Immigrant Families in a Global Context: Challenges and Future Directions

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The 15 chapters of this book explore the situation of immigrant families in many different countries, involving different ethnic groups and under different contexts. In terms of countries, the book includes immigrant families in Albania, China, Estonia, Japan, Kenya, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The contexts of these studies have included the school setting, the home and neighborhood, and the larger political environment. The topics of focus in this book have ranged from topics on well-being (as part of psychological adaptation) and school adjustment (as part of sociocultural adaptation) to civic and political participation of immigrant youth. The topics have included both very well-studied (e.g., school adaptation and psychological well-being) and less well-studied topics such as the need to go beyond the two dimensions that have been suggested to underlie all acculturation (see Sam and Berry 2010).

Looking at the scope and the coverage of the book, the title of the book as *Global Perspectives on Well-Being in Immigrant Families* is really apt as it draws on authors with varied backgrounds, having worked in different societies. Against this background, an epilogue to a book of this kind brings to bear on the importance or the implications that context has in making generalizations. Thus, one of the issues this epilogue looks at is the meaning of context in immigrant family studies.

Whereas this book discusses immigrant families, much of the focus has been on children, adolescents, and young adults, with few chapters devoted to immigrant parents. This imbalance is perhaps not surprising because, from economic and demographic points of view, the future of many societies lies in the hands of their children: the children of today will be the leaders, workers, and parents of tomorrow (Sam 2006). Consequently, the welfare of children is seen as having important consequences for societies. Indeed, this book is just one of several in recent years where young immigrant family members have been the main focus (see Garcia Coll 2012; Masten et al. 2012). This epilogue nevertheless argues for the need to direct more attention to immigrant parents and the effect their acculturation may have on

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their children. To date (Chuang and Gielen 2009; Fuligni and Pedersen 2002; Kwak 2003), the focus in this area has been on how parenting in immigrant families impacts on their children. Before delving into the two issues pointed above (i.e., the context and redirecting of attention) regarding family studies, the epilogue will start by looking at some converging findings and some unresolved issues that may have bearing in the future on research.

Converging Findings with Unresolved Issues

All the chapters of this volume underscore the complex nature of individual acculturation, and even more so that of families. Although many of the chapters have directed their attention to one group of family members, families entail interaction among different subsystems (an issue that is discussed a bit later), amplifying the complex nature of family acculturation even further. Consistent with this position, all the chapters of the book, including the integrative papers (see, e.g., Chaps. 3, 4, and 11) and those following ethnographic perspectives (see Chap. 8), pursue a rather complex conceptualization and utilize sophisticated methodological approaches. In spite of the complexities in conceptualization and methodological sophistication, the chapters of this book point to some convergences in research findings in the broader area of acculturation of immigrant families and also within the book itself. Although converging findings may suggest that some form of universality in acculturation research exists and possibly point to a proposition that "we know all that there is to know," the focus of this epilogue is to emphasize that we still have a long way to go and that it is premature to rest on our oars. In the next section, we will look at three issues: the immigrant paradox, the causal link between perceived discrimination and well-being, and school adjustment, where, in spite of some consistent findings, more questions remain unanswered.

The Immigrant Paradox As the numbers of immigrant children and youth continue to soar in several Western societies, the need to disentangle the underlying mechanism of the so-called immigrant paradox is urgent (Garcia Coll and Marks 2011). The immigrant paradox itself is the counterintuitive finding where, on the one hand, immigrants are found to report better adaptation compared with their native peers and, on the other hand, first-generation immigrants are found to report better adaptation than their second-generation peers, particularly in the area of sociocultural adaptation (Sam et al. 2008). Whereas the Chap. 2 by Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, and Sirin (this book) could not find support for the immigrant paradox between first- and second-generation immigrants in New York, USA, both Dimitrova and Chasiotis (Chap. 15) and Laghi and colleagues (Chap. 14, this book) respectively found support for the paradox, when comparing Albanian immigrants with Italian natives and Chinese immigrants with Italian natives.

These findings here raise a question whether the *paradox* is context dependent, where, for instance, Italy as a society of settlement poses risks to acculturating

individuals, and if so, what exactly about Italian society is risky. Indeed, the potential role of the context in the occurrence of the paradox has been suggested by Garcia Coll and her coworkers (see Garcia Coll and Marks 2011; Garcia Coll et al. 2012) as well as Dimitrova et al. (2013) who could not find an unequivocal support for the paradox in Europe.

