, an intropunitive response can lead to marginalization in the acculturation process (see Figure 1). The extropunitive response involves increased animosity towards the dominant group (the source of discrimination) and a separation mode of acculturation. The rejection-identification model proposes that social rejection (discrimination or exclusion) accentuates ethnic/racial identity because of an individual’s psychological innate need to belong to a social group. In other words, the experience of rejection in the mainstream culture – either through overt prejudice or more subtle forms of racism or stigmatization – compels racial minorities to develop stronger ethnic/racial identities.

There is limited evidence to support the intropunitive perspective. As illustrated above, few immigrants appear to be jettisoning their ethnic identities in the acculturation process. Incorporating an ethnic label is an important aspect of the identities of both first and second generation immigrants with non-European ethnic backgrounds (Costigan et al. 2009). Phinney et al. (1993) examined the effect of negative social evaluations about Hispanic people on the ethnic identity among a group of Hispanic high school students. The results of their experiment showed that these evaluations lowered the ratings of their ethnic group, but it had no effect on their ethnic self-concept. In an ethnically heterogeneous sample, Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2009) also observe that discrimination associates with a more negative view of one’s ethnic group. Phinney et al. (1993) conclude that ethnic self-concept – i.e., how people view themselves as a member of an ethnic group – is fairly stable and resistant to external evaluations. Moreover, their research illustrated that individuals with a strong sense of ethnic identity tended to affirm their ethnic self-concept in response to negative evaluations.

Does racism influence in-group identification among immigrants? The literature suggests that ethnicity is a more salient characteristic for the social identities of racial minorities than Whites because it is linked to racialization, discrimination, and marginalization (Umaña-Taylor 2011). A stronger sense of in-group belonging tends to associate with greater antipathies toward out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979). There is a general tendency among minorities worldwide to develop “oppositional identities” in response to blocked mobility or racism (Waters 1996). An “oppositional identity” refers to a rejection of mainstream cultural norms and identification with the dominant culture (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998). Jenkins remarks that “the experience of [racialization] may strengthen existing group identity through a process of resistance and reaction” (1994: p. 203). Berry et al. (2006) conclude that the experience of discrimination associates with a rejection of involvement with the host community and a stronger orientation towards in-group belonging or confusion about their identities.
There are questions about whether the extropunitive response is confined to the experiences of Blacks or if it is also applicable to recent Asian and Hispanic immigrants. According to Sears et al. (2003), the Black discrimination model suggests that politicized ethnic identities could emerge among non-Black racial minorities because of discrimination. This would be a troubling outcome since such identities associate with “ethnic balkanization” and a lack of assimilation or integration among new immigrants. Sears et al. observe that the experience of discrimination among Blacks (African Americans) is distinct from the discrimination that other racial minorities encounter. Numerous African Americans see themselves in a power struggle with Whites because of the legacy of slavery and segregation. These historical conditions and the pervasive disadvantages that African Americans continue to face has contributed to a racial identity (Black consciousness) based on a common fate in a White-dominated society. Since recent Asian and Hispanic immigrants do not face the same color barriers as Blacks, Sears et al. suggest that it is possible that politicized ethno-racial identities will not emerge among these groups.

Still, Golash-Boza (2006) questions the possibility for recent immigrants to lose their “ethnicity” as did European immigrants, and demonstrates that this possibility also varies widely among immigrant groups. Latinos who have lighter skin tones and face little discrimination appear to be able to adopt an “American” label. Some Latin American immigrants and their children, however, are adopting pan-ethnic identities through the process of racialized assimilation. This reflects their treatment as “non-White” in their interactions with the dominant group. Golash-Boza observes that the experience of discrimination discourages Latinos from self-identifying as unhyphenated Americans. This illustrates how the process of identificational assimilation is a two-way process. Discrimination sends these immigrants a clear message that members of the dominant group do not consider them real “Americans” or social equals. Thus their rejection of an American label in favor of a pan-ethnic or hyphenated label is a response to feeling unwelcome or subordinate in the host community. This exclusion from the mainstream, Golash-Boza argues, corresponds to the tacit assumption that the label “American” is exclusively for Whites. In response, Latin American immigrants have adopted Latino/Latina identities. In this respect, the label “Latino” should not be interpreted as a cultural designation, since it is a sociopolitical identity that corresponds to a shared experience of exclusion.

