

Berry, J. (1992). Acculturation and adaptation in a new society

International Migration

QUARTERLY REVIEW
VOL. XXX 1992

**Special issue:
Migration and Health in the 1990s**

edited by H. Siem and P. Bollini

Papers presented at the Second International
Conference on Migration and Health
Brussels, 29 June - 1 July 1992

organized jointly by
International Organization for Migration
Commission of the European Communities



Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society

.. W. Berry*

INTRODUCTION

The process of migrant adaptation has been studied for over half a century. Although it was once believed that migration inevitably led to psychological and social problems, current views are that while migration may be a risk factor, outcomes range from very positive adaptations through to very negative ones (e.g. Beiser *et al.*, 1988; Berry and Kim, 1988). The outcome for any particular individual or group is now known to depend on a variety of characteristics relating to individuals and groups during the course of migration.

Recent studies of various immigrant and refugee groups (e.g. Chataway and Berry, 1989; Dona and Berry, 1992; Sands and Berry, 1992; Krishnan and Berry, 1992; Zheng and Berry, 1991) closely fit this generalization: some individuals adapt very well while others experience a great deal of difficulty. The psychological, social and cultural factors that affect outcomes are moderately well known, leading to the possibility that certain steps can be taken that will make positive adaptations more likely.

ACCULTURATION

The process of acculturation is presented schematically in Figure 1 (page 81). Acculturation has been defined as culture change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield *et al.*, 1936). While originally proposed as a group-level phenomenon (left side of Figure 1) it is now also widely recognized as an individual-level phenomenon (right side)

* Psychology Department, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

...and *psychological acculturation* (Graves, 1967). At this second level, acculturation refers to changes in an individual whose cultural group is collectively experiencing acculturation. It is important to note that while changes to both groups are implied in the definition, most changes in fact occur in the non-dominant (migrating) group as a result of influence from the dominant (society of settlement) group. It is on these non-dominant (or acculturating) groups that I will focus in trying to link acculturation experience to individual outcomes among migrants.

What changes may occur at the group level as a result of acculturation? First, there are physical changes, including a new place to live, new type of housing, increasing population density, urbanization, more pollution, etc. Second, biological changes, including new nutritional status and new diseases are common. Third, political changes usually bring the non-dominant groups under some degree of control and may involve some loss of autonomy. Fourth, economic changes may move people away from traditional pursuits towards new forms of employment. Fifth, cultural changes (which are at the heart of the definition) include alteration of original linguistic, religious, educational and technical institutions or imported ones taking their place. Sixth, social relationships become altered, including intergroup and interpersonal relations.

At the individual level (right side of Figure 1), numerous psychological changes occur. Changes in behaviour have been well documented in the literature (see Berry, 1980, for a review) and include values, attitudes, abilities and motives. Such changes are referred to as *behavioural shifts*. Existing identities and attitudes change and new ones develop: personal identity and ethnic identity often shift away from those held prior to contact, and views about how (and whether) one should participate in the process of acculturation emerge (see Berry *et al.*, 1989); other attitudes (such as intergroup attitudes and lifestyle preferences) also change and develop during acculturation.

Also at the individual level, social and psychological problems frequently appear during acculturation. These are referred to as *acculturative stress* (see Berry *et al.*, 1987), specifically the psychological, social and physical health consequences of acculturation. While these negative and largely unwanted consequences are not inevitable, and while there are also opportunities available during

acculturation, it is nevertheless the case that serious problems sometimes appear in relation to acculturation (Beiser *et al.*, 1988; Berry and Kim, 1988).

The appearance and extent of both behavioural shifts and acculturative stress is affected by the characteristics that individuals bring with them to the acculturative arena, e.g., the moderating factors that exist prior to acculturation (indicated above the psychological acculturation portion of Figure 1), and by other phenomena that arise during acculturation (the moderating factors indicated in the lower part of Figure 1).

