



## Cultural Assimilation

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**Cultural assimilation** is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a dominant group or assume the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group. A conceptualization describes cultural assimilation as similar to acculturation while another merely considers the former as one of the latter's phases. Assimilation could also involve the so-called additive acculturation wherein, instead of replacing the ancestral culture, an individual expands their existing cultural repertoire.

### Overview

Cultural assimilation may involve either a quick or a gradual change depending on circumstances of the group. Full assimilation occurs when members of a society become indistinguishable from those of the dominant group.

Whether it is desirable for a given group to assimilate is often disputed by both members of the group and those of the dominant society. Cultural assimilation does not guarantee social likeness. Geographical and other natural barriers between cultures, even if created by the dominant culture, may be culturally different. Cultural assimilation can happen either spontaneously or forcibly (*see forced assimilation*). A culture can spontaneously adopt a different culture. Also, older, richer, or otherwise more dominant cultures can forcibly absorb subordinate cultures.

The term "assimilation" is often used with regard to not only indigenous groups but also immigrants settled in a new land. A new culture and new attitudes toward the origin culture are obtained through contact and communication. Assimilation assumes that a relatively-tenuous culture gets to be united to one unified culture. That process happens by contact and accommodation between each culture. The current definition of assimilation is usually used to refer to immigrants, but in multiculturalism, cultural assimilation can happen all over the world

and within varying social contexts and is not limited to specific areas. For example, a shared language gives people the chance to study and work internationally, without being limited to the same cultural group. People from different countries contribute to diversity and form the "global culture" which means the culture combined by the elements from different countries. That "global culture" can be seen as a part of assimilation, which causes cultures from different areas to affect one another.

## **Indigenous assimilation**

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### **Canada 1800s–1990s: Forced assimilation of Aboriginals**

During the 19th and 20th centuries, and continuing until 1996, when the last residential school was closed, the Canadian government, aided by Christian Churches began a campaign to forcibly assimilate Aboriginals. The government consolidated power over Aboriginal land through treaties and the use of force, eventually isolating most indigenous people to reserves. Marriage practices and spiritual ceremonies were banned, and spiritual leaders were imprisoned. Additionally, the Canadian government instituted an extensive residential school system to assimilate children. Indigenous children were separated from their families and no longer permitted to express their culture at these new schools. They were not allowed to speak their language or practice their own traditions without receiving punishment. There were many cases in which violent or sexual abuse by the Christian church was committed. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded that this effort amounted to cultural genocide. The schools actively worked to alienate children from their cultural roots. Students were prohibited from speaking their native languages, were regularly abused, and were arranged marriages by the government after their graduation. The explicit goal of the Canadian government, through the Catholic and Anglican churches, was to completely assimilate the Aboriginals into European culture and destroy all traces of their native history.

### **Brazil**

In January 2019, newly elected Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro has stripped the indigenous affairs agency FUNAI of the responsibility to identify and demarcate indigenous lands. He argued that those territories have very tiny isolated populations and proposed to integrate them into the larger Brazilian society. According to the Survival International, "Taking responsibility

for indigenous land demarcation away from FUNAI, the Indian affairs department, and giving it to the Agriculture Ministry is virtually a declaration of open warfare against Brazil's tribal peoples."

## **Immigrant assimilation**

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Social scientists rely on four primary benchmarks to assess immigrant assimilation: socioeconomic status, geographic distribution, second language attainment, and intermarriage. William A.V. Clark defines immigrant assimilation in the United States as "a way of understanding the social dynamics of American society and that it is the process that occurs spontaneously and often unintended in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups."

Studies have also noted the positive effects of immigrant assimilation. A study by Bleakley and Chin (2010) found that people who arrived at or before the age of nine from non-English speaking countries tend to speak English as well as those from English speaking countries. Conversely, those who arrived after nine from non- English speaking countries have much lower speaking proficiency and this increases linearly with age at arrival. The study also noted sociocultural impacts such as those with better English skills are less likely to be currently married, more likely to divorce, have fewer children, and have spouses closer to their age. A 2014 study done by Verkuyten found that immigrant children who adapt through integration or assimilation are received more positively by their peers than those who adapt through marginalization or separation.