Rumbaut (1994) also demonstrates that first and second generation immigrants who expect to encounter discrimination are less likely to adopt an unhyphenated American identity. These people are also more likely to maintain a national-origin identity. However, Fuller-Rowell, Ong, and Phinney (2013) propose that the effect of discrimination on an individual’s ethnic identity could depend on their level of identification to the mainstream culture. For those with weak feelings of belonging to American culture, discrimination could trigger a stronger commitment to their ethnic group, as the rejection-identification model predicts. In contrast, when a person identifies with the culture that also disparages their ethnic group, the experience of discrimination or stigmatization can have the opposite effect. Hence, these authors suggest that American identity moderates the effect of discrimination on ethnic identity. The authors find support for this hypothesis. Less Americanized Latinos respond to discrimination with increases in their in-group identification over time. For those with a stronger sense of being American, these experiences stifle their sense of in-group commitment.
While Rumbaut (1994) demonstrates that American identity formation increases across generations, his results are not unequivocally supportive of the straight-line hypothesis of assimilation. He shows that forming American identities is a reactive process that corresponds to the reception of immigrants within their host communities. For example, on the heels of the passage of Proposition 187 in California – a backlash against illegal immigrants that restricted their access to public resources – numerous immigrants recanted their American or hyphenated-American identities. Between 1992 and 1995, the proportion claiming a non-American national identity (e.g., Mexican) jumped from 44 to 61 percent among the foreign-born and from 16 to 33 percent among the second generation. There was also a sharp decline in the number of immigrants who identified themselves as unhyphenated Americans. Rumbaut argues that this “boomerang effect” corresponds to a “reactive ethnic consciousness,” which implies that perceptions of exclusion from the mainstream mediate self-identities. Roehling et al. (2010) also observe that exposure to “immigration debate” triggers ethnic identity exploration and higher levels of acculturative stress among Latino youth.

Kibria (1997) observes that being labelled “Asian” or “Oriental” is a common experience for the members of Asian-origin groups. Second generation Chinese and Korean immigrants perceive these labels as a common racial experience that binds some Asian groups together. There does not appear to be, however, evidence of an Asian consciousness that is on par with Black consciousness. Hiller and Chow (2005) observe that the experiences of racism among recent Chinese immigrants to Canada have not been severe enough to trigger strong reactive identities. Few choose pan-ethnic or purely national-original labels, and most linked their identities to a sense of being Canadian. However, this does not demonstrate that race is an unimportant factor in their identities. The perception of racial difference from the dominant groups partly explains the low numbers that self-identify as just Canadian. The fact that their identities are modified or hyphenated reflects their internalized feelings of difference. One respondent described themselves as Chinese, despite immigrating to Canada as an infant and feeling Canadian rather than Chinese.

Spatial Concentration

A major characteristic of the new immigration is the spatial or geographic concentration of immigrants in metropolitan areas (Alba and Nee 1997). In most North American cities, racial minorities are clustered at the regional and sub-regional levels. This spatial concentration can result from involuntary segregation because of racial or socioeconomic status, but ethnic communities and enclaves can also emerge because of personal preferences for residing among co-ethnics (Wu et al. 2012). The neighborhoods where immigrants live are consequential for two reasons. First, the neighborhood environment is a determinant of individual-level life chances and prospects for economic assimilation. Second, neighborhoods are a primary context for social interactions. Spatial concentration (or segregation) implies a higher level of social isolation. Thus spatial concentration is a form of social distance from the mainstream and this could foster strong in-group tendencies, oppositional subcultures, and a weaker sense of belonging to the host nation.

The long-standing assumption is that spatial concentration is a barrier to the assimilation or integration of immigrants (Sanders 2002). This assumption is based on the US context and the experience of European immigrants, and could be less germane for other countries and more recent waves of immigrants. In the European immigrant experience,
acculturation and socioeconomic mobility preceded spatial assimilation. Fong and Wilkes (1999) report a different outcome for non-White immigrants in Canada. For East/Southeast Asians, South Asians, and Blacks, there is a weak correlation between neighborhood attainment and socioeconomic status. In part, this could reflect a group-level preference for residing close to relatives and co-ethnics and the process of chain migration. Fong and Wilkes point out that in the Canadian context such neighborhoods are sites of social capital that draw co-ethnics together. In Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver – Canada’s three immigrant gateway cities – the number of large ethnic enclaves has increased from six neighborhoods in 1981 to over 250 neighborhoods in 2001 (Hou and Picot 2004).

