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Journal of Adolescence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/adolescence

Editorial

Introduction to a special section on Explaining Positive Adaptation of Immigrant and Minority Youth across Cultures

A B S T R A C T

This special section on “Explaining Positive Adaptation of Immigrant and Minority Youth across Cultures” is the result of an expert meeting organized by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD), the European Association of Developmental Psychology (EADP), and the European Association for Research on Adolescence (EARA). The aim of this special section was to bring together empirical studies and expert commentaries on a pressing topic of global importance, and to explore intersections between the fields of acculturation and positive youth development. From these contributions, several major challenges were identified. These included the need for greater attention to the strengths and adaptation of immigrant adolescents (i.e., to include a positive youth development framework in acculturation research and theory), the differentiation and intersections between acculturative processes and normative developmental challenges, the evolution acculturation theory, the need to better understand contact between multiple groups, the consideration of context-dependency and dynamic nature of acculturative processes.

In September 2015, a group of immigration and human development experts met on the Island of Hydra, Greece. The meeting was organized on behalf of Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) International Affairs Committee and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Racial and Ethnic Issues Committee in collaboration with the European Association of Developmental Psychology (EADP) and the European Association for Research on Adolescence (EARA). The idea behind the meeting was to bring together experts in the fields of immigration research and human development and to discuss emerging challenges and opportunities associated with the growing cultural diversity and migration streams in societies across the globe. One product of the meeting was a mission statement that the group published (Coll et al., 2015). This mission statement summarizes and highlights for a diversity of stakeholders major internationally confirmed empirical findings about the conditions that support the positive psychosocial adaptation of immigrant youth, but also provided recommendations for societal, structural supports that can foster the adaptation of immigrant youth and their families. The statement was designed primarily to raise awareness among the wider public, as the content of the mission statement is mostly widely shared knowledge among scientists working in this area. However, the discussions in the meeting also revealed several less well-addressed topics that clearly deserved more research attention. A second result of the meeting was, hence, the creation of this special section aiming at communicating research gaps, theoretical blind spots, and new developments in the fields of immigration and youth development research, this time our focus was on a scientific audience. We hoped that by communicating criticisms and novel ideas we would inspire new innovative research and that this would result in an even better understanding of the challenges and triumphs of immigrant youth.

The special section was organized in a particular way. First, we invited empirical studies highlighting some of the pressing issues in contemporary acculturation and youth development research. One such issue is the growing complexity and diversity among minority and immigrant groups. To highlight this, we invited a study on a truly under-researched minority group – the Roma (Dimitrova, Johnson, & van de Vijver, 2017). Many Roma adolescents grow up with extreme marginalization, systematic

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.09.008>

discrimination, and exposure to negative group stereotypes, so that common models of bicultural socialization and the benefits of a bicultural identity are challenged (Dimitrova et al., 2017). This study highlights the long standing challenges faced by some minority groups, and the vital importance of testing the generalizability of theories about adaptation and acculturative process in a diversity of contexts.

The focus was also on heterogeneity in the second study in this special section (Syed & Juang, 2017). Developmental science has seen important advances when theoretical and methodological innovations go hand and hand with one another. For example, the person-oriented approach, has its conceptual foundations in holistic-interactionistic systems theory (Magnusson, 1988), and methodologically one of the common tools used in the person-oriented approach involves techniques geared to identifying patterns of characteristics or qualities across individuals (i.e., inter-individual variation; Bergman & Lundh, 2015; Bergman, Magnusson, & El-Khouri, 2003). Hence, in keeping with the pattern focus of the person-oriented approach, Syed and Juang (2017) differentiated between six subgroups of Chinese American adolescents, and empirically demonstrated the importance of recognizing diversity among acculturating adolescents, and highlight what might be missed by methods ill-suited to consider such diversity.

The third study by Titzmann and Gniewosz (2017) illustrates the ways in which immigrant adolescents can be a true resource for their families and the society as a whole. Using an actor-partner interdependence model with dyadic data, this study showed that adolescents are a driving force for family adjustment, bearing substantial responsibilities, by transmitting cultural knowledge to their mothers (Titzmann & Gniewosz, 2017).