Examining the psychological and sociocultural adaption of immigrant youth in five different European countries (excluding Italy), Sam et al. (2008) found mixed support for the immigrant paradox. Whereas the pattern of sociocultural adaptation for first- and second-generation immigrants resembled the immigrant paradox, results for psychological adaptation were opposite to the paradox. The researchers pointed to the peculiarities of US immigration history compared to those of Europe as one possible explanation for the difference. In this book, support for the immigrant paradox was found between two different ethnic groups in Italy.

In the integrative chapter by Rogers-Sirin et al. (Chap. 2, this book), two important issues about the paradox are brought to light. The first is that the outcome variables included a number of psychological adaptation indicators. The second is the longitudinal nature of the study. With respect to the first issue, studies seem to suggest that the paradox is particularly so in the area of sociocultural adaptation (where the attention is on school adjustment and problem/risky problem). In the area of psychological adaptation, the paradox is less clear (see Garcia Coll et al. 2012; Sam et al. 2008).

The immigrant paradox is often conceptualized as immigrant vs. nationals, and first- vs. second- and higher-generation immigrants. Particularly with respect to the latter conceptualization, some form of longitudinal design is implied to ascertain clearly whether adaptation deteriorates the longer an individual resides in the society of settlement. In a meta-analysis undertaken by Dimitrova et al. (2013) of 51 European studies, weaker effects for the paradox among immigrant children and youth have been found. However, these effects vary according to geographic area, developmental period, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and national policy indicators toward immigrant groups. Moreover, one of the conclusions in the review by Garcia Coll and her colleagues (2012) was that the paradox is stronger during the adolescent period compared with early and middle childhood. Do major developmental changes occurring during adolescence (e.g., pubertal changes, identity formulation, and peer network formation) complicate the acculturation changes taking place among immigrant youth? Other than generational status and contextual factors, what exactly about acculturation undermines young people's adaptation in a new society? For instance, does perceived discrimination play a role in the occurrence of immigrant paradox, where first- and second-generation immigrants have different reference groups when they evaluate social and economic conditions? More precisely, whereas first-generation immigrants compare themselves with members of their home country, second-generation immigrants compare themselves with their national peers. By so doing, first-generation immigrants perceive themselves as relatively well off and the second-generation immigrants see themselves as not so well off.

Perceived Discrimination The debilitating effect of discrimination (whether objective or subjective) on the adaptation of immigrants is well documented (see Berry et al. 2006; Liebkind and Jasinskaja-Lathi 2000; Paradies 2006; Pascoe and Richman 2009). In this book, the Chap. 12 by Bobowik, Basabe, and Paez clearly demonstrates this negative effect. What is interesting in the Bobowik et al. chapter is the effort made to delineate the (mediating and moderating) pathways between perceived discrimination and well-being. Considering that research to date suggests that there is an invariant negative relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being, it is puzzling that in experimental studies that are aimed at establishing a direct link between perceived discrimination and well-being, the mechanisms of this pathway are generally lacking. An understanding of the mechanisms will go a long way to offset these negative effects of perceived discrimination. In the absence of such experimental studies, it could be argued that poor mental health increases one's susceptibility to (perceived) discrimination (see Mays and Cochran 2001). The need for experimental studies to establish a direct causal link between perceived discrimination and well-being in general cannot be overemphasized. Similarly, the link between perceived discrimination and the functioning of the family as a whole is very much needed. In the absence of experimental studies, we may turn to longitudinal studies: these studies point to the causal link between perceived discrimination and well-being (see Pavalko et al. 2003); however, they are also generally lacking in acculturation research.

School and Academic Adjustment The centrality of schooling in young people's well-being in general and the acculturation of immigrant children and youth is very well documented in acculturation literature (see Reiser 2009; Suarez-Orozco 2009) and the number of chapters in this book (see e.g., Chaps. 2, 4, 5, 14, and 15) focusing on schooling, either in part or wholly, underscore the importance of schooling for migrant children and youth. Whereas some of the chapters point to structural factors within the society in general and within the school in particular (e.g., the Chap. 5 by Chen points to migrant children denied entry to public schools because of urban residence requirements), discriminatory practices akin to exclusion policies (e.g., Japanese laws not making 9-year schooling obligatory for foreign citizens) all combine to undermine the school adjustment of immigrant children. Moreover, teacher perceptions of immigrant parents and involvement in their children's education and differences in immigrant and national parents about the role of the school and teachers in children's education can exacerbate the education of immigrant children. Investigations into a better understanding of how structural practices and perceptions and beliefs all combine to affect the successful education of immigrant children are still needed.

