

# Exploring the Acculturation Strategies Among First Generation and Second Generation: Indian Immigrants Residing in the United States of America

Arjun Arya

Bellarmino College Preparatory

## ABSTRACT

The majority of Indians living in the US came to the US during the Y2K scare close to 2000 and were first-generation immigrants who faced a very different culture than they had in India. Many people had different strategies to adapt to the newness of American Culture. This paper aims to explore and understand the similarities and differences in the acculturation strategies used by first-generation parents, specifically mothers and second-generation immigrants i.e. their adolescent children. A total sample of 30 respondents residing in the Bay Area (15= mothers, 15= adolescents) was taken using convenience sampling. The adolescent acculturation strategies were measured by the Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire (BIQ) (Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978), and adult acculturation strategies were measured by the Likert scale. This questionnaire, based on a scale of 1-5, measures biculturalism and lack thereof, as well as cultural involvement and lack thereof. To analyze, a Mann-Whitney U test was carried out. Children adapted to the new American culture, whereas mothers mainly stayed with Indian culture, and children were more culturally involved than their mothers. This implies that children on the whole used their mother's strategies about halfway through when they began to incorporate American culture into their life.

## **Introduction**

In 2019, the total number of immigrants in the world was close to 272 million people (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p.19). This is equal to around 3.5 percent of the world's population. This number has been increasing steadily over the past five decades, due to many reasons, including war, the search for a better life abroad, and globalization. Europe and Asia output the largest number of migrants. India outputs 2.5 million migrants every year, according to a Ministry of External Affairs(India) report. In total, there are 4.6 million Indian immigrants living in the US right now(Budiman, 2021). These immigrants came to the US in three waves. The first wave was in 1965, after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the second was in the 1980s, and the third is the "IT generation", starting in the mid-1990s.

All of these immigrants have different ways of adjusting to life in America, or any country other than their own. The degree to which we lose our culture when migrating to a new country is known as "acculturation"(Graves 1967). Depending on where Indians immigrate to in the US, it can be hard to find things that remind them of home, like restaurants and grocery stores that sell the things needed for authentic Indian cooking. Also, some areas where other Indians are not present can also be harder to live in, because the feeling of togetherness with other Indians is not present. A study on Iranian immigrants found that mental health has a direct correspondence with how well immigrants assimilate into the new culture.

Acculturation, as given by Merriam-Webster, means the cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture. It means a lot more than adapting to another culture. Normally, this happens to immigrants emigrating to what is seen as a more “modern” country. It happens a lot more in this day and age since there are more people immigrating to a new country now than ever. This theory arose in 1918, by a group of anthropologists and became more widely discussed after World War II, since there were many war-torn refugees fleeing to new nations (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). They assimilated into their new culture quite quickly, although many selectively borrowed what they would adapt from the new culture, and what they would keep. The language was a wide adaptation, as to live in a new country, knowing the language is key, and the old language doesn’t have as much importance.

Globalization is probably the cause of this phenomenon since because of it, people have been moving around, moving from India to the US, rural to urban cities, and from urban to suburban areas. Losing our culture and adapting to the new one is something all immigrants experience, although the degree to which we keep our old culture is different for everyone. That degree depends on the 4 types of acculturation, as given by John Berry - assimilation(completely going into a culture), separation(keeping only the old culture), integration(mixing both cultures), and lastly, marginalization(keeping neither culture). A study on Iranians immigrating to the US found that mental health closely relies on how well the immigrants are able to assimilate into the new culture(Ghaffrian, 1997). A different study focusing on Indian women found that a traditional, Indian household in the US correlated with more depression and more children(Mann, 2017). Every child is influenced by the actions of their parents, and part of this can be related to how children cope with being the children of immigrants, as well as what strategies they use to fuse their culture with the new culture, or lack thereof. This study aims to explore if there is a correlation between how Indian immigrants(first generation) adjust to the US, and what strategies their children use. The family environment aspect of acculturation is important because parents create an environment from which their child picks things up subconsciously.

## Methodology

### Aim

The study explores the similarities between acculturation strategies adopted by Indian mothers who migrated to the US and their adolescent children, and how these immigrants adjust to life in the US. This could be insightful for the immigrants themselves, as well as people looking to immigrate to the United States, who can see the different strategies to adjust to American life employed by people already in the US.

### Research Design

This research paper is a quantitative study i.e. survey-based data from Indian immigrants to the US. The adult survey was based on a survey with a Likert scale, from 1-7, with the four types of acculturation tested for in different sections of the survey.

### Hypothesis

Null hypothesis - There would be no similarity between the acculturation strategies adopted by mothers and their children.

Alternative hypothesis - There would be a similarity in the acculturation strategies adopted by mothers and their children.

## Consent

Informed consent was taken from all respondents for data collection. The confidentiality and privacy of the respondents were maintained; no data would be disclosed to any existential person or persons. No identifiers such as names or pictures were disclosed in the article or while conducting the study, only initials were asked to consider correlation. Ethical guidelines of research were followed.