ADAPTATION

Adaptation is the term used to refer to both the strategies used during acculturation, and to its outcome. It is proposed that different strategies lead to different varieties of adaptation. For the individual, three such strategies have been identified: *adjustment*, *reaction*, and *withdrawal* (Berry, 1976). In the case of adjustment, changes in the individual are in a direction which reduces conflict (that is, increases the congruence or fit) between the environment and the individual by bringing one into harmony with the environment. In general, this strategy is the one most often intended by the term adaptation.

In the case of reaction, changes are in a direction which retaliates against the environment; these may lead to environmental changes which, in effect, increase the congruence or fit between the two, but not by way of group or individual adjustment. In the case of withdrawal, change is in a direction which reduces pressures from the environment; in a sense, it is removal of the group or individual from the adaptive arena, and can occur either by forced exclusion or by voluntary withdrawal. This is often not a real possibility for those being influenced by larger and more powerful cultural systems. And for the second strategy (reaction), in the absence of political power to divert acculturative pressures, many migrants cannot successfully engage in retaliatory responses. Thus, individual change in order to adapt to the environment (some form of the adjustment strategy of adaptation) is often the only realistic alternative.

Paralleling these differing strategies of adaptation are varying ways in which individuals can seek to acculturate (termed *acculturation strategies*). Corresponding to the view that adjustment is not the

only strategy of adaptation, assimilation is not the only mode of acculturation. This position becomes clear when we examine the framework in Figure 2, page 82 (Berry, 1984). The model is based upon the observation that in culturally plural societies, individuals and groups must confront two important issues. One pertains to the maintenance and development of one's ethnic distinctiveness in society; it must be decided whether one's own cultural identity and customs are of value and should be retained. The other involves the desirability of inter-ethnic contact, deciding whether relations with the larger society are of value and should be sought. These are essentially questions of attitudes and values and may be responded to on a continuous scale, from positive to negative. For conceptual purposes, however, they can be treated as dichotomous ("yes" or "no") decisions, thus generating a fourfold model (see Figure 2) that serves as the basis for our discussion. Each cell in this fourfold classification is considered to be an acculturation option (both a strategy and an outcome) available to individuals and to groups in plural societies. The four options are *Assimilation*, *Integration*, *Separation* and *Marginalization*.

When the first issue is answered "no", and the second answered "yes", the *Assimilation option* is defined, namely, relinquishing one's cultural identity and moving into the larger society. It can take place by way of absorption of a non-dominant group into an established dominant group, or it can be by way of the merging of many groups to form a new society, as in the "melting pot" concept.

The *Integration option* implies some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group (that is, some reaction or resistance to change) as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework (that is, some adjustment). Therefore, in the case of *Integration*, the option taken is to retain cultural identity and move to join the dominant society. When this strategy is widely adopted, there are a number of distinguishable ethnic groups, all cooperating within a larger social system.

When there are no substantial relations with the larger society, accompanied by a maintenance of ethnic identity and traditions, another option is defined. Depending upon which group (the dominant or non dominant) controls the situation, this option may take the form either of *Segregation* or *Separation*. When the pattern is imposed by the dominant group, segregation to keep people in "their place" appears. On the other hand, the maintenance of a traditional

way of life outside full participation in the larger society may be desired by the acculturating group and thus lead to an independent existence, as in the case of separatist movements (that is, reaction followed by withdrawal). In our terms, *Segregation* and *Separation* differ mainly with respect to which group or groups have the power to determine the outcome.

Finally, there is an option that is difficult to define precisely, possibly because it is accompanied by a good deal of collective and individual confusion and stress. It is characterized by striking out against the larger society and by feelings of alienation, loss of identity, and what has been termed *acculturative stress* (Berry and Annis, 1974). This option is *Marginalization* in which groups lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society (either by exclusion or withdrawal). This form of acculturation constitutes the classical situation of marginality (Stonequist, 1935).

BEHAVIOURAL SHIFTS

As already noted, when individuals move to another culture, two broad forms of change take place: *behavioural shifts* and *acculturative stress*. In the first are changes in behaviour away from previously learned patterns towards those more frequently found in the new society. These involve learning and unlearning a repertoire of behaviours. In the second category are a number of stressful psychological phenomena that involve conflict and often result in new forms of behaviour that interfere with smooth day-to-day functioning.

