



The majority's perceptions about adaptation to the host society of different immigrant groups: The distinct role of warmth and threat



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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research was to show that majority members differ in their perceptions of different immigrant groups as regards their warmth, competence, similarity, and triggered threat, and that these differences might explain why majority members vary in their perception of adaptation and the perceived need to adapt for different immigrant groups. Particularly, the study aimed to test the distinct role of stereotypes (especially the warmth dimension) and perceived threat (especially realistic threat) in predicting the majority's perception of adaptation and the need for immigrants to adapt. Spanish participants ($N = 307$) responded to a questionnaire assessing Moroccan, Romanian, and Ecuadorian immigrants, reporting their perceptions of adaptation and the need for immigrants to adapt to the host society, on two dimensions of stereotypes (warmth and competence), perceived (realistic and symbolic) threat, and intergroup similarity. Results showed that the majority's perceptions about immigrants were specific to the immigrant target assessed. The psychosocial variables that predicted perception of adaptation and need to adapt differed depending on the immigrant target assessed, although warmth generally predicted perception of adaptation, and perceived threat generally predicted need to adapt. Accordingly, warmth was found to be a mediator in predicting perception of adaptation, whereas perceived realistic threat was a mediator when predicting the need to adapt. Intergroup similarity was a reliable mediator in both perception of adaptation and need to adapt. Overall, warmth seemed to be more closely related with acculturation perceptions, whereas perceived threat was more related with acculturation preferences.

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1. Introduction

Immigration has been a vital topic of research as scholars search to understand why immigration goes more smoothly for some groups than for others. And with good reason, a United Nations report on World Population Policies estimated that there were 214 million international immigrants in 2010, and that the most likely destinations for immigrants over the next 40 years include the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Spain, Italy, Germany, Australia and France in that order ([UN report on World Population Policies, 2010](#)). Clearly it is critical that these governments find solutions for successful integration of these newcomers. This study focused on the majority's perception of adaptation, a factor that is critical in determining the ultimate success of the immigrant's adjustment to the new society.

The goal of this research was to demonstrate that majority members differed in their perceptions of different immigrant groups as regards their warmth, competence, intergroup similarity, and perceived threat. In addition, we suggest that these differences may explain why majority members varied in their perception of adaptation and the perceived need to adapt of these immigrant groups. Based on previous research about acculturation preferences ([Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Sénécal, 1997](#); [Navas et al., 2004](#); [Navas & Rojas, 2010](#); [Piontkowski, Florack, Hölker, & Obdržálek, 2000](#)), we expected that majority members would differ not only in their perception of adaptation and their need to adapt to the host society when assessing different immigrant groups, but also in their stereotypes ([Lee & Fiske, 2006](#)), perceived threat, and perceived similarity ([Rohmann, Piontkowski, & Van Randenborgh, 2008](#)) toward different immigrant targets.

Furthermore, the study attempted to test the possible differential impact of stereotypes (compared to perceived threat and similarity) when predicting the majority's perception of adaptation and the need for immigrants to adapt to the host society. Regarding this specific goal, which builds on literature about stereotypes (Stereotype Content Model, SCM; [Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008](#); [Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002](#); [Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999](#)) and about intergroup threat perception (e.g., [Esses, Jackson, Nolan, & Armstrong, 1999](#); [Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005](#)), some specific predictions were made: stereotypes (particularly the warmth dimension) may be more relevant to the majority's perception of immigrants' adaptation, whereas perceived threat may be more relevant when predicting need to adapt. Accordingly, we hypothesized that the majority's stereotypes (specially warmth) about different immigrant targets would explain the variation in their perception of immigrants' adaptation, whereas their perceived threat would explain the majority's different need to adapt for different immigrant groups.

This research will enable us to better grasp the majority's perceptions toward minority groups in order to understand and predict the future intercultural relationships in a multicultural context.

2. The majority's acculturation preferences for different immigrant targets

Majority members of the host society hold a clear partiality in their acceptance of different immigrant groups ([Berry & Kalin, 1995](#); [Hagendoorn, 1993](#)). Research shows a preference by majority members for contact with some outgroups more than with others (for a review see [Hagendoorn, 1995](#); [Owen, Eisner, & McFaul, 1981](#)).

Accordingly, the majority's acculturation preferences would not be homogeneous for different immigrant groups, but specific to the immigrant target assessed by majority members. A key contribution of the Interactive Acculturation Model ([IAM], [Bourhis et al., 1997](#)) is the idea that the majority's acculturation preferences for an immigrant may differ depending on the national origin of the immigrant group considered. As [Montreuil and Bourhis \(2001\)](#) highlight, flexible acculturation orientations such as 'integration' or 'individualism' would be more desirable for 'valued' immigrants (e.g., French; whose language and culture are similar to the ingroup), whereas less receptive acculturation orientations such as 'segregation' or 'exclusion' would be preferred for 'devalued' immigrants (e.g., Haitians, Arabs-Moslems; for whom majority members already have negative stereotypes or whose culture and religion are perceived as being considerably different from the ingroup). This idea has received empirical support in some studies (i.e., [Bourhis & Dayan, 2004](#); [Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001](#); [Montreuil, Bourhis, & Vanbeselaere, 2004](#)).

Along these same lines, the works of Piontkowski and collaborators ([Piontkowski et al., 2000](#); [Rohmann et al., 2008](#)) also found that the majority's acculturation preferences varied depending on the origin of the immigrant target considered. In particular, they discovered that Germans were more in favor of 'integrating' Italian immigrants, whereas the option of 'assimilation' was preferred for Turkish immigrants ([Rohmann et al., 2008](#)).

Likewise, in the Relative Acculturation Extend Model ([RAEM], [Navas et al., 2005](#)), the ethno-cultural origin of minorities in acculturation processes is highlighted, demonstrating that the majority's opinion varies as a function of the immigrant collective being assessed. The results of these studies, carried out in various places of Spain, show that majority members make more demands and require more changes from the Maghrebians (i.e., immigrants from Morocco and Algeria) than from the sub-Saharan collective (immigrants from Senegal, Guinea, Mali, etc.), because the latter are allowed to keep part of their culture ('integration' option), whereas the Maghrebians are called on to abandon their customs to adapt to those of the hosts ('assimilation'). These results are consistent with the fact that majority members value Maghrebians less than sub-Saharans. Additionally, manifest and subtle prejudice is higher toward Maghrebians than toward sub-Saharans. Spanish people also

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