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Enculturation

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Enculturation is the process by which individuals of an ethnic group unintentionally, unconsciously, and naturally, acquire culture specific values, knowledge, behaviours, manners, and identities (Gob, Lee, & Yoon, 2008) (Grovtevant, Gunnar & Hellerstedt, 2006) (Kim & Omizo, 2006) (Constantine & Miville, 2006). There are many psychological concepts that can be linked to enculturation such as psychological protective factors, perceived sense of well being, social connectedness, psychological health, cultural identity, help seeking, self efficacy, and self esteem. Research literature pertaining to enculturation has illustrated that, the degree to which these psychological concepts are present within individuals, are strongly influenced by enculturation. Due to ecological variations, religious variations, differential economical values, differential cultural beliefs, and differential cultural behaviours, individual psychological diversity among intra- ethnic and inter- ethnic groups are empirically evident (Grovtevant et al., 2006) (Lamb & Nsamenang, 1995) (Lumsden, 1984). With that, it is equally important to note that certain products/ consequences of enculturation and similar cross cultural environments and values, have contributed to transcultural similarities that are evident among individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Grovtevant, et al., 2006) (Kim & Omizo, 2006). In essence, the enculturation phenomenon can be used to understand and explain both the psychological similarities and psychological differences, that are seen among intra- ethnic group members and inter- ethnic group members. This literature review will provide valid definitions of the above mentioned psychological concepts (based on the context of this paper), empirical cross cultural research evidence that illustrates reasons for cultural similarities and differences due to enculturation, the problems/ limitations associated with the enculturation phenomenon,

and in close this review will discuss how enculturation impacts the ABC's of psychology, referring to affectivity, behaviour, and cognition.

Psychological protective factors refer to psychological resources that enable individuals to overcome and skillfully cope with ethnic prejudices, that lead to racism and/or discrimination (Grovtevant, et al., 2006) (Kim & Omizo, 2006). Perceived sense of well being is defined as a subjective feeling that reflects an individuals physical state (Gob et al., 2008). Social connectedness refers to an individuals perceived sense of closeness and togetherness, in relation to their cultural and/ or ethnic community (Gob et al., 2008). Social connectedness is more likely to be to experienced among individuals, who live in areas that are highly populated by people of their specific ethnic group (Gob et al., 2008). Psychological health refers to the affectivity and attitudes an individual is experiencing at a given time (Gob et al., 2008). For example, affect such as depression, anxiety, alienation, and negative attitudes, would result in a decrease in psychological health (Gob et al., 2008) (Grovtevant, et al., 2006) (Constantine & Miville, 2006) (Kim & Omizo, 2006). In contrast, positive attitudes and affect such as joy, calmness, and feeling connected, would contribute to an increase in psychological health. Cultural identity is a term that is similar to ethnic and racial identity, and it refers to ones membership to a specific ethnic group, however, membership is symbol/ psychological rather than concrete and tangible (Kim & Omizo, 2006). Help seeking is a term that identities an individuals desire to approach and take advantage of health services such as counseling, psychological services, and traditional/ culturally acceptable healers/ healing mechanisms (Constantine & Miville, 2006) (Kim & Omizo, 2006). Self efficacy reflects an individuals belief regarding their abilities and skills to engage in a task, and successfully carryout the required duties in order to the achieve the final

goal (Kim & Omizo, 2006). Self esteem can be divided into two distant groups, such as collective self esteem and individual self esteem. Collective self esteem refers to the sense of worth an individual attributes to their distinct ethnic group (Kim & Omizo, 2006). Individual self esteem refers to the sense of worth an individual attributes to themselves, after evaluating themselves in reference to their specific ethnic group (Kim & Omizo, 2006).

Cross cultural research by Gob et al., 2008, was conducted on 186 Korean immigrants, where 76 were male participants and 113 were female participants, and they found that social connectedness influenced the degree to which an individual experienced enculturation (Gob et al., 2008). Social connectedness was the key element that enabled the unintentional acquisition of manners and knowledge, specific to an individuals ethnicity (Gob et al., 2008). The fact that the degree of enculturation was dependent on the level of social connectedness, explains why intra ethnic and inter ethnic group differences pertaining to psychology exist (Gob et al., 2008). Basically, as a result of a lack of enculturation due to social connectedness, an individuals cultural identity has not been fully reinforced and reassured, and as a result individuals within a specific culture and individuals pan culturally, vary cognitively and behaviorally. In relating this finding to current events such as terrorist extremism, it is possible that individuals who are seen to be moderates, are a result of a lack of social connectedness they may have felt towards extremist within there ethnic group. Therefore they may have not been fully enculturated to a point were they felt, extremism was a part of their cultural identity. In relation to the above research by Gob et al., Koreans who had experienced a high degree of enculturation, also experienced a high degree of social and cultural bonding (social connectedness) within their

specific ethnic group, which means that enculturation worked as a result of social connectedness (Gob et al., 2008).

Mehta's 1998 research on Indian Immigrants and Asian Americans, found that positive/ high levels of social connectedness which produced a high degree of enculturation, contributed to an individuals positive psychological health and perceived sense of welling being (Mehta, 1998). Research my Mehta points out a significant cultural similarity, that is present between a predominately collectivist society (Indian), and a predominately individualistic (American) society. The cross cultural similarities in relation to positive psychological health and positive feelings of well being, can be explained using the enculturation process despite the different cultural norms and values being observed.

