

Connecticut College

Digital Commons @ Connecticut College

CISLA Senior Integrative Projects

Toor Cummings Center for International Studies
and the Liberal Arts (CISLA)

2024

The Impact of Acculturation on Chilean Immigrants in the United States

Gicel Zuniga

Connecticut College, gzuniga@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/sip>



Part of the [Development Studies Commons](#), and the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zuniga, Gicel, "The Impact of Acculturation on Chilean Immigrants in the United States" (2024). *CISLA Senior Integrative Projects*. 73.

<https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/sip/73>

This Senior Integrative Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts (CISLA) at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in CISLA Senior Integrative Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

The Impact of Acculturation on Chilean Immigrants in the United States

Gicel Zuniga

Department of Human Development, Connecticut College

CISLA Senior Integrative Project

Professor Sunil Bhatia

Spring 2024

Introduction

Chile is among the Latin American countries that have in the past suffered under an unjust political environment in the form of a dictatorship. Wright (1995) begins his article on the legacy of the Chilean dictatorship by speaking to the use of exile as the main method employed by military forces to maintain control of the country following the coup d'etat that took place on September 11th in Santiago de Chile, the nation's capital. This event, which took place in 1973 with the overthrowing and death of the democratic leader Salvador Allende by General Augusto Pinochet and his military forces, thrust Chile into a seventeen year regime under which their human rights were constantly violated and where there was an ever present sense of fear and uncertainty. Their political situation during this time period led many Chileans to leave the country, many having been exiled by Pinochet and his forces, and there was an increase in Chilean migration to the United States.

Wright (1995) expands on the political phenomenon of mass exile that formed a significant part of Latin American history in particular beginning in 1959 as a result of drastic political and social changes. He points out, however, that Chileans as a subgroup of Latin American exiles differ from other exiles such as those from Cuba and Brazil in the characteristics that make up the narrative of their exile. Chilean exile had a longer duration than is typical of exiled individuals, and the amount of countries to which Chilean exiles fled was more diverse than other exiled groups, deepening the concept of Chilean diaspora following the dictatorship. Although in present day Chileans make up only slightly over one percent of the Latin American population in the United States, their narratives of migration and the issues they face upon arrival and in trying to build a life in this country make for a migration experience that differs from other Latin American migrant groups with regards to racial identity and social capital status

among other aspects, lending an important perspective with which to begin to understand the effects of migration on Latin American individuals.

Scholarship in the area of cultural psychology on understanding the migrant experience and the factors that contribute to it have utilized sociocultural perspectives of culture that view it simply as a variable that can be applied to set psychological processes of the mind and self in cultural groups. However, viewing these as being created within these groups and in individuals with an understanding that culture is interconnected with self allows for the notion of culture as being shaped by existing power dynamics and history alongside the social practices of a specific group (Bhatia & Litchmore, 2021). This paper analyzes how Latin American migrants experience acculturation with an initial focus on Chilean adults who migrated primarily during the period of Chile's dictatorship. The specific goal of this Senior Integrative Project is to explore how migration impacts Chilean individuals and families as they navigate and settle into a new country and culture.

Three Waves of Chilean Migration to the U.S.

At present in the United States there are approximately 140,000 Chileans, with over 96,000 of them having been born in Chile. However, they make up only slightly more than one percent of the Latino population in the United States and are highly integrated, often identifying as a white homogenous group. Most Chilean migrants come from urban or industrialized areas of Chile such as the metropolitan city of Santiago, which helps them adapt to social systems and lifestyles present in the U.S. similar to the ones in urban sectors of Chile such as transport, government protocols and education. This often leads Chileans to settle in and around cities as a compatible setting to their urbanized country within which they can navigate more effectively (Gomez, 2018). Nonetheless, Chilean migrants are still faced with difficulties in adapting to

these new settings and building a life outside their home country. Chilean political parolees taken in by the United States government during Pinochet's regime, as previously mentioned, were ill prepared to settle down in this country due to the sudden need to uproot following the political state of their country which made for a toilsome entry and transition into their new lives in the U.S. Those who came some time after Pinochet's rule often had established employment and housing as well as connections to Chileans that were already present in the United States. This is not the reality for all Chilean migrants however, and despite having connections and a plan for the life these migrants try to establish upon arrival, factors such as racial and ethnic identity can influence the ways in which they settle into their new place of residence.

Migrations of Chileans to the United States can be looked at in terms of roughly three waves. The first wave occurred in the mid-1800s during the California gold rush, when Chileans migrated primarily to California with the goal of improving their economic standing in lieu of Chile's then struggling economy, following word of gold in the U.S. reaching ports like those in the coastal city of Valparaiso in central Chile. Though many of those Chilean migrants returned to Chile due to a lack of finding gold, the majority of those who stayed in the U.S. remained in California where areas dense with Chilean migrants known as "Chilitowns" could be found. There remained some migration of Chileans to the U.S. until the 1960s that expanded into states neighboring California, but it was not until 1973 when president Salvador Allende was overthrown by a military coup d'etat that took place on September 11th led by General Augusto Pinochet that there was a steady increase in Chilean migration to the United States (Gomez, 2018).

