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# **Toward an Interdisciplinary Study of Acculturation, Identity, and Culture**

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As both Côté and Hand point out in their commentaries, acculturation, identity, and culture are complex processes that are determined and affected by the contexts in which they operate. As we stated in our article in this issue, we do not dismiss the notion that culture and identity are complex and individualized phenomena that vary from one person or context to the next. However, our goal is pragmatic in that we wish to operationalize acculturation, identity, and culture for empirical research that can then be used to design and support intervention efforts. To design interventions that consist of core components but can be adapted for specific immigrant groups and receiving societies, we believe that it is necessary to develop ‘quasi-universal’ principles about what personal, social, and cultural identity are and how they operate and are affected by the experience and process of international migration. This assumption does not preclude adapting the intervention modality for specific situations, groups, and contexts; in fact, research has found that individuals are most likely to participate in interventions that are tailored for their specific personal and cultural circumstances [Castro, Barrera, & Martinez, 2004; Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, & Bellamy, 2004]. So in Hand’s example, the Mexican immigrant student in California would likely experience many of the same stressors (e.g., discrimination, marginalization) as other Mexican students – and therefore an intervention program designed to promote personal identity development could be tailored to accommodate the specific issues that this student and his peers face. Moreover, like any skilled clinician, the interventionist would focus on the specific life circumstances and challenges encountered by the individuals participating in the intervention. So the increased precision offered by Hand’s approach may in fact help to tailor interventions more effectively for specific individuals and situations.

A larger issue that both Côté and Hand raise, and that we fully endorse, is the need for interdisciplinary attention to issues of acculturation and identity in immigrant individuals. Our aim was to begin to develop a knowledge base concerning the role of identity in acculturation and its implications for empirical research and for intervention. We fully agree that our approach is open to revision and expansion, particularly by scholars from other fields of inquiry. As psychologists, we focus large-

ly on the individual level of analysis. Such an approach should be complemented by a focus on the social-structural forces at play, such as the economic and political issues that influence immigration and those that confront immigrants when they arrive in their new homelands. It is also vitally important to focus on the specific situations and groups in which immigrant people interact, and on how these interactions shape the person's experiences in the new society. Therefore, as a complement to our largely psychological analysis, there is a need to explore both (a) global and socio-structural determinants of the immigrant experience and (b) precise and situation-specific aspects of this experience. Such explanations might best be undertaken through collaborations among psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, educators, and scholars in related fields so that the adjustment of immigrant people is understood, and perhaps complemented, from a variety of viewpoints. It is through such collaborations that efforts to help immigrant individuals may bear the most fruit.

## References

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- Kumpfer, K.L., Alvarado, R., Smith, P., & Bellamy, N. (2002). Cultural sensitivity and adaptation in family-based prevention interventions. *Prevention Science, 3*, 241–246.