



Factors affecting immigrants' acculturation intentions: A theoretical model and its assessment among adolescent immigrants from Russia and Ukraine in Israel^{☆,☆☆}

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ABSTRACT

In this study, a new acculturation intentions model (AIM) was formulated to help explain immigrants' preferences for different acculturation strategies and their further emigration intentions, i.e. their plans to either remain in the host country, return to their country of origin, or emigrate to a third country. The AIM applies the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) to the case of immigration. In the present study, the AIM was assessed among high-school adolescents who immigrated from Russia and Ukraine to Israel as part of an educational program ($n = 151$). The adolescents completed questionnaires twice: half a year before and three years after their immigration. In accordance with the theoretical model, attitudes towards the country of origin and the host country and perceived environmental constraints (including perceived discrimination as well as perceived social support from parents, peers, and teachers) affected the immigrants' acculturation intentions. In contrast with what was hypothesized in this study, immigrants' psychological resources were not related to their acculturation intentions. The significance of these findings for both the immigrants and the host society are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Acculturation is an extremely popular concept in immigration studies. The PsycNet database of the American Psychological Association lists nearly 4000 articles on acculturation published in peer-reviewed journals during the last 20 years (APA, 2010). However, an overwhelming majority of these studies focused on the outcomes of different acculturation strategies, i.e. they examined how preferences for different acculturation strategies affect the immigrants' social and psychological adjustment in the host country, family relations, and the psychological development of immigrant children and adolescents. Very few studies have focused on the factors affecting the immigrants' preferences for different acculturation strategies. Understanding these factors is important for both theoretical and practical reasons, and this article aims to partially fill this gap.

The main goal of this article is to formulate and empirically test a model that will help explain immigrants' acculturation intentions; i.e. their preferences for different acculturation strategies as well as their plans to remain in the host country, return to their country of origin, or emigrate to a third country. The study was conducted among high-school adolescents who participated in an educational program and immigrated from Russia and Ukraine to Israel without their parents. The

[☆] The results of this study were partially presented at the 117th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 2009.

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program's conditions enabled assessment both during the pre-migration period (about half a year before emigration) and in the post-migration period (at the end of the three-year immigration program, when the adolescents completed high school in Israel).

1.1. Models explaining immigrants' preferences for different acculturation strategies

Several theoretical models have been suggested to explain immigrants' preferences for different acculturation strategies, each with their advantages and drawbacks, which will be briefly reviewed. The first model was suggested by [Berry \(1997\)](#). This model is based on the assumption that the choice of acculturation strategies can best be understood in terms of the interaction between the immigrants' psychosocial characteristics (which are mainly formed in the pre-migration period) and the acculturation policy of the host society. Following this assumption, Berry's model includes a large number of variables grouped according to where they originate – in the country of origin or in the host country – and according to their intrapsychic or environmental nature ([Berry, 1997, 2005](#)). The main advantage of this model is its comprehensiveness, while its main drawback is that it is too complex to be empirically tested.

[Safdar, Lay, and Struthers \(2003\)](#) suggested a more parsimonious model, which assumed that the psychological resources of immigrants, their co-national connectedness, and daily hassles predict their acculturation preferences. Empirical testing of this model ([Safdar, Struthers, & van Oudenhoven, 2009](#)) has demonstrated that the immigrants' psychological resources and co-national "connectedness" indeed predict their preferences for different acculturation strategies. Unfortunately, this model did not include variables related to the immigrants' connectedness with the host society and social conditions existing in the host society, which may be important predictors of the immigrants' acculturation preferences.

A third theoretical framework was suggested by [Burgelt, Morgan, and Pernice \(2008\)](#). It describes the dynamic relationships between different factors affecting the acculturation strategies of immigrants as they vary with time during the immigration process. The main significance of this model is in its analysis of the pre-migration factors (expectations, hopes, and motivations) affecting the acculturation preferences. However, this model is based on the ethnographic approach, which is difficult to test in a quantitative research.

The present study continues the process of building a parsimonious theoretical model to explain the acculturation intentions of immigrants. It strives to enhance the previously suggested models in two important ways. First, the present acculturation intentions model (AIM) is based on a general psychological theory and, therefore, it may have greater explanatory power. Second, the model was tested in a three-year longitudinal study that includes the pre-migration stage. [Ajzen's \(1991\)](#) theory of planned behavior (TPB) was used as a foundation for developing the acculturation intentions model. The TPB was chosen for three main reasons: (1) acculturation strategies are behaviors or behavioral intentions and, therefore, the TPB should explain them, as it explains other behaviors and behavioral intentions (cf. [Ajzen, 2002b](#); [Ajzen, Czasch, & Flood, 2009](#); [Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004](#)). (2) The TPB takes into consideration both intrapsychic and environmental factors; therefore, it is well suited to the situation of immigration; (3) The TPB explains both stability and changes in behavior ([Ajzen, 2002a](#)); hence, it may explain changes in acculturation intentions during the immigration process.

1.2. Main postulates of the theory of planned behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) assumes that attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control affect the behavioral intentions of individuals, which, in turn, affect their behavior ([Ajzen, 1991](#)). The theory further assumes that all other factors (personal and environmental) affect the individuals' behavior through their influence on the attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control ([Ajzen, 2002b](#)). Attitudes towards a behavior reflect the perceived benefits of the behavior from the standpoint of the individual's values and goals. Positive attitudes form a motivation to implement the behavior ([Ajzen et al., 2009](#)). Social norms reflect the society's attitude towards the behavior. Societies approve or encourage certain behaviors while disapproving or punishing other behaviors. Individuals internalize societal norms (to a greater or lesser degree), and tend to choose a behavior that corresponds with these societal norms ([Ajzen, 2002b](#)). Perceived behavioral control includes beliefs regarding the individual's possession of the necessary resources and ability to conduct a particular behavior (e.g., skills, time, and money) and the perceived environmental constraints for performing the specific behavior ([Ajzen, 2002b](#)). The probability of a specific behavior increases as the individual has a more positive attitude towards that specific behavior, the more behavioral control the individual has, and the more society encourages that particular behavior. The theory further assumes that variations in motivational factors (attitudes), personality factors (resources), and environmental factors (social norms and environmental constraints) can lead to a change in behavior ([Ajzen, 2002a](#); [Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004](#)). Ajzen's theory does not specify the relationships between the attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, several recent studies have found that social norms and perceived behavioral control affect the individuals' attitudes towards various behaviors: when social norms are more permissive regarding a behavior and the perceived control over the behavior is higher, the individuals' attitudes towards this behavior are more positive ([Hsu & Chiu, 2004](#); [Leach, Hennessy, & Fishbein, 2001](#); [Ryu, Ho, & Han, 2003](#)).

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