The nature and extent of behavioural shifts are portrayed in Figure 3 (page 83). On the left are group-level variables that set the stage for individuals to maintain, or to change, their behaviour. At initial contact, relatively few changes may appear, but as contact continues an individual's degree of participation, as well as the number of contact-related problems experienced, may increase. The degree of participation and of problems are both likely to be affected by a variety of factors existing prior to acculturation (such as a person's motivations for migrating) and factors arising during acculturation (such as one's acculturation strategies). The behavioural shifts themselves consist of two distinguishable phenomena: *learning* behaviours from the new culture; and *shedding* features of one's

original culture. There is also the potential for conflict between these two processes; when conflict is present, this phenomenon feeds into the phenomenon of acculturative stress, to be dealt with in the next section.

In general, most culture learning and culture shedding occur as a result of the assimilation strategy, while the least of both occur during the separation strategy. Considerable new culture learning, combined with limited culture shedding, occur with the use of the integration strategy, while the opposite is present as the result of marginalization. Conflict is predictably high with separation and marginalization, since these strategies both involve resistance to, or rejection by, the dominant society. Acceptance of and by the dominant society are both involved in integration and assimilation, and these are usually accompanied by lower levels of conflict. However, much depends on the policies and attitudes held by the dominant society, and whether acculturating individuals prefer strategies that correspond to these views in the larger society. For example, individuals preferring their own assimilation in an assimilationist society will experience less conflict than those adopting an integrationist strategy in an assimilationist society.

Eventual behavioural outcomes will vary, depending on one's acculturation strategy. If one pursues the assimilation strategy, substantial behavioural change occurs, leading to an individual behavioural repertoire which virtually matches that typically found in the larger society. In contrast, if one pursues the separation strategy, there is a reaffirmation of one's heritage behaviour, and a return to an earlier repertoire. In the integration strategy, there is usually a selective adoption of behaviour from the repertoires of the two societies, perhaps heritage behaviours dominating in one's private life (e.g. in the family and ethnocultural community) with behaviours being adopted from the larger society in more public domains (e.g. schooling, work, and political involvement). These longer-term adaptations have been identified and described in the literature of psychological acculturation (see Berry *et al.*, 1989). The essential point is that individuals vary within a group in their acculturation strategies (both their attitudes and actual behaviours) leading to variable behavioural repertoires. Thus, from this perspective, there is no expectation of one single acculturation pattern, but of highly variable strategies and outcomes that lead to variably successful long-term adaptations.

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS

The concept *stress* has had wide usage in recent psychological and medical literature (e.g. Lazarus, 1980). Stress is considered to be a *generalized physiological and psychological state of the organism, brought about by the experience of stressors in the environment, and which requires some reduction (for normal functioning to occur), through a process of coping until some satisfactory adaptation to the new situation is achieved.*

The concept *acculturative stress* refers to one kind of stress, that in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of acculturation; in addition, there is often a particular set of stress manifestations which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (particularly anxiety, depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, and heightened psychosomatic and psychological symptom level. Acculturative stress is thus a phenomenon that may underlie poor adaptation, including a reduction in the health status of individuals, identity confusion and problems in daily life with family, work and school. To qualify as acculturative stress, these changes should be related in a systematic way to known features of the acculturation process, as experienced by the individual.

In a review and integration of the literature, Berry and Kim (1988) attempted to identify the cultural and psychological factors which affect the emergence of acculturative stress. We concluded that problems often do arise during acculturation; however, these are not inevitable and seem to depend on a variety of group and individual characteristics which enter into the acculturation process. That is, acculturation sometimes enhances one's life chances, and sometimes virtually destroys one's ability to carry on; the eventual outcome for any particular individual is affected by other variables that govern the relationship between acculturation and stress.