Whatever the reason for spatial concentration – be it a choice or a lack thereof – there is a relationship between neighborhood co-ethnic density and patterns of social affiliation. Since neighborhoods are an important social milieu, spatial concentration could limit contact with out-group members. This issue is whether these ecological conditions discourage identificational assimilation because it reflects immigrants’ social isolation from the mainstream. In contrast, mixed-race neighborhoods provide opportunities for intergroup contact that can promote positive relations between groups (Fong and Wilkes 2003). The formation of social ties with members of the dominant group is a potential wellspring for identificational assimilation. Self-identification as Canadian (even if it is hyphenated) is a function of membership in local social networks and the perception of social acceptance this membership fosters (Wu et al. 2010). As noted above, there is a relationship between engagement with Canadian culture and the likelihood of having a strong sense of belonging to Canada.

The presumption is that concentrations of co-ethnic at the neighborhood or regional level foster the maintenance of ethnic identities (Sanders 2002). This is a logical presumption considering that key dimensions of ethnic identity (e.g., ethnic-based institutions and events, co-ethnic networks) depend on the local size of the ethnic group. Previous studies illustrate that individuals with the strongest identities were socialized in co-ethnic communities during childhood (Alba 1990; Harris 1995). Rumbaut (1994) shows that the school context of immigrants is another important factor. In the US, attending an inner city school – which have high concentrations of racial minorities – increases the chances that a child of an immigrant will form a racial or pan-ethnic identity. He observes an opposite effect for children attending upper middle-class private schools. Rumbaut argues that these findings support the notion of segmented assimilation since it reflects an intersection between immigrant status and community-level deprivation in the production of social identities.

Berry et al. (2006) observe that youth who adopt bicultural identities tend to live in ethnically diverse communities. In contrast, those with strong in-group identities tend to reside in ethnically homogeneous communities. Bisin et al. (2010) find a contrasting pattern. Focusing on England, the authors observe that ethnic identity is much stronger in mixed race than in homogenous neighborhoods. Their conclusion is that this pattern of ethnic identity formation represents cultural distinction among racial minorities. This finding is consistent with theories that suggest that ethnic identities are products of intergroup relations and often emerge when perceived dissimilarities between groups are large. That is, negative interactions with members of the dominant group can motivate cultural distinction among racial minorities. Since the demographic opportunities of having encounters with Whites are higher in mixed than homogeneous neighborhoods, this accounts for their finding that in-group identification is higher in racially integrated neighborhoods.
Wu et al. (2012) examined if the density of co-ethnics in neighborhoods of settlement influences the sense of belonging to Canada and feelings of comfort (or out of place) in the host community. Among first generation immigrants, the authors report a linear relationship between the co-ethnic composition of neighborhoods and these outcome variables. With greater levels of spatial assimilation, the sense of belonging to Canada increases. This finding indicates that living in an ethnic enclave is a barrier to identificational assimilation. This finding is restricted to first generation immigrants, however, who tend towards national-origin identities anyways. Neighborhood ethnic composition has no effect on sense of belonging to Canada among the 1.5 and second generations. First generation immigrants also tend to feel more comfortable in Canada when residing among co-ethnics. There are no feelings of discomfort living in mixed neighborhoods for the 1.5 and second generations. Wu et al. conclude that living in an ethnic enclave can help first generation immigrants adapt, even though it weakens their sense of belonging to Canada.

SUMMARY

This knowledge synthesis examined the literature on the ethnic identities of immigrants and how these identities correspond to their level of incorporation in the host nation. This overview of the literature offers several key findings:

1. **Ethnicity and ethnic identity should be interpreted as products of intergroup relations.** Too often ethnicity is considered to be a cultural phenomenon. Ethnicity should not be reduced to culture for two reasons. First, the assumption that a common culture is the basis for ethnicity ignores the cultural variation that exists within ethnic groups (Chandra 2006). This is particularly the case for national (e.g., Chinese) and pan-ethnic groups (e.g., Asian), which are quite heterogeneous with regard to cultural norms and behaviors. In addition, people that share the same “ethnicity” have different levels of affiliation with their ethnic group, ranging from none to a lot. This includes variation on indicators of culture such as language use, traditions, values, and behavioral norms. Second, ethnicity has little meaning in homogeneous societies; it is a social phenomenon that is exclusive to heterogeneous societies. The classic statement from Barth (1969) is that ethnicity represents the boundaries between groups not the “cultural stuff” inside groups. In this perspective, intergroup contact (power relations) is the primary determinant of ethnic identities. For racial minorities, ethnic identity is an ascribed label that connotes their social distance from Whites.