In contrast to Metha's research findings, Constantine et al.'s 2006 research report illustrates contradictory findings. These findings illustrate that Mexican American college students with higher levels of enculturation, were more likely to express negative attitudes when in a dominant culture that is different from their own (Constantine et al., 2006). In addittion, Mexican American students were more likely to experience negative psychological health due to resentment felt in the host culture, and due to the fact that they were more likely to refrain from making use of professional psychological help (Constantine et al., 2006). These differences seen among Mexican Americans, who can be seen as adhering to collectivists beliefs, can be explained in terms of the enculturation process they underwent (Constantine et al., 2006). For example, Mexican culture enculturated Mexicans to rely on traditional healing mechanisms, rather than modern day therapy and mental health services (Constantine et al., 2006). This finding has beneficial implications that can improve the psychological situation felt by Mexican

immigrants. For example, schools should implement medical programs that adapt to the enculturated Mexican students, and services that provide traditional health services that are accepted by Mexican Americans.

Grovtevant et al.'s 2006 research on internationally adopted infants, found intra- ethnic psychological differences linked to protective psychological factors, among adoptees who were adopted by families who were racial dissimilar, and adoptees adopted by families who were racially similar. Adoptees who grew up in an environment/ cultural setting that did not provide ethnic specific enculturation, were not able to form a strong cultural identity, as opposed to the adoptees raised in a cultural setting that provided ethnic specific enculturation (e.g. Same race parents). As a result of differential enculturation, those with poorly formed cultural identities due to a lack of ethnic specific enculturation, did not develope psychological protective skills which would have enabled them to over come prejudices, that lead to racism and/or discrimination (Grovtevant, et al., 2006). The researchers are implicitly stating that adoptees and children in general, are more likely to develope strong ethnic identifies that will contribute to the developement of psychological protective factors, only if they receive ethnic specific enculturation. The inter and intra cultural group similarities relating to the ability to overcome racism and discrimination, can be understood and explained using enculturation, which works by fostering the formation of a strong ethnic identity.

Research by Kim & Omizo 2006, illustrates the impact enculturation has on self efficacy, collective self esteem, and individual self esteem. A study done on 156 Asian American college students, in which there were 96 female participants and 60 male participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 24 years, found the following. Higher levels of enculturation were associated with

higher degrees of self efficacy, higher levels of collective self esteem, and higher levels of individual selfesteem (Kim & Omizo, 2006). In addittion, embedded feelings of uncertainty regarding ones cultural identity due to a lack of enculturation, decreased over all self esteem (Grovtevant, et al., 2006). When comparing Kim and Omizo's research on Asian Americans, with   Grovtevant et al's research on international adoptees, it is evidence that similarities revolving around self efficacy and self esteem result from enculturation, which works to strengthen cultural identity. In reference to the conceptualization of self esteem and self efficacy mentioned earlier, it is evident an identity component is important in order to experience positive affect.

Research done on the people Nsoland, Cameroon, by Lamb and Nsamenang in 1995, identified the factors that influence the diversity in the enculturation process. Environmental factors such as schools and the availability of resources, cultural beliefs such as patriarchy, cultural practices such gender roles, and religious factors, strongly influence the cross cultural diversity among the enculturation process. In Nsoland, Cameroon, children are taught that they are viable members of the family, and that they need to contribute to economic and food increase (Lamb & Nsamenang, 1995). With that, at an early age in life their psychological mindset is focused on labour and fulfilling duties, which in turn influences their cognition, behaviours (Lamb & Nsamenang, 1995), and potentially affect. Secondly, Nsoland children are enculturated to perceive economic status as being premised on amount of children one has (Lamb & Nsamenang, 1995). This in turn focuses there cognition on the ability to produce many children, in order to gain economically and increase kinship ties (Lamb & Nsamenang, 1995). It is evident that the Nsoland cultural atmosphere is emphasizing interdependence, as parents and children

both depend on each other for food and economic gain, and the developement of social networks such as kinship.

In comparison to American culture which has an independent cultural atmosphere, the environment (e.g. School present), the cultural beliefs (e.g. Equality), and the cultural practices (e.g. Decrease in sexual division of labour) are different to those in Nsoland, Cameroon. As result, children are not actitively engaged in providing for needs, instead, they are mandated to attend school (Behavioural aspect). Secondly under the capitalist economy, parents work to support themselves and their children through wage labour not hunting and gathering. In addittion, status is increased through monetary and power resources, not amount of children. Thirdly, children are not focused on reproducing abundantly in order to increase social networks, instead, they are focused on one day being self reliant and independent (Cognition aspect). Therefore this cross cultural comparison between American children and Nsoland children, explicitly highlight the power/ influential ability of enculturation, as enculturation was seen to to influence individual cognition, and behaviour.

After a careful analysis of the literature pertaining to enculturation, it is evident that one of the weaknesses of this theory is its lack of ability to explain paradoxical research findings. For example, it does not critical explain psychological paradoxes such as the lack of psychological protective factors, that are seen among individuals who do receive ethnic specific enculturation (e.g. Adoptees with same race parents). Therefore these types of outcomes require a deeper psychological analysis, that focuses on a deeper explanation regarding the relationship between enculturation and cognition, behaviour, and affect. Secondly, the enculturation theory cannot be accurately assessed and analyzed without the acculturation theory. For instance, in order to see the different affects of enculturation among diverse ethnic groups, these ethnic groups must

experience acculturation in order to test what they have enculturated. It is only through this process that the cognitive, behavioural, and affect related aspects of enculturation will actually become evident.

The cultural and environmental differences and similarities have contributed to differences and similarities in cognition (e.g. Psychological protective factors), behaviour (e.g. Focus on reproduction), and affectivity (e.g. Resentment). The enculturation phenomenon works through the filters of cultural beliefs, cultural practices, economics, environment, geography, and religious variations, in order to produce the cultural and ethnic psychological differences and similarities that are present pan culturally in the world today.

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