This concept is illustrated in Figure 4 (page 84). On the left are group level factors and on the right individual level factors (cf. the distinction between group and individual in Figure 1). At the top are factors that precede the process of acculturation (in the society of origin and in individuals who are about to experience acculturation). At the bottom are factors that exist in the acculturation context (those that pre-exist in the society of settlement and those that arise in individuals during their acculturation). The process of psycho-

logical acculturation is initiated by the joint influence of the two societies (double arrows on left) on individuals. Their psychological acculturation may be described in relation to four sets of phenomena: acculturation experience, stressors, stress and adaptation.

Individuals participate in and experience acculturation to varying degrees. In current terms, acculturating individuals experience varying "life change events". Stressors may also result from this varying experience of acculturation; for some people, acculturative changes may be perceived as stressors, while for others they may be benign or even be seen as opportunities. Then, varying levels of acculturative stress may become manifest as a result of acculturation experience and stressors. And finally, variations in adaptation (from well-adapted to maladapted) may appear.

The first crucial point to note is that relationships among these four phenomena (indicated by the horizontal arrows) are probabilistic rather than deterministic; the relationships are likely to occur but are not fixed. The second crucial point is that these relationships depend upon a number of moderating factors (indicated in the upper and lower boxes), each of which can influence the degrees and direction of relationships between the four phenomena in the middle of Figure 4. This influence is indicated by the vertical arrows drawn between these moderating factors and the four sets of phenomena.

The literature reviewed by Berry and Kim (1988) and Berry *et al.* (1987) provides some evidence for all of these factors influencing acculturative stress and adaptation. First (centre left of Figure 4), individuals seek varying degrees of contact, succeed in some degree of participation, and experience various problems. These variations depend, for example, on an individual's acculturation strategy (lower box) and on the motives for migration (upper box); they may also vary depending upon one's appraisal of the host society's ethnic and racial attitudes (lower box), and upon the degree of prior knowledge of the language of the host society (upper box). Thus, large individual differences in acculturation are typically found in any acculturating group.

The degree to which these acculturation experiences give rise to stressors also depends on numerous factors. Appraisal of these life changes as opportunities (rather than problems) will be most likely if one has suitable educational or pre-acculturation experiences (upper box), or if one has an established basis of social support (lower box)

from which to engage in interactions with the larger society. Of particular interest is whether one succeeds in establishing the degree of contact with the larger society that one desires; the larger the difference (contact discrepancy) the greater the stressors.

The emergence of acculturative stress depends not only on the presence of stressors, but also on one's coping strategies and resources (lower box); for those able to cope, the presence of stressors will not lead to the emergence of acculturative stress, while for those unable to cope, acculturative stress may be substantial. Acculturation strategies (lower box) are also known to affect acculturative stress: integration strategies are the least stressful, while marginalization is associated with most stress; assimilation and separation are known to fall in between. Initial health, age and education (upper box) and one's use of social support and reaction to societal attitudes (lower box), also affect the emergence of acculturative stress.

Typically acculturative stress manifests itself in a variety of symptoms, notably psychosomatic and psychological complaints. Among the latter, the most common are elevated levels of anxiety and depression.

The eventual outcome of the process of psychological acculturation is that of adaptation, varying from well-adapted to maladapted. Two aspects have been conceptually and empirically distinguished by Searle and Ward (1990): *psychological adaptation* and *sociocultural adaptation*. These are indicated in Figure 1 (generally) and in Figures 3 and 4 (more specifically). The former is a set of psychological outcomes, including a clear sense of personal and ethnic identity, good mental health and the general ability to achieve a sense of personal satisfaction in the society of settlement. The latter is a set of personal outcomes that link an individual to his/her new sociocultural reality. These include ability to deal with daily problems in the new cultural setting, particularly in the areas of family life, work and school.

CONCLUSION

Much of what we know about acculturation and adaptation suggests that migrants can, and often do, make a successful move to their new society. However, it is obvious that the *conditions* that affect their

adaptation should be those that facilitate rather than interfere with successful adaptations. Most of the conditions identified in this overview are subject to some degree of control by policy makers and health professionals. Hence, in principle, it should be possible to increase the rate of successful adaptations by making appropriate policy choices and by implementing appropriate programmes.