Immigrant parents often embark on emigration with the desire to create a better future for their children (Bacallao and Smokowski 2006; Fuligni and Telzer 2012; Thronson 2008), either in the new country or through sending remittances to their home country (Kofman 2004). In a society of settlement, one way immigrant parents can ensure their children's future is through education (Fuligni and Telzer 2012). Studies abound in the area of immigrant parents' involvement in their

children's education (see Carreon et al. 2005, Kao and Tienda 1995). However, studies are lacking on how parents fare, when their dreams and wishes for their children concerning education go down the drain. Although a study among school-grade children has, for instance, found support for the hypothesis that experiences of perceived failure at school increased the likelihood of aversive parent–child interactions after school, there was no evidence of the reverse effect. When children rated self-reported more academic failure events at school, they also described their parents as more disapproving and punishing after school (Repetti 1996). To what extent do immigrant parents become less supportive in the face of their children not doing well in school? What are the acculturation consequences on immigrant parents when their children do not live up to their "Yale University" expectations and end up in "jail" as failures.

The Context

Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that comes about from the meeting between individuals or groups of different cultural backgrounds (Sam and Berry 2010). One result of acculturation is the formation of societies with more than one cultural or ethnic group. Acculturation research therefore normally takes place in societies or contexts involving at least two ethnic or cultural groups of unequal economic and or political dominance. Quite often, the emphasis of the research is on the changes occurring among individual members of the less dominant groups (Berry 2006). To fully understand the acculturation experiences and the outcome, the need to understand the context under which the acculturation is taking place is now greatly acknowledged (Berry 2006) and amply demonstrated (Birman et al. 2005; Nguyen et al. 1999). Many of the chapters of this book have also underscored the relevance of context. The Chap. 9 by Svensson (this book), which demonstrates how parents monitor their children's peer relations and the children's reactions to this monitoring in different neighborhoods, is a clear instance of the importance of the context. Moreover, the Chap. 8 by Iqbal (this book) also shows differences in ethnic–racial socialization in three different families in the UK.

    Contexts are rich, multifaceted, and complex; further, the degree of complexity depends on which side of the equation (the dominant vs the nondominant group) the focus is, and the interaction between two contexts and among the subcontexts themselves within the larger respective context (Horenczyk and Tartar 2012). The level of complexity has even been raised higher as attention is now drawn to a *third* dimension (see Chap. 3 by Ferguson and Bornstein, this book), namely that immigrants entering multicultural societies need to orient themselves toward the dominant society and its culture, as well as different aspects of the nondominant culture and simply to a single nondominant cultural group. With respect to the three-dimensional acculturation, immigrants have to orientate themselves to nondominant cultural factors such as nationality (e.g., Russian) vs. religion (e.g., Jewish) vs. race/color (e.g., Black). (See Persky and Birman (2005) for research on how Russian

Jews to the United States mange these three dimensions.) Moreover, many immigrant families do not reside in a predominately same-ethnic community (i.e., ethnic enclaves) but in multiethnic neighborhoods (Berry et al. 2006; Borjas 1995, 1998), implying that the acculturation process is not limited to a single nondominant cultural group but to multicultural nondominant groups. The challenges of operationalizing the two dimensions of acculturation are difficult enough (see Snauwaert et al. 2005), and this undoubtedly becomes more complex in a three-dimensional perspective. Nevertheless, research should take into account the realities of these kinds of acculturating contexts.

As we seek to gain a better understanding of the context of acculturation, that of the immigrant family is still lagging behind. To begin with, contextual information in many acculturation studies still remains at the descriptive level and is often presented from an ethnographic perspective. With increasing sophistication in research methods accompanied by powerful computer software, it is prudent to make use of large multination databases that have quantified contextual information such as settlement policies, ethnolinguistic fractionalization, cultural diversity, and homogeneity. Presently, three such large national databases are available and can be utilized (see Bloemraad 2011; MIPEX 2012; Vigdor 2011).