## Sample

The paper is based on 30 respondents, 15 adolescents and 15 mothers living in the Bay Area, with the adolescents being teenagers, and the gender ratio for adolescents was 8 males for 7 females, and the adults were all female.

## Tools Used

The adolescent survey was based on a questionnaire known as the Bicultural Involvement Questionnaire (BIQ) (Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). This questionnaire, based on a scale of 1-5, measures biculturalism and lack thereof, as well as cultural involvement and lack thereof. The American score subtracted from the native score gives us a score for biculturalism, where if a score is close to zero, biculturalism is indicated, a substantial positive score indicates a lean toward the native side, and a substantial negative score indicates a lean toward the American culture. The questionnaires employed in this paper were based on scales of 1-5 and 1-7 Likert scales, for adolescents, and adults, respectively. The questionnaires only asked for gender, age, and initials, so they were completely anonymous.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Summary of Wilcoxon Test Analysis for Indian-origin teenagers and their mother’s assimilation of American culture (N=30).

| Respondents | N  | Mean  | SD   | Z     | p     |
|-------------|----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Children    | 15 | 50    | 6.08 |       |       |
| Mothers     | 15 | 19.67 | 4.94 | -3.41 | 0.001 |

Table 1 depicts that mean scores for children (M=50, SD =6.08) reported significantly higher on assimilation than mothers (M = 19.67, SD = 4.94), Z = -3.41, p = 0.001. This means that children adapted more to the new culture, or in this case, Americanism. Similarly, it was found that younger generations spoke more English and less Russian, and older generations spoke more Russian than English in a study of Russian immigrants to the United States (Tricket, Perskey & Espino 2019).

**Table 2.** Summary of Wilcoxon Test Analysis for Indian teenagers and their mother’s separation from American culture.

| Respondents | N  | Mean | SD   | Z     | p     |
|-------------|----|------|------|-------|-------|
| Children    | 15 | 37.6 | 6.91 | -2.25 | 0.025 |
| Mothers     | 15 | 32.4 | 2.47 |       |       |

Table 2 depicts that mean scores for children (M = 37.6, SD = 6.91) reported somewhat lower on separation than mothers (M = 32.4, SD = 2.47), Z = -2.25, p = 0.025. This means that mothers kept more of the host culture and less of the new culture. Similarly, a study on Moroccan immigrants to the Netherlands found that older people used their original language more than the younger generations (Stevens 2004).

**Table 3.** Summary of Wilcoxon Test Analysis for Indian teenagers and their mother’s integration of American culture into Indian culture (N=30).

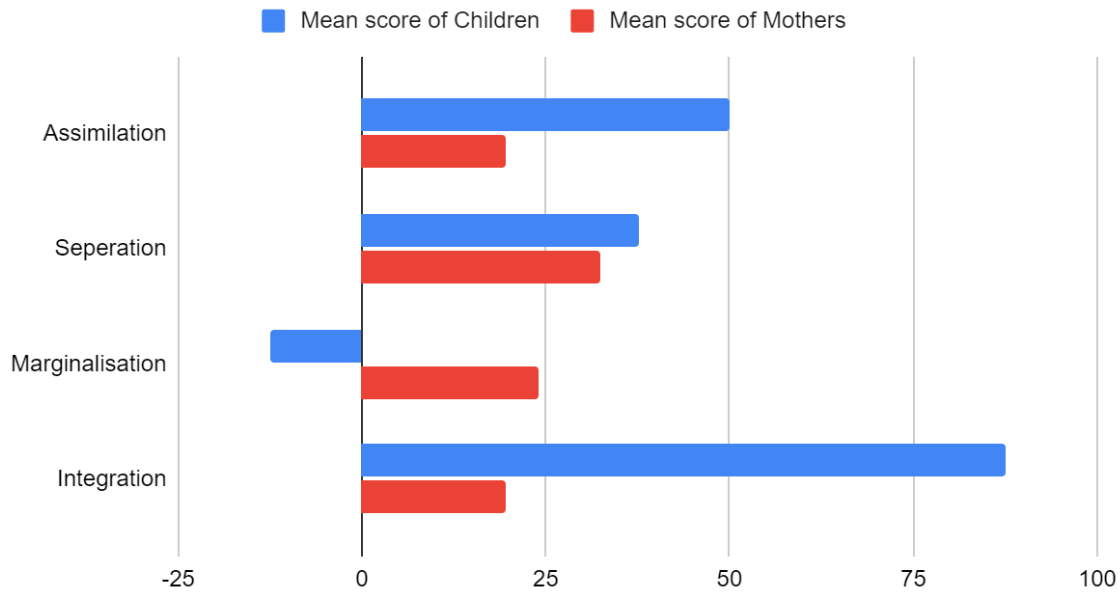
| Respondents | N  | Mean  | SD   | Z     | p     |
|-------------|----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Children    | 15 | -12.4 | -10  | -3.41 | 0.001 |
| Mothers     | 15 | 24.07 | 1.98 |       |       |

Table 3 depicts that mean scores for children (M= -12.4, SD= -10) reported significantly lower on biculturalism than mothers (M = 24.07, SD = 1.98), Z = -3.41, p = 0.001. This means that mothers incorporated both cultures while adapting to the US. Similarly, it was found that the averages for Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands relating to Dutch culture were higher for adults than for children (Stevens,2004).