During Pinochet's military regime, thousands of Chileans were exiled, imprisoned, tortured, and murdered. Many of those who went "missing" during the dictatorship are yet to be

found or identified in the remains of the many bodies that were thrown into the mass graves utilized during this time by Pinochet's military forces. Those targeted for exile and imprisonment were individuals such as journalists, intellectuals, radical professionals and students, among others that threatened Pinochet's efforts to control the information and ideas Chileans were exposed to at the time. The United States took in Chilean refugees as "political-parolees" as they fled the state of their home country, and often arrived without prospects for employment, securing of housing or established communities and connections to help them in this drastic transition. The dictatorship ended in 1990 and democracy was restored to the country under democratic president Patricio Aylwin.

Following the reestablishment of democracy in Chile, most of the Chilean migrants that come to the United States now are often middle to upper middle class individuals seeking better economic opportunities, higher education or for reasons regarding business (Doña-Reveco 2011). Chile is also faced with increased migration from other Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and from the Caribbean country of Haiti. This migration causes social tensions and divisions within the country due to the racial shifts and exacerbates economic and cultural barriers in the general population due to the fact that Chile's government provides significant resources to migrants (Soto-Alvarado et al. 2022). Chile is a relatively segregated country with a small white identifying population that is more wealthy and holds higher education levels than their darker and poorer counterparts. This lends an income gap that contributes to the division of social classes within the country that is a contributing factor to migration of Chileans to the United States (Meyer, 2012).

The following sections aim to discuss the topic of acculturation and its effects on Chilean diaspora in the United States, exploring the identities they hold for themselves here as well as the

identities others hold for them in regards to race, social status, and migrant identity. Taking into account the influence of sociopolitical, racial and cultural histories of Chile, this paper will also discuss the psychosocial experiences of Chilean migrants coming to the United States, among these being familial stress or the stress of cultural belonging that can dictate the trajectories of their acculturation and lead to negative feelings of the narratives they hold in their new country of residence.

Acculturation

The path of acculturation is one taken by immigrants upon arrival in a new cultural context in order to more effectively navigate the social environment of which they now form a part of. Rogler et al. (1991) conducted research on the linkages between mental health status and acculturation among Hispanics and identified the pitfalls it had on self-esteem and the views of their ethnic self in immigrants that had either low levels of acculturation or an increase in the phenomenon. Low acculturation that manifests itself as a rejection of the new culture in which immigrants find themselves following migration results in the absence of crucial skills, such as language acquisition, that contribute to making the unfamiliar environment all that much more uncontrollable for immigrants navigating a new setting. This places strain on the connections immigrants can form in their new cultural environment that provide needed support for the transition of migrating, and promotes feelings of isolation from the cultural framework of the host culture. On the other end of the spectrum, Rogler and his colleagues describe how increases in acculturation can promote a sense of alienation in the immigrant individual from their home cultural group as the norms and values that can be adopted through the process of acculturation are often anti-immigrant and discriminatory. This can result in internalized negative feelings towards an individual's own ethnic identity. They identify a “sweet spot” on the spectrum of

acculturation that is an optimal combination of upholding supportive viewpoints towards immigrants' traditional cultures and practices while learning and reinforcing aspects of the host society's cultural ways of being for instrumental purposes that makes navigating the new culture easier. A drastic approach to acculturation that can veer into the territory of assimilation, leading to a loss of homeland cultures, is detrimental to the cultural identity and sense of self of migrant individuals. However, it is also not plausible to live in rejection of the normative practices that are present within a society that may differ from one's own traditional norms and expect to be able to establish a progressive life in a new cultural context. Acculturation provides a sort of "happy medium" to immigrants in regards to the new variations in identity and way of life they must form upon entering a new country.

As previously mentioned, the most significant influx of Chileans to the United States took place in the seventies following the dictatorship that began in 1973. Many individuals during the dictatorship were exiled, mainly middle class individuals among which were those who held radical views in academics or formed part of the media and journalism. Others fled the country due to the violence that was present during that time period and the economic struggles of the country. Overall, those who left were forced or pushed out, there was not a desire to leave their home but a need to do so for means of survival and preservation of their families as well as quality of life. As can be seen across various cultures and peoples who have migrated to the United States, there is a desire to uphold traditions and ways of being that are in line with their country of origin in an attempt to preserve the life and culture they had in said country to the extent that they can. Parasecoli (2014) explores the concept of culinary practices as a way in which immigrants in an unfamiliar environment uphold their cultural customs and traditions so as to foster a familiar sense of identity that is tied to the culture in their country of origin. He

presents the use of a quotidian activity such as eating as an opportunity that immigrants take advantage of to uphold the norms and values of their traditional culture that can be present at the dinner table in how the meal is structured, aspects not only influenced greatly by homeland tradition but also in collaboration with the new differing culture that immigrants find themselves in. The concept of food as cultural preservation and expression is presented by Parasecoli as a tool utilized by immigrants to make sense of change in regards to their cultural contexts and the norms of their diasporic communities in differing parts of the world. Although some migrants choose to leave their country of origin for a new and perhaps more developed and opportunity rich setting, many migrants are pushed to leave because of the economic struggles they may face or the violence that may be present in their country. Upholding their cultures in any way they can, such as through food, is a form of identity preservation that immigrants cling to as they undergo the process of acculturation in their host country.