## **Perspective of dominant culture**

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There has been little to no existing research or evidence that demonstrates whether and how immigrant's mobility gains—assimilating to a dominant country such as language ability, socioeconomic status etc.— causes changes in the perception of those who were born in the dominant country. This essential type of research provides information on how immigrants are accepted into dominant countries. In an article by Ariela Schachter, titled "From "different" to "similar": an experimental approach to understanding assimilation", a survey was taken of white American citizens to view their perception of immigrants who now resided in the United States.<sup>[9]</sup> The survey indicated the whites tolerated immigrants in their home country. White natives are open to having "structural" relation with the immigrants-origin individuals, for instance, friends and neighbors; however, this was with the exception of black immigrants and

natives and undocumented immigrants. However, at the same time, white Americans viewed all non-white Americans, regardless of legal status, as dissimilar.

A similar journal by Jens Hainmueller and Daniel J. Hopkins titled "The Hidden American Immigration Consensus: A Conjoint Analysis of Attitudes toward Immigrants" confirmed similar attitudes towards immigrants.<sup>1</sup> The researchers used an experiment to reach their goal which was to test nine theoretical relevant attributes of hypothetical immigrants. Asking a population-based sample of U.S citizens to decide between pairs of immigrants applying for admission to the United States, the U.S citizen would see an application with information for two immigrants including notes about their education status, country, origin, and other attributes. The results showed Americans viewed educated immigrants in high-status jobs favorably, whereas they view the following groups unfavorably: those who lack plans to work, those who entered without authorization, those who do not speak fluent English and those of Iraqi descent.

### **Adaptation to new country**

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As the number of international students entering the US has increased, so has the number of international students in US colleges and universities. The adaption of these newcomers is important in cross-cultural research. In the study "Cross-Cultural Adaptation of International College Student in the United States" by Yikang Wang, the goal was to examine how the psychological and socio-cultural adaption of international college students varied over time. The survey contained a sample of 169 international students attending a coeducational public university. The two subtypes of adaption: psychological and socio-cultural were examined. Psychological adaption refers to "feelings of well-being or satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions;" while socio-cultural refers to the ability to fit into the new culture. The results show both graduate and undergraduate students showed both the satisfactory and socio-cultural skilled changed over time. Psychological adaption had the most significant change for a student who has resided in the US for at least 24 months while socio-cultural adaption steadily increased over time. It can be concluded that eventually over time, the minority group will shed some of their culture's characteristic when in a new country and incorporate new culture qualities. Also, it was confirmed that the more time spent in a new country would result in becoming more accustomed to the dominate countries aspects of characteristics.

Figure 2 demonstrates as the length of time resided in the United States increase—the dominant country, the life satisfaction and socio-cultural skill increase as well—positive correlation.<sup>[11]</sup>

In a study by Viola Angelini, "Life Satisfaction of Immigrant: Does cultural assimilation matter?", the theory of assimilation as being beneficial is confirmed. The goal of this study was to assess the difference between cultural assimilation and the subjective well-being of immigrants. The journal included a study that examined a "direct measure of assimilation with a host culture and immigrants' subjective well-being."<sup>[13]</sup> Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, it was concluded that there was a positive correlation between cultural assimilation and an immigrant's life's satisfaction/wellbeing even after discarding factors such as employment status, wages, etc. "Life Satisfaction of Immigrant: Does cultural assimilation matter?" also confirms "association with life satisfaction is stronger for established immigrants than for recent ones." It was found that the more immigrants that identified with the German culture and who spoke the fluent national language—dominant country language, the more they reported to be satisfied with their lives. Life satisfaction rates were higher for those who had assimilated to the dominant country than those who had not assimilated since those who did incorporate the dominant language, religion, psychological aspects, etc.

### **Willingness to assimilate and cultural shock**

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One's willingness to assimilate is, surprisingly, not only based solely on their decision to adapt but other factors as well, such as how they're introduced to the dominant country. In the study "Examination of cultural shock, inter-cultural sensitivity and willingness to