The fourth and final empirical study by Deater-Deckard et al. (2017), consistent with other studies in this section, illustrates what can be gained from methodological innovation that is coupled with theoretical models that recognize the complexity of youth development and the immigration experience (e.g., Motti-Stefanidi, Berry, Chryssochoou, Sam, & Phinney, 2012). In keeping with wider efforts to tackle complexity, the study by Deater-Deckard et al. (2017) had a variable-oriented approach that used multi-level modelling as a way to better understand whether variability was primarily located in individuals or groups, in their wide ranging and diverse study sample.

After the empirical papers successfully completed peer-review, we then invited colleagues with distinguished track records in the fields of youth development and/or acculturation research to comment on them. Even more important, we wanted the commentary authors to extract the novelties and shortcomings, so that potential future steps for research were carved out. The result is an innovative and diverse collection of ideas and new perspectives on acculturation phenomena among immigrant and minority youth.

For example, to highlight the contributions of the commentaries, one is immediately struck by the observation that research with immigrant youth should move away from a deficit-oriented perspective in which it is automatically assumed that adolescents who are experiencing immigration or are in a minority status are inherently challenged and overwhelmed by stressors (Motti-Stefanidi & Coll, 2017; Sam, 2017). Some of the empirical studies in this section as well as other research (e.g., Marks, Ejesi, & García Coll, 2014) have shown that adolescent immigrants fare much better than often assumed. They take on responsibilities for their families (e.g., Fuligni & Telzer, 2012) and actively help their parents in dealing with the new society (e.g., Titzmann & Gniewosz, 2017). Hence, scholarly attention and the funding structures that support research should attend to immigrant and minority youth from a holistic perspective and with openness to the diversity in development and contexts that exist. Taking a holistic approach demands openness to rethinking how constructs are formulated, how research questions are posed, which methods are used, as well as a willingness to push the boundaries of our assumptions about adolescent development and acculturation.

As noted in the commentaries, there is a need to understand how normative developmental processes and acculturative processes can be distinct, yet are also intersect in some instances (Motti-Stefanidi & Coll, 2017; Van de Vijver, 2017). One could, for example, study developmental and acculturative changes through immigrant and native group comparisons, one could comparatively study predictors pertaining to developmental and acculturative processes, or one could differentiate between developmental and/or acculturative stages in long-term adaptation (Titzmann & Lee, 2017). Research may profit from a careful consideration of the differences and intersections between these processes, in that immigrant youth may be unnecessarily stigmatized (e.g., by highlighting the differences between immigrants and natives, although they are in fact more similar than different) or may not receive the required support (e.g., when their specific needs are not recognized).

Another challenging issue raised by Van de Vijver (2017) concerned our fundamental understanding of acculturation. He showed that acculturation research has reflected the historical changes in migration patterns. The current migration streams are unprecedented not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of immigration motivation, heritage and host orientation and levels of transnationalism – to name just a few dimensions. The implication is that more situation-specific components, more intra-individual variation over time, and multiple cultural identifications have to be more deeply considered in acculturation definitions and models (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015; Noels & Clément, 2015).

Another challenge is also associated with cultural diversity. In today's societies, there are many more than just two groups in contact with each other, which is at the heart of some acculturation models. Super-diversity (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015) poses new challenges for acculturation models, because the creation of harmonious intercultural relations may be more challenging (Sam, 2017; Van de Vijver, 2017). How societies deal with this diversity, how multiple groups relate to one another and establish coalitions or frictions, is vital to study in its own right, as well as to then connect to our understanding of individual adolescent development and acculturation.

Another point relates to the importance of considering the developmental context. Acculturation always takes place in a particular context, which can facilitate or undermine the success of cultural adaptation (Motti-Stefanidi & Coll, 2017; Sam, 2017; Van de Vijver, 2017). Hence, comparative research across countries promises to be highly relevant in the future. First examples of such studies exist that either compare groups in theoretically derived receiving societies (Titzmann, Serwata, Silbereisen, & Davidov, 2016) or use large scale projects that assess various countries that differ systematically in certain domains, such as immigration policies (Stevens et al.,

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