Though it has been over fifty years since the the dictatorship, the country's past continues to haunt Chileans and those who immigrated during the regime and did not return have built lives and established new generations of Chilean-Americans in the United States with the notion of the countless injustices that took place in their country's past. Bhatia and Ram (2001) expand on psychologist Hubert Herman's theory of the dialogical self in their article on the dialogical self in an age of transnational migration, highlighting his belief that neither self nor culture can be looked at as limited and independent or as something abstract but rather that these are interrelated aspects which are present in and influenced by context. They go on to expand on Herbert's discourse about the self as ever changing, constantly shifting as individuals move through the cultures within which they find themselves contextually and to which they contribute with the cultures they bring into that context. Following this, the authors establish that a primary

challenge of his theory is to attempt to determine how individuals bring together or mesh their interpersonal ways of being with the cultural positions they face in a differing environment following transnational migration. Their writing speaks to the depth of the impact that acculturation has on migrants who come into a new country with culturally established ways of being and living, and how these not only often clash with the new culture they are entering but that also must merge and adapt to it in order to survive in a differing society from their own that does not readily make space for them. This need to change, suppress and adapt their cultural selves can cause immense amounts of stress in migrants that often has a strong negative impact on their psychological and social well being.

One of the most prominent aspects that contribute to acculturative stress is that of language. Acculturative stress consists of the stressors associated with being an immigrant in a new setting as they undergo the process of acculturation that manifest as mental and emotional challenges, such as anxiety over language acquisition for example (Borrego Jr. et al. 2019). Ward et al. (2021) characterize acculturative stress as intersecting social, economic, and physical domains and is grounded in the context of the competing demands of the new country's culture and their heritage culture. The authors elaborate how this conflict can affect the values and behaviors of bicultural individuals as well as their sense of self, associated with a negative impact on psychosocial functioning.

In the United States, learning the English language is expected of migrants with the premise that if they are in a country whose primary language is English that they should move to speak said language. Such beliefs are rooted in discriminatory viewpoints that reject anything that is not in line with Western values and ideals, a rejection that extends to migrants, especially from Latin America. The reality for many Latin American migrants is that when they arrive in

the United States with limited proficiency in the English language, there is a preference for their native language that clashes with the linguistic expectations of their new country of residence. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) recognize the crucial role of having a grasp on the English language for a “successful” immigrant adaptation following migration to a new country such as the United States. They state that learning English is an essential first step that helps enable immigrants to begin participation and involvement in aspects of their new communities such as in education, the workforce and even in their endeavors with healthcare. However, they also illustrate the history of English language acquisition as a deciding factor of Americanization that dictated the level of acceptance an individual was shown based on their mastery of the language that was framed as a requirement, with no tolerance for linguistic diversity.

Learning a new language takes time and is a difficult task, but the discriminatory views held towards migrants who do not speak the language are present from the moment they arrive and can instill large amounts of stress in individuals that are already struggling to adapt to a new and uncertain setting. Lueck and Wilson (2011) identify linguistic integration for Latino immigrants as a set of social requirements that only enforce the acquisition of English, it is framed as a duty that migrants must undertake while their language is simultaneously blatantly rejected or ignored. The authors speak to what was previously mentioned about rejecting anything that is not in line with Western ideals, stating that Spanish, while being a widely spoken language, is seen not as an asset but as a threat in the United States and thus rejected accordingly. The authors highlight that although the United States holds various ethnic groups, their policies still reflect a push for assimilation of the individuals coming into the country. The example of California's Proposition 227 from 1998, which drastically reduced bilingual classes in California schools with the reasoning that not enforcing only English in education would instead promote

the use of Spanish, was a clear attempt to alienate and undermine immigrants as members of this nation. The political climate of the United States towards Latin American immigrants provides a social environment that promotes negative connotations towards them, labeling them as criminals and often viewing their presence in the country as invasive and parasitic of the economy and governmental resources. This only exacerbates immigrant levels of acculturative stress that have overall negative psychosocial effects.

Landale et al. (2017) breaks down the way in which the increased presence of immigrants entering the United States also increases the discourse surrounding the potential impact their presence in the United States may have on the country, specifically regarding the population of undocumented immigrants entering the country. They recognize undocumented immigrants as highly vulnerable due to their perceived social standing at the bottom of the status hierarchy due to their lack of rights in the country. Stating that hierarchies of position on the basis of socioeconomic, demographic, and immigration status can influence discrimination to which immigrants are exposed, the expectation that all Latinos have an increased likelihood of experiencing discrimination in the current anti-immigrant climate of the United States is duly noted.

Expanding on the previous claims of generalized experiences of discrimination for immigrants, this act of prejudice towards Latin American individuals is ever present in the United States, exacerbated even further in recent years following Trump's presidency during which he held the goal of drastically reducing Latino immigration to the United States, communicating detrimentally negative views about Latin American migrants and Latinos overall that increased tensions towards this group. These viewpoints of darker skinned individuals from other countries as less than their American counterparts however have been present for decades

and continue to be applied to current migrants. Nasatir (1974), in his article on Chileans in California during the Gold Rush tells of how Chileans were looked down upon by white miners in the area for example who viewed them as destitute and often destroyed their belongings. He does also include, however, the viewpoint of Chilean immigrants during this time as more educated and less subservient than other Latino migrant groups present during that time such as Mexicans and Peruvians. Regardless of this perceived higher social status among Latino migrants then, they were treated as minorities due to their racial status and culture.