**Table 4.** Summary of Wilcoxon Test Analysis for Indian teenagers and their mother’s cultural involvement (N= 30).

| Respondents | N  | Mean | SD   | Z     | p     |
|-------------|----|------|------|-------|-------|
| Children    | 15 | 87.6 | 3.87 | -3.41 | 0.001 |
| Mothers     | 15 | 19.6 | 3.89 |       |       |

Table 4 depicts that mean scores for children (M = 87.6, SD = 3.87) reported significantly higher separation than mothers (M = 19.6, SD = 3.89), Z = -3.41, p = 0.001. This means that mothers were less culturally involved than children. In contrast, it was found that Russian adolescents immigrating to the US related less to either culture (Tricket, Perskey & Espino 2019).



**Figure 1:** Graphical representation of mean scores of mothers and their children on Acculturation strategies (N=30).

Figure 1 shows the average scores for all 4 acculturation strategies for mothers and children (N = 30). As shown, the children have higher scores in all but marginalization, showing that mothers are on the whole less culturally involved than their children. Similarly, in a study done on Latinos in the US mental health, the children were more accepting of other cultures than adults in the survey, showing that they had adjusted more (Gamst et al 2002).

## Conclusion

Major findings in this research paper are that on average, mothers were less likely to be more adapted to American culture than their children and that children were more culturally involved than their mothers. This makes a lot of sense, as mothers who grew up in India would have more attachment to Indian culture and less to America, as most of their life had been in India.

This study can be used to see how Indian people respond to their cultural diffusion, as well as new surroundings. Also, this study can be used to help Indians adjust by helping them to see where they can add effort, to be more culturally involved, or more adapted to the new culture, or old culture.

## Limitations

This research paper has some limitations, however, including the sample size, which was 30 respondents. The demographics of the sample may be a limitation as well, as only the mothers were surveyed, instead of both parents. This survey was taken in the Bay Area, so it may not be representative of the Indian American population.

## Acknowledgments

The respondents of the survey deserve recognition for their contribution to the findings of this research paper, including teenage students in the Bay Area, and their mothers. The mentors who helped with the paper itself also deserve thanks. Lastly, my parents and family friends deserve thanks for contributing to the survey and to the paper.

## References

- Budiman, A. (2022, May 24). *Indians in the U.S. fact sheet*. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Retrieved December 31, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/asian-americans-indians-in-the-u-s/>
- Gamst, G., Dana, R. H., Der-Karabetian, A., Aragón, M., Arellano, L. M., & Kramer, T. (2002). Effects of Latino acculturation and ethnic identity on mental health outcomes. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 24(4), 479–504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986302238216>
- Ghaffarian, S. (1998). The acculturation of Iranian immigrants in the United States and the implications for mental health. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 138(5), 645–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224549809600419>
- Graves, T. D. (1967). Acculturation, access, and alcohol in a tri-ethnic community. *American Anthropologist*, 69(3-4), 306–321. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1967.69.3-4.02a00030>
- Graves, T. D. (1967). Acculturation, access, and alcohol in a tri-ethnic community. *American Anthropologist*, 69(3-4), 306–321. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1967.69.3-4.02a00030>
- Mann, S. K., Roberts, L. R., & Montgomery, S. (2017). Conflicting cultural values, gender role attitudes, and acculturation: Exploring the context of reproductive and mental health of Asian-Indian immigrant women in the US. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 38(4), 301–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2017.1283376>
- The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Vol. 1.* Thomas, W.I. and Znaniecki, F. (1918) the Polish peasant in Europe and America. vol. 1. Badger, Boston. - references - scientific research publishing. (1918). Retrieved December 31, 2022, from [https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjt55\)\)/reference/referencespapers.aspx?referenceid=1955875](https://www.scirp.org/(S(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjt55))/reference/referencespapers.aspx?referenceid=1955875)
- Stevens, G. W., Pels, T. V., Vollebergh, W. A., & Crijnen, A. A. (2004). Patterns of psychological acculturation in adult and adolescent Moroccan immigrants living in the Netherlands. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 35(6), 689–704. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022104270111>
- Trickett, E., Persky, I., & Espino, S. R. (2019). Acculturation Research: Proxies as Sources of Concept Obfuscation. *IACCP*.
- UN. (n.d.). *IOM publications platform*. IOM Publications - International Organization for Migration. Retrieved December 31, 2022, from [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf)