THE NEW IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

• Reviews the literature on the social identities of immigrants
  • Immigrants with non-European origins
  • Studies published from 1990 to 2014
• Social identities are an important dimension of immigrant adaptation and acculturation
  • Social attachment (or alienation)
  • Identificational assimilation
BACKGROUND

• The “new immigration” refers to the influx of immigrants from non-European countries

• The elimination of racial selectivity in immigration policy has increased ethnic and racial heterogeneity

• In the late 1960s, racial minorities accounted for 2% of Canada’s population

• At present, racial minorities account for about 20% of the population
MAIN ISSUES

• The acculturation “processes for non-visible minorities and visible minorities are different and distinct” (Hou & Balakrishnan)

• The assimilation or integration of recent immigrants is problematic

• There are structural barriers to assimilation and integration:
  • Socioeconomic constraints
  • The “color line” or racism
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• Does acculturation influence the social identities of immigrants?
• Do strong ethnic identities associate with alienation from the host nation?
• Are strong ethnic identities incompatible with identificational assimilation?
• Does racism trigger “reactive” ethnic identities?
DEFINITIONS

• Tajfel defines ethnic identity 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”

• Major components: self-identification; group attachment; in-group attitudes; and ethnic involvement
TYPES OF IDENTITY

- Ethnic-origin (e.g., Tibetan)
- National-origin (e.g., Chinese)
- Bicultural (e.g., Chinese-Canadian)
- Pan-ethnic (e.g., Asian)
- Unhyphenated (e.g., Canadian)
MODES OF ACCULTURATION

• **Assimilation.** Strong identification with the dominant culture **without** the preservation of cultural distinctiveness

• **Integration.** Strong identification with the dominant culture **with** the preservation of cultural distinctiveness

• **Separation.** Preservation of cultural distinctiveness with limited contact and identification with the dominant culture

• **Marginalization.** Little cultural distinctiveness or identification with the dominant culture
## ACCULTURATION AND IDENTITY

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CONTEXT OF IDENTITY

• Phinney states that “ethnic identity is virtually a meaningless concept” in ethnically/racially homogenous societies

• Ethnic or racial identities are products of intergroup contact

• Ethnicity represents a social boundary (not a cultural difference per se) between groups

• Ethnic boundaries represent a form of social organization (power) that emerge via intergroup relations
CONTEXT OF IDENTITY

• Ethnic identity is fluid
• The ethnic identity an individual chooses depends on the situation
• There are social constraints on the identity that an individual can self-select
• Some racial/ethnic identities are involuntary or socially imposed labels (e.g., Black)
• Ethnicity is optional for most Whites, an ascribed status for most non-Whites
KEY PATTERNS

• First generation immigrants tend to prefer national-origin identities (e.g., Chinese)

• Second generation immigrants are more likely to adopt bicultural or hyphenated identities (e.g., Chinese-Canadian)

• A higher proportion of 1.5 generation immigrants claim a nation-origin identity than the second generation

• These findings suggest that intergenerational assimilation is occurring
KEY PATTERNS

• The racial status of immigrants complicates identification assimilation

• Few non-European origin immigrants adopt unhyphenated identities, such as “Canadian” or “American”

• For 1.5 and second generation immigrants, ethnic origins remain an important form of self-identification

• Most second generation immigrants adopt bicultural identities
ACCULTURATION EFFECTS

• Being native-born is the strongest predictor of adopting an unhyphenated identity

• The evidence is mixed with regard to whether ethnic identities are incompatible with a sense of being “Canadian” or “American”

• The bulk of evidence appears to support a bicultural mode of acculturation

• There is not a strong inverse relationship between ethnic identification and identification with the host nation
RACISM AND IDENTITY

• The identity that immigrants select depends on their perception of race relations

• Some are reluctant to “drop the hyphen” because racialization makes them feel unaccepted as “Canadian” or “American” (i.e., second-class citizens)

• Ethnicity is a salient characteristic for the social identities of racial minorities because of its link to racism

• Some racial minorities adopt pan-ethnic (e.g., Hispanic) or racial (e.g., Black) identities in response to social exclusion

• The color line is preventing “ethnicity” from receding among racial minorities as it did among many European immigrants
KEY MESSAGES

1. Ethnic identity is a product of intergroup relations

2. Ethnic identities are not incompatible with identification with the host nation

3. The acculturation process is incomplete for the new migration

4. Bicultural identities are predominant

5. Segmented assimilation is occurring
THANK YOU