Similarly today, despite having social capital from being able to enter the country with less difficulty utilizing a tourist visa waiver or through the H-1B1 employment program for Chilean nationals with a valid passport, Chileans are viewed as a migrant minority like other Latin American immigrants. Aguilar and Sen (2009) present the differing definitions of social capital that have been formulated over time by scholars like Alejandro Portes and Pierre Bourdieu. Portes (1998) defines social capital as an individual's ability to gain access to the benefits reaped by a specific group once they have gained membership into it themselves. Additionally, he emphasizes a distinction between the source of the social capital and the consequences that it brings about. On the other hand, Bourdieu (1986) formulated the concept of capital as being able to be possessed at an economic, cultural, and social level. He defined these three forms of capital as monetary and material resources, power gained from social connections and the networks one has established, and the knowledge and skills of different ways of living that can serve as instrumental social resources respectively. For the purposes of this research paper, the use of the concept of social capital not only refers to the resources that Chileans have access to through the visas and documents they hold, but also in regards to the power they attain

from the connections they perceive to be established between them and their white-American counterparts.

Chileans view themselves as having more social mobility in comparison to other Latino groups for the previously mentioned reason of government documentation, leading to the viewpoint that they will be treated with more similitude to their white counterparts. This is only furthered by their personal identity as a white homogenous group which is often not the cultural identity that Americans assign to them, especially if they are of darker skin tone. Despite being seen as “American”, Chileans are not viewed as “white-Americans” and may be exposed to microaggressions about aspects they hold as migrants such as their accents of darker skin color. Although many Chileans who migrate to the United States are upper middle class and identify as white, providing privileged social experiences within Chile, they are not treated the way they see themselves in terms of social standing upon arrival in the United States which poses as damaging to the transition into their new place of residence.

In reference to the discrimination towards Latin American migrants present in the United States, the political context in which these viewpoints are upheld are in part perpetrated by socio-political climates brought on by political campaigns that contribute to a racialized context of immigration. Ellis et al. (2023) discussed the effects of immigration enforcement in a racialized context that has negative effects on Latin American families overall, regardless of documented status. They describe migrant “illegality” as a racialized social category that is the outcome of the policies, laws, media discourses, social attitudes and institutional practices that have long been present in the history of the United States. Presenting the lived experiences of immigrants and children of immigrants in an educational setting, the authors highlight the impact of Donald Trump's campaign and election on these individual's everyday experiences. One of

their interview respondents, a citizen child of undocumented Mexican parents, shared his fear of possibly being victim to physical violence following racist comments from his classmates who were Trump supporters. Another respondent shared how defenseless and defeated he felt when Trump's election was announced and his classmates cheered "Build a wall" in the halls of his school. The authors explain that their analysis showed how their Latino respondents often experienced stressors brought on by perceived citizenship status. These are racially motivated and promote concerns regarding status that only contribute to the alienated socio political position that immigrants and their children experience in the United States. This can be seen as a clear example of how the political climate surrounding immigration and immigrants themselves in the United States is a deeply contributing factor to the difficulties of acculturation for these individuals. Although Chilean immigrants often enter the United States with some form of documentation of residence such as an H-1B1 or tourists visa, because they are viewed as an ethnic minority in American society, being Latin American, they are still victim to these negative political viewpoints. Chilean's identification as a white homogenous group, coupled with this constantly perpetuated negative viewpoint towards immigrants can foster a challenging environment for the formation of their identity and sense of self in their host country. Being present within a societal context in which they are viewed as less than and constantly bombarded with political viewpoints that urge Americans to reject them and push them out, migrant individuals face immense challenges to their identity in their new context.

Cultural Identity Development

Jacobsen and Comas-Diaz (1987) identify the cultural sense of self as a contributing factor to balancing self esteem and expand on ethnicity as influential in the development and preservation of identity. Having had a certain sociocultural standing in their country of origin and

in their culture, immigrants that face being labeled at a perceived lower social capital following migration to the United States experience uncertainty in their identities as and sense of self as individuals. Jacobsen and Comas-Diaz (1987) speak to the intricacies and complications of cultural adaptation which can be attributed to aspects that accompany cultural change, such as a shift in or loss of socioeconomic position and being newly categorized as belonging to an ethnic minority group. When faced with such differing viewpoints of the place they hold in the United States in comparison to the place they held in their country of origin, immigrants can feel conflicted about their personal identities and the worth they provide to the country in which they now reside. A decrease in the perception of their self worth can come about as immigrants are seen as a group of socially subordinate individuals in the U.S., which can have overall negative effects on identity and sense of self. Coupled with a decrease in sense of belonging not only because of the shift in cultural setting, but because of the negative viewpoints towards them from their American counterparts, migrating is often an event that negatively alters and impacts overall identity in immigrants. This only deepens the already difficult process of acculturation and may even lead to feeling an obligation to assimilate that can compromise previously established cultural identities and ways of living.

Regarding circumstances such as the expedited work visa available to Chilean migrants, there may also be a delayed realization of having migrated that comes with the deeply impactful reality of having a new permanent life in an unfamiliar country. This cultural shock can lead to negative feelings regarding the new setting and their place within it, and these feelings are only furthered by the discrimination that they may face in the country. Latinos are classified as an ethnic or racial minority in the United States and Chilean migrants, belonging to this ethnic category, are often treated as such. This leads to feelings of a loss of social capital despite having

documented status unlike many migrants in the U.S. and access to government programs. Chileans also reap the benefits of entering the educational system and workforce much more easily than other Latinos, but because of these circumstances may realize in a delayed manner that they are in fact in a vastly different setting, which can make potential acculturation an even more difficult task. Chileans hold high expectations for the quality of life they aim to lead coming into the United States. Better housing and job situations are anticipated as well as an emphasis on better education, which is very pertinent in Chilean culture as a gateway to a solid career and good social mobility, both of which are highly valued. Many migrants choose to reject assimilation, and Chileans are no exception. In attempting to preserve their culture, customs and even ways of thinking they acculturate in place of assimilating. This can be beneficial for Chileans that return to their country of origin, such as in the past with individuals who had been exiled, and also for the preservation of their culture and customs for future generations.

Debates in Acculturation

Rudmin (2009) discusses the historical upbringings of acculturation, beginning with the roots of acculturation as a concept that was thought to improve the health and well-being of immigrants peoples who were viewed as dirty, ignorant, and prone to crime, stereotypical characteristics that assimilation into Anglo-Saxon culture was thought to remedy. He describes that upon carrying out an empirical study on immigrants at a later time however, researchers Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) revealed that assimilation did the exact opposite of what it was thought to and was instead detrimental to the maintaining of personality and identity in immigrants. As additional scholars produced findings that proved acculturation caused mental disorder, building on the theories that emerged as more inquiry was carried out, the widely

accepted assumption that minority mental health was greatly impacted by acculturation came to dominate the field of acculturative research.

Rudmin (2003), further articulated by Berry (1970) established the presumption that the unfamiliarity of a new and different culture will cause stress when contact with the culture is made by the minority individual, and moves them to feel the need to either assimilate into the culture, reject it, become bi-culturally integrated or to simply endure the stressors that accompany the act of marginalization to which they will be exposed. Due to these normalized theories of acculturation, the main narrative that is presented in this theory of study is that of a migrant group or individual that undergoes cultural modification in order to fit into the differing cultural context they have entered following a migration. The social viewpoint that those who are coming into a country are the ones who will adapt and adjust their cultural ways of being to fit the new culture are perpetuated by these theories of acculturation and minority mental health that dominate discourses about how immigrants are impacted by cultural immersion or migration.

Previously, this was seen as a one way street where migrants discarded aspects of their culture as they adopted new norms of the culture in which they found themselves in. However, cultural psychology has evolved to understand that this acquisition of the beliefs, practices and values of the country to which an individual has migrated does not necessarily mean that the beliefs and practices of their country of origin will not continue to be employed and present in their day to day lives. Schwartz et al. (2013) identify the views of cultural similarity towards migrants as one of the main pitfalls to a majority of acculturation literature and theories. The authors emphasize the differing factors that can contribute to the acculturative challenges and the degree of acculturation change that subgroups of migrants can face despite having similar ethnicities and cultures. They identify age as a prominent factor, giving the example of how often

individuals who migrated as children can more easily acquire the practices and values of the new culture into which they have entered, whereas migrant adults may have more difficulty or even be less willing to adopt those same practices and values. Acculturation can extend to some second-generation migrants that as the authors highlight can experience discriminatory microaggressions through inquiry about their country of origin and use of the English language due to their appearance of darker skin in the case of many Latino migrants. Additionally, they speak about the role of ethnic enclaves, communities composed of an immigrant ethnic group that are present in countries such as the United States and allow for the preservation and retention of their heritage culture, further altering how differently acculturation may carry out with such contextual factors at play. Taking these factors into account, it becomes apparent that the common discourse surrounding acculturation and the migrants who undergo this intricate process as generalized cannot be applied as such because of the different narratives that migrant individuals hold, making their acculturation experiences entirely unique

Additionally, the socio political contexts in which migrants undergoing acculturation find themselves are ever changing, which can drastically alter migrants' reactions to these which directly affect their acculturative process. Ellis and Bhatia (2018) speak to how psychological studies of migration need to move to account more explicitly for such shifts in socio political contexts, as these dictate the experiences migrants have in their new country of residence and the opportunities they are exposed to. In this article on cultural psychology for a new era of citizenship politics, Ellis and Bhatia discuss the experiences of Polish migrants in Canada, presenting their notion of *kombinowanie*: finding alternative ways to carry out everyday tasks in the face of sociopolitical adversities faced by migrants. They elaborate on the ways in which Polish migrants learned to survive by adapting to their new setting, developing alternative ways