The Family System as a Context Three chapters in this volume focused on immigrant families (Chaps. 8, 10, and 14). As Chun (2006) points out, the family is a system comprising interconnected and interdependent elements. To understand the individual, we must understand his/her family system. People cannot be understood in isolation from one another. From Gestalt psychology, we know that a family is greater than its individual parts. Moreover, the family system itself is also made up of different subsystems (including the parent–child subsystem, the couple subsystem, and the siblings subsystem), each with its own uniqueness and challenges. There is also the external (extended) family subsystem that may have its impact on the family dynamics. All these subsystems deserve further research. Studying individual members of acculturating families (i.e., the adolescent with an immigrant background or parent–child interaction) only gives limited information of the family as a whole. Studying the family as a unit will be more informative.

Redirecting Research Attention

Building on the previous point, let us take the case of the parent–child subsystem, which has characterized immigrant family research to date. More specifically, a lot of attention has been devoted to the conflicts within the subsystem, parenting styles relating to autonomy and control and how these may affect the younger person (Cheah et al. 2009; Kwak 2003; Phinney and Vedder 2006). Much of the research in this area has focused on the children's experiences and their perception of their parents' experiences to these interactions (see Birman 2006a, b). These studies seem to suggest that immigrant parents are able to take care of themselves and do not need

"*support*". Very much absent are parents' reactions to, for instance, intergenerational differences, notably when these differences may give rise to conflicts. How do parents experience failure, when they are unable to meet the acculturation needs, the educational support their children need. How do immigrant parents react when they fail to instill in their children cultural values deemed important by the parents, such as filial obligations, and when children disobey their parents as well as bring dishonor to the name of the family (see de Valk and Schans 2008).

Equally important are studies that look at how immigrant children contribute to the family as a whole. A review chapter by Fuligni and Telzer (2012) sheds light on the contributions of immigrant children to the immigrant family. It is not unusual to regard immigrant children either as helpless pawns in the acculturation of immigrant families, such as being a language broker for their parents and supporting the family economically, or as susceptible to acculturation stresses. The precise effect of the various roles immigrant children take on, which affect their psychological and sociocultural adaptations, is not fully understood. To echo one of Fuligni and Telzer (2012) recommendations, more research is needed to help identify the tipping point, where the important roles immigrant children take on for the family become debilitating and when they may be beneficial. In addition to identifying the tipping point, precisely how these management roles work will be important to know.

Research Designs

In the introduction to the epilogue, the level of sophistication of the chapters was applauded. However, some research design recommendations may still not be out of place. Acculturation is a process that takes place over time and is accompanied by a number of changes. Immigrant families undergo a number of changes at all levels, particularly the differential speed in parents and their children in acquiring the cultural values of the latter. These kinds of changes can best be understood in longitudinal designs. Except for a few chapters (see Chaps. 2 and 9, this book), hardly any of the studies reported in this book takes a longitudinal approach.

Much of acculturation research is interested in understanding the factors and conditions that affect or bring about change or can account for an outcome. To be able to account for the outcome, extraneous and confounding factors have to be excluded or controlled for in our analyses. To achieve this, experimental studies are most ideal (Berry et al. 2011). Although there are several forms of experimental studies, one form that is rather lacking in acculturation research in general and also in the acculturation of immigrant families involves experimentally manipulating the mindsets of children and their parents on various aspects of interest, for instance values, and measuring the resulting changes in behavior.

Although not clearly stated, the underlying motive in bringing together immigrant family researchers across the globe to produce this book is the desire to provide general principles that relate acculturation experiences to acculturation out-

comes. Many acculturation studies, including the ones in this book, examine one acculturating group settled into one society. The findings from such studies cannot be generalized beyond the group(s) and the societies where the study has taken place. Most acculturation research has been conducted in Western societies, particularly in the USA, although large numbers of people undergo acculturation in other parts of the world including China and India. Interesting enough, only two chapters in this book are based in the USA, making this book unique. While it is important to know about acculturation phenomena in one group in one society, there is the risk that such limited research findings will be generalized beyond the setting in which they were obtained. The major contribution of this book is the inclusion of acculturation studies of immigrant families in different countries, but it is equally important to study immigrant families comparatively, by including many different countries. With increasingly powerful research tools, acculturation research needs to go beyond the simple comparative approach and become more cross-comparative involving three or more ethnic groups in three or more societies of settlement (i.e., a 3×3 (or higher)) research design. As we move on to cross-comparative designs, combined with studying families as a unit and as subsystems, a multilevel design will be a prerequisite. Individuals in immigrant families are nested in subsystems, and subsystems are nested in the families.

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