REFERENCES

- Beiser, M., *et al.*
1988 *After the door has been opened: Mental health issues affecting immigrants and refugees in Canada.* Ministries of Multiculturalism and Citizenship and Health and Welfare, Ottawa.
- Berry, J. W.
1976 *Human ecology and cognitive style: Comparative studies in cultural and psychological adaptation.* Sage, London.
1980 "Social and cultural change" in H.C. Triandis and R. Brislin (Eds.) *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*, Vol. 5. Social Psychology, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
1984 "Cultural relations in plural societies" in N. Miller and M. Brewer (Eds.) *Groups in Contact*, Academic Press, New York.
- Berry, J. W. and R. C. Annis
1974 "Acculturative stress: The role of ecology, culture and differentiation", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 5: 382-406.
- Berry, J. W. and U. Kim
1988 "Acculturation and mental health" in P. Dasen, J.W. Berry, and N. Sartorius (Eds.) *Health and cross-cultural psychology*, Sage, London.
- Berry, J. W., *et al.*
1987 "Comparative studies of acculturative stress", *International Migration Review*, 21: 491-511.
- Berry, J. W., *et al.*
1989 "Acculturation attitudes in plural societies", *Applied Psychology*, 38: 185-206.
- Chataway, C. and J. W. Berry
1989 "Acculturation experiences, appraisal, coping and adaptation", *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Sciences*, 21: 295-309.
- Dona, G. and J. W. Berry
1992 "Acculturative stress and mental health among Central American refugees resettled in Canada", Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Graves, T. D.
1967 "Psychological acculturation in a tri-ethnic community", *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 23: 337-50.
- Krishnan, A. and J. W. Berry
1992 "Acculturative stress and acculturation attitudes among Indian immigrants to the United States", *Psychology and Developing Societies*, (in press).
- Lazarus, R.
1980 "Psychological stress and adaptation", in H. Seyle (Ed.) *Guide to Stress Research*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York.

FIGURE 1

THE PROCESS OF ACCULTURATION AS GROUP- AND INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL PHENOMENA

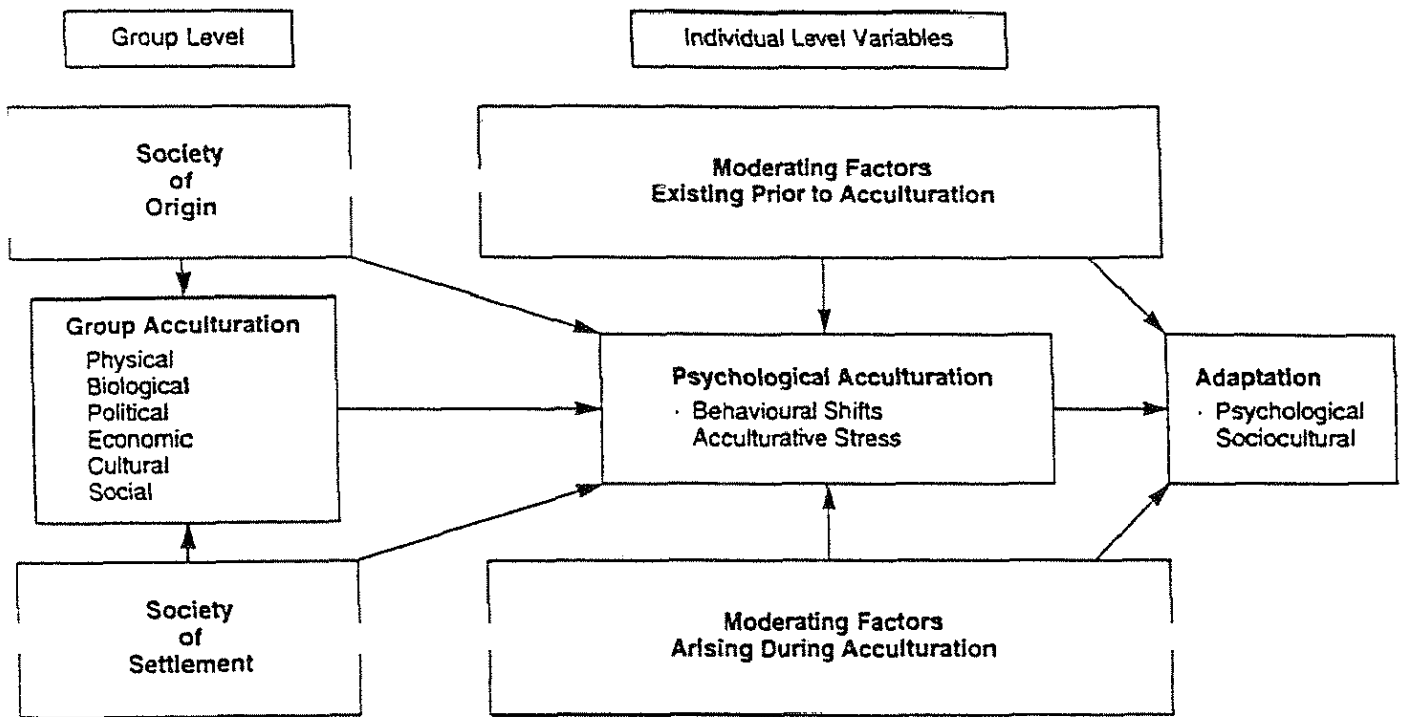


FIGURE 2

FOUR ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES AS A FUNCTION OF TWO ISSUES

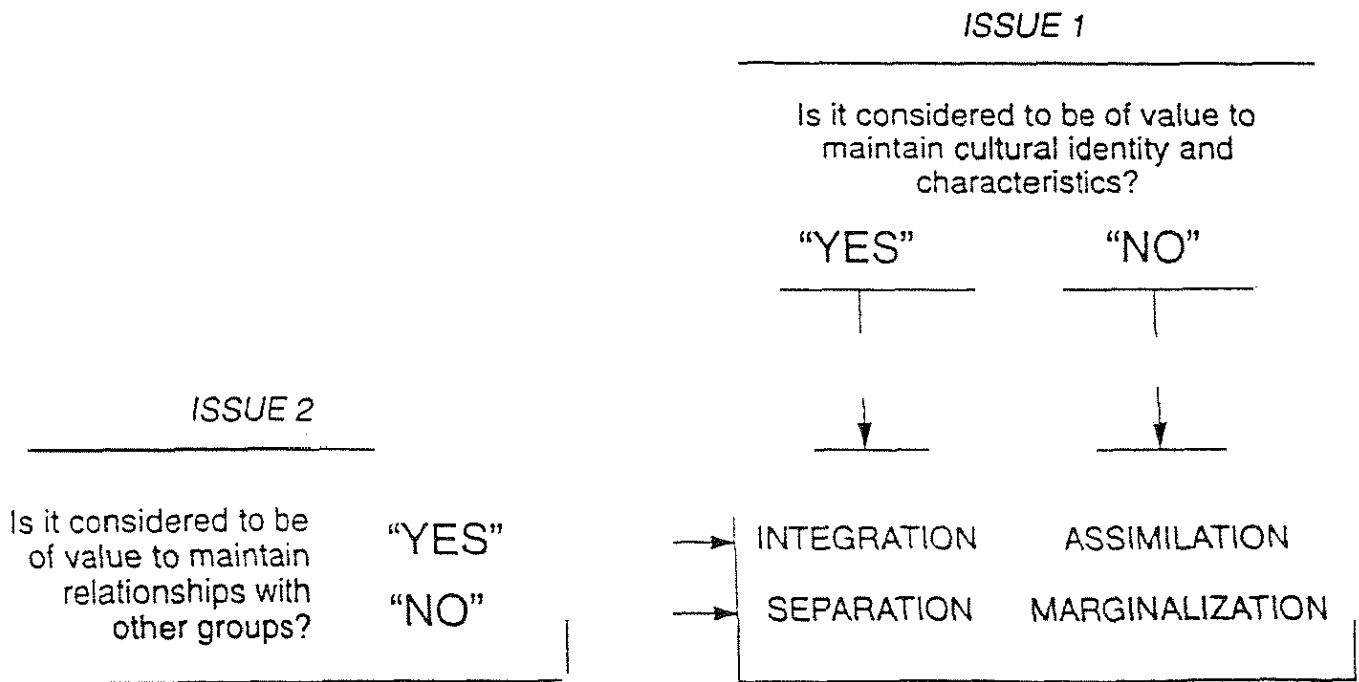
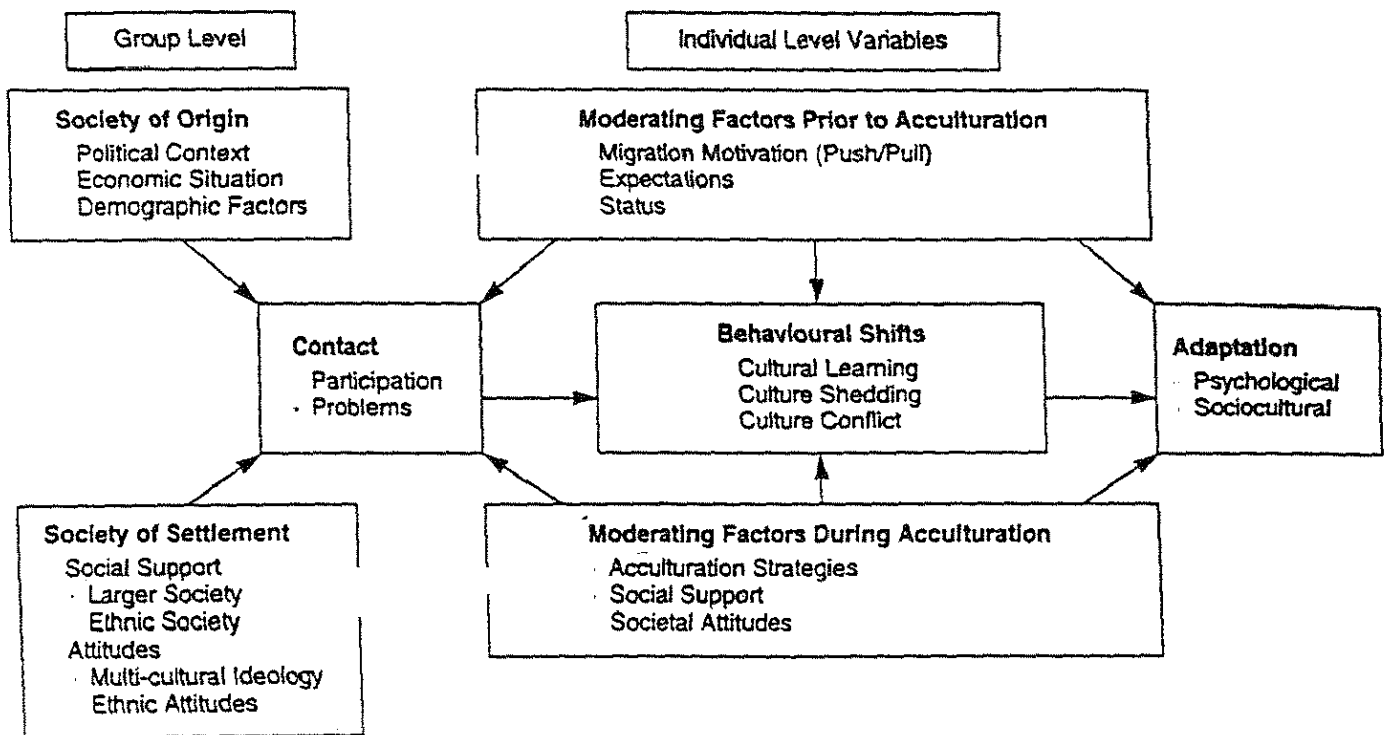


FIGURE 3

BEHAVIOURAL SHIFTS IN RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATION



ACCULTURATIVE STRESS IN RESPONSE TO ACCULTURATION