of being to navigate in deportable connections. This demonstrates how immigrant lives can be shaped by social contexts such as that of “illegality” in which they have to develop not just lived strategies of navigating the society they’re in, but also undergo a form of psychological training to grapple with the institutional barriers they face. The psychosocial lives of immigrants, that directly impact their process of acculturation and cultural identity, are greatly influenced by how much they feel they fit into the society in which they are present following migration. Bhatia and Litchmore (2021) present the notion of thinking of culture as belonging, explaining how this viewpoint lends us the opportunity to pay attention to how aspects such as cultural practices and race for transnational migrants can structure overall human development. The authors elaborate on this recommendation by stating that culture is dynamic and relational and is not limited by a single geographical location, and that because of this culture in psychology should be looked at as a process and practice that emerges from the power dynamics present in our society and the history and social norms that accompany these. Speaking to the experiences of Black-Canadian and Indian-American individuals, Bhatia and Litchmore draw the similarity of how both of these communities have to grapple with the viewpoints of race held about them by their white counterparts, regardless of if they themselves claim them or not. Such experiences can be expanded to Chileans migrants in the United States, who identify as a white homogenous group but often times are not seen as such by their white counterparts, and consequently must deal with the societal implications of being viewed as an ethnic minority for example that bring about confusing views of their identity in this country. A sense of belonging is crucial to providing a proper entry into an unfamiliar environment that comes with the act of migrating. With the lack of support that immigrants often encounter in the United States not only systematically but from

their non-immigrant counterparts, this can be a difficult thing to achieve and is often the pitfall of a positive acculturation experience.

Unlike acculturation, assimilation is a deeper integration into the society that an individual or group has migrated to. Whereas acculturation can be seen more as a merging of the two differing cultures that are present for migrants, assimilation can be seen rather as a replacement of the cultural values, practices and social norms of the country of origin with those of the new country of residence. With regards to assimilation in their article on the psychological impact of biculturalism, Laframboise et al. (1993) present one of the models that can help explain the psychological state of a person living in two cultures as a process of absorption into the culture that is seen as dominant. They highlight that most assimilation models expect that as the individual acquires the cultural identity of the new context they will lose the cultural identity they hold from their country of origin. Consequently, while the individual attempts to assimilate into the perceived dominant culture there will be increased stressors surrounding the belonging and acceptance they seek from that assimilation. The authors highlight that during this process when the individual is losing the support from their culture of origin and not yet integrated fully into the new culture, that same stress coupled with anxiety will take hold. The identity crisis that may stem from the process of assimilation is most prominent in individuals who prefer to identify with the perceived dominant group, but for groups such as the Ojibwa Indians that were a focus of this article, there may be an unsurpassable wall when trying to assimilate into the perceived dominant group.

Migration and Identities of Citizenship and Whiteness

Many Chileans, as previously mentioned, identify as a white homogenous group but are often not seen as such by their white-American counterparts in the United States. Choosing this

racial identity yet being faced with rejection of that identity from Western society can be a reality for not just Chileans but many Latin American migrants who are of darker skin tone or struggle with the English language. The barriers they may face when aiming to assimilate into the perceived dominant culture can foster low self esteem, poor social relationships and an overall negative emotional state that disrupts the process of settling into the new country of residence. Oftentimes, Latin American migrants aim to preserve their cultural customs and form ethnic communities in the country to which they have migrated which can be seen in the Bronx for example with the presence of a large Dominican community. This is not to say that most migrants crave assimilation and full acceptance into the perceived dominant culture, but returning to the idea of needing to feel a sense of belonging for an overall positive social experience is a notion that can be looked at through the topic of assimilation and the challenges it brings to better understand the narratives of migration that immigrants hold. These are also influenced by the negative socio-political climate that contributes to a racialized context of immigration, breeding longstanding discriminatory views that combat acceptance and a sense of belonging.

Adolescent Acculturation

An important subgroup of migrants that have been a focal point of some acculturative research are adolescents and children of immigrants. Many of them endure discriminatory viewpoints that stem from the construction of illegality perpetuated by the negative socio-political climate towards immigrants in the United States like their parents and other family members do. Additionally, they are also affected by the role of the dual societies that they inhabit while living in transnational diasporas, which can have a significant impact on cultural identity and dictate the narratives they hold for themselves and that others hold about them in

regards to social position, race, and overall identity. Most adolescent migrants face the additional challenge of integrating into an academic setting following migration, which only adds to the stress of acculturating and beginning the transition of creating a life in a new and often drastically different environment. Martin and Suárez-Orozco (2018), in their article on immigrant origin adolescent newcomers in education, speak on the practices that are employed in educational institutions that can help ease the transition for immigrant origin students and make them feel welcomed. They emphasize how necessary it is for schools to have institutionalized procedures to receive immigrant students so that they can feel supported and welcomed from the beginning and throughout the academic school year. Looking into schools that did have such procedures implemented, they derived valuing multilingual multicultural school culture as an essential factor for promoting a safe environment that is not only vital to learning but combats the lack of safety that migrants feel upon entering a country in which they are made to feel as if they don't belong. The positive psychological state and emotions that a sense of belonging promotes contribute to successful learning and language acquisition for these students and also fosters a normalization of immigrant and bicultural experience with which these individuals are very familiar.

In line with how crucial it is to feel a sense of belonging in a new community, addressing the complex socioemotional needs of adolescent migrants and their families in community settings such as schools is an essential way to foster acceptance into a new country of residence, which is often not present for migrants in the United States. Bhatia and Litchmore (2021) discuss how children of immigrants have lived experiences of dual societies and multiple identities due to the diasporas they form a part of that span across nations. They expand on the idea of the new immigrants as transmigrants whose ways of living are influenced by the connections they hold

across national borders, allowing them to reconstruct and shift their identities as they move through cultures that differ from the culture of their country of origin. The processes by which migrants develop their identity are upheld by the power dynamics that are present in the cultures they enter following a migration. Consequently, these breed identity struggles for migrants that often determine the racial and cultural norms they feel the need to follow and the culture which they aim to uphold in their lives. Children of immigrants that face identity struggles that stem from their parents' immigrant narratives coupled with the lives they have established and continue to establish in a crucial period of identity formation such as adolescence are forced to learn to navigate the differing yet intersecting cultural worlds in which they exist. Acculturation may be the route taken, merging the two cultures, but assimilation and even rejection of the culture of origin that is shunned by the social views of countries such as the United States towards immigrants may be the alternative choice as a form of social survival. There may be a loss of one cultural or racial identity in pursuit of the other more dominant one that promises less socioemotional struggles and rejection, perpetuating the culturally detrimental lengths to which migrants may be pushed in an environment where they are constantly othered.

Latin American Approaches to Acculturation

Immigrants may become bicultural individuals when they step into a sociocultural environment that differs from the one found in their country of origin. In the case of children of immigrants, they may hold a bicultural identity from the start in having the experience of growing up in a country that upholds one cultural context while forming a part of a family whose roots often perpetuate an entirely different one. Comănanu et al. (2017) discuss the theory of identity hybridity, expanding to address the notion of how bicultural identity applies to individuals who view themselves as persons whose identity is best described as a fused hybrid of

two contrasting cultural identities. They utilize the example of Canadian Francophone youths who do not identify as strictly Francophone or Anglophone but rather as bilingual Canadians whose identities they felt were a mixture of the two. Immigrant individuals who walk among two worlds of cultural norms and values may come to identify as a bicultural individual who is the product of the two or more cultural contexts that they have been shaped by.

Regardless of conscious bicultural identification in an individual, acculturative stress is present as they try to navigate a life that holds their ethnic roots but that also may need to shift to provide a way of living that reflects the new societies norms and practices in order to be accepted. Undocumented Latin American immigrants that enter the United States are faced with the constant fear of deportability that dictates the actions they can take within the country and the social mobility they hold. Many of these undocumented individuals can lead “underground” lives for decades, developing strategies to achieve day to day needs when not provided with the same opportunities and resources to obtain these as their documented counterparts. The inability to properly settle into the new culture brought on by these immigration struggles can lead to constant negative psychological experiences that extend to detrimental effects on overall psychosocial functioning. Ward et al. (2021) underscore research that identifies integration as a preferred method of entering a new culture for many immigrants, holding onto their heritage while also immersing themselves in the new culture. As previously mentioned, most migrants do not want to forget or erase their cultural identity and will upkeep traditions and customs in the home and ethnic community following migration in order to preserve it. However, it is inevitable to undergo a process of adaptation to the new culture to a degree that allows migrant individuals to move through the new society with more ease than if they were to reject it in its entirety.

As a child of immigrant parents, I have witnessed the challenges that are posed by the conflicting cultural identities present for an immigrant individual. The immigrants in my family did not wish to leave their country of origin, but were forced to because of economic struggles they faced that accompanied the lack of prospects for adequate employment. The ways in which my family members approached their new lives in the United States differed. My mother enrolled in English language acquisition courses because she held the belief that the only way she would be able to fend for herself in this country was to be able to properly communicate with others. She did not forgo the use of Spanish however, and made it a point to only speak English when necessary, extending this value to me and implementing the rule of only speaking Spanish in the house. My grandmother on the other hand did not move to learn English and even after over twenty years of living in this country has a very limited understanding of the language.

The contextual circumstances were definite contributing factors to the choices made by my mother in contrast to my grandmother with regards to developing skills in the dominant language. My grandmother relied on my grandfather for every necessity during her first decade in the country, and often remained at home without the need to work and interact with non-family members. My mother on the other hand, alongside her two siblings, was held to the responsibility of working to build a life for herself in this new setting. My grandfather had made it very clear he would not support them for the rest of their lives so she did what she felt she needed to do to survive in the new country she has been brought to. I cannot speak to either of their experiences with discrimination or racial injustices, as neither they nor anyone in my immediate family has ever claimed to have encountered any of these. Regardless, I can identify how embracing biculturalism can lend experiences within American society that are of less difficulty in seeing how my mother embraces the ways she can use the aspects of American

culture she has adopted to thrive in this environment in contrast to how my grandmothers rejection of American culture has rendered her somewhat of a stranger to the society in which she has existed for the past two decades.

Implications

The statements made about the role of acculturation in the lives of Latin American immigrants throughout this paper, with a focus on Chilean migrants in particular, are not claiming to apply to all individuals who have experienced and undergone the process of acculturation. Rather, they aim to contribute to the discourses about the components that go into the theories and understandings held about acculturation, with an emphasis on taking into account the impact of the sociopolitical climates perpetuated about immigrants, as these dictate the positive or negative route that this already complex process can take. The examples given throughout my writing about immigrant communities were not always focused on Latin American migrant groups, but with additional support from preexisting theories and evidence about immigrant experiences, these narratives can be extended to provide a baseline from which to continue to explore the unique experiences and narratives of each cultural immigrant subgroup and even go so far as to develop the understanding that each individual from an ethnic sharing group has their own distinctive immigrant story whose acculturative outcome is idiosyncratic.