2. **Ethnic identities are not incompatible with national identities.** A major concern in the literature is whether cultural maintenance discourages a sense of belonging with the host nation. This corresponds to the question of whether ethnicity among recent immigrants from non-European countries will fade across generations as occurred for European-origin immigrants. Patterns of self-identification suggest that attachment to the host nation increases across generations. First generation immigrants, regardless of length of residence, tend to prefer a nation-origin label. This largely reflects their foreign-born nativity and socialization. In the 1.5 and second generations, there is an increase in identificational assimilation. For these generations, however, an ethnic affiliation remains important. Being domestic-born has stronger effects on the odds of claiming an unhyphenated or hyphenated label than does length of residence (Rumbaut 1994). A key feature of the new immigration is the potential to retain
ethnic identities alongside national identities. The modal path of acculturation in the second generation is the development of bicultural identities. Having a Canadian identity may indeed involve a multicultural ethos that fosters cultural distinctiveness.

3. **The acculturation process is on-going.** Since 99 percent of Canadian racial minorities are first or second generation immigrants, the process of acculturation is incomplete, since ethnicity is not expected to fadeout before the third generation. At this point, unhyphenated identities remain rare among the second generation. The literature suggests that race is a major factor in the acculturation process. Dropping the hyphen is, perhaps, no longer necessary or desirable. The reasons the children of European immigrants lost their ethnicity are themselves unclear. For recent immigrants, personal preferences and a greater tolerance for cultural distinctiveness in host communities implies that hyphenated identities could persist past the third generation. In addition, internalized perceptions of difference constrain racial minorities from dropping the hyphen and adopting straight “Canadian” or “American” identities. The relationship between a sense of belonging to an ethnic group and adopting an ethnic label is not clear-cut. For example, some minorities adopt an ethnic label despite little emotional identification with the ethnic group (Hiller and Chow 2005). That is, despite feeling more “Canadian” or “American” than ethnic, racial minorities are adopting hyphenated identities because of racial discourses that make them feel less Canadian or American than Whites.

4. **Segmented assimilation is occurring.** The relationship between acculturation and the social identities of immigrants is complex, and there are several possible outcomes. The modal outcome is integration. This is a positive indication that numerous immigrants are able to maintain an ethnic identity and incorporate into the host nation. But not all immigrants are willing or able to integrate. The reasons are unclear, but a national-origin identification (e.g., Chinese) is not uncommon in the second generation. In models of acculturation, this represents a separated outcome. It cannot be assumed that a strong ethnic identity in conjunction with a weak national identity (e.g., Canadian) necessarily reflects alienation from the host nation. There are other forms of social affiliation that connect immigrants to the host community besides identificational assimilation. It could be that labels such as “Canadian” are simply too amorphous to resonate for some immigrants. That said, it is also possible that some second generation immigrants adopt a nation-origin label because of being made to feel less Canadian than Whites. There is evidence that some people adopt racialized labels because of their incorporation into an underclass.

5. **Racism influences social identities.** Historically, ethnicity has functioned as a basis for social stratification in Canada and the US. This has two major implications for the social identities of immigrants. First, the dominant group places immigrants into ethno-racial categories, which constrains their choices of self-identification. Most US Blacks cannot and do not claim to be “White,” even though most have some White ancestry. This is because society perceives them as “Black” regardless of their personal identity. This color line is not as stark for Asians and Hispanics, but perceptions of difference from Whites still “color” their patterns of identification. For example, treatment as second-class citizens vis-à-vis Whites complicates their national identities. This can discourage the use of unhyphenated labels and promote a preference for pan-ethnic identities. Second, the experience of racism can foster the development of in-group identities. Similarly, it can lead to a rejection of a national label such as “American” or “Canadian” and alienation from the mainstream. These represent politicized identities that emerge in context of social exclusion and socioeconomic deprivation. Thus ethnic balkanization
is a corollary of unreceptive host communities. In contrast, for immigrants with prospects for socioeconomic mobility and few encounters with discrimination, integration is the expected outcome.
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