References

- Wright, T. C. (1995). Legacy of dictatorship: Works on the Chilean diaspora. *Latin American Research Review*, 30(3), 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0023879100017611>
- Bhatia, S., & Litchmore, R. (2021). Racial Identity and Transnational Migration: Black-Canadian and Indian-American Diaspora Communities. In *Routledge International Handbook of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology: Critiques, Problems, and Alternatives to Psychological Ideas* (1st ed., pp. 285–307). essay, Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036517-19>
- Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2001). Locating the dialogical self in the age of transnational migrations, border crossings and diasporas. *Culture & Psychology*, 7(3), 297–309.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X0173003>
- Borrego Jr., J., Ortiz-Gonzalez, E., & Gissandaner, T. D. (n.d.). *Acculturative stress*.
Acculturative Stress - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/acculturative-stress>
- Comănanu, R.-S., Noels, K. A., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2018). Bicultural identity orientation of immigrants to Canada. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 39(6), 526–541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1404069>
- Ward, C., Szabó, Á., Schwartz, S. J., & Meca, A. (2021). Acculturative stress and cultural identity styles as predictors of psychosocial functioning in Hispanic Americans. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 80, 274–284.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.12.002>

- Rumbaut, Rubén G., *Language: Diversity and Resilience* (2014). Chapter 6 of Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. 4th ed. University of California Press, 2014. , Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2782250> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2782250>
- Gomez, L.A. (2018). Chilean Americans: A Micro Cultural Latinx Group. In: Arredondo, P. (eds) *Latinx Immigrants. International and Cultural Psychology*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95738-8_3
- Doña-Reveco, C. (2011). Chilean Immigrants. *Multicultural America; an Encyclopedia of the Newest Americans*, 237–275. https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/31619770/Dona-Reveco_EM_C Chapter_Chile_2011-libre.pdf?1392497145=&response-content-disposition
- Soto-Alvarado, S. V., Garrido-Castillo, J., & Gil-Alonso, F. (2022). Discursos sobre los motivos para migrar a Chile. De La expulsión a la realización profesional. *Migraciones Internacionales*, 13, 0. <https://doi.org/10.33679/rmi.v1i1.2491>
- Nasatir, A. P. (1974). Chileans in California during the Gold Rush Period and the Establishment of the Chilean Consulate. *California Historical Quarterly*, 53(1), 52–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25157486>
- Aguilar, J. P., & Sen, S. (2009). Comparing conceptualizations of social capital. *Journal of Community Practice*, 17(4), 424-443.
- Meyer, P. J. (2003). *Chile : Political and Economic Conditions and U.S. Relations (R40126)*. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

- Rogler, L. H., Cortes, D. E., & Malgady, R. G. (1991). Acculturation and mental health status among Hispanics: Convergence and New Directions for research. *American Psychologist*, 46(6), 585–597. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.46.6.585>
- Parasecoli, F. (2014). Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities. *Social Research*, 81(2), 415–439. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26549625>
- Lueck, K., & Wilson, M. (2011). Acculturative stress in Latino Immigrants: The impact of social, socio-psychological and migration-related factors. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2), 186–195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.11.016>
- Landale, N. S., Oropesa, R. S., & Noah, A. J. (2017). Experiencing discrimination in Los Angeles: Latinos at the intersection of legal status and socioeconomic status. *Social Science Research*, 67, 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.05.003>
- Comas-Diaz, L., & Jacobsen, F. M. (1987). Ethnocultural Identification in Psychotherapy. *Psychiatry*, 50(3), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1987.11024355>
- Rudmin, F. (2009). Constructs, measurements and models of acculturation and acculturative stress. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33(2), 106–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.12.001>
- Thomas, W. I., & Znaniecki, F. (1919). *The Polish peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an immigrant group* (Vol. 3). University of Chicago Press.
- Rudmin, F. W. (2009). Catalogue of acculturation constructs: Descriptions of 126 taxonomies, 1918-2003. *Online readings in psychology and culture*, 8(1), 8.
- Berry, J. W. (1970). Marginality, stress and ethnic identification in an acculturated Aboriginal community. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1(3), 239-252.

- Schwartz, S. J., Unger, J. B., Zamboanga, B. L., & Szapocznik, J. (2010). Rethinking the Concept of Acculturation: Implications for Theory and Research. *The American Psychologist*, 65(4), 237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019330>
- Ellis, B. D., & Bhatia, S. (2019). Cultural psychology for a new era of citizenship politics. *Culture & Psychology*, 25(2), 220-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X18808760>
- LaFromboise, T., Coleman, H. L. K., & Gerton, J. (1993). Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114(3), 395–412. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.114.3.395>
- Martin, M., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2018). What It Takes: Promising Practices for Immigrant Origin Adolescent Newcomers. *Theory into Practice*, 57(2), 82–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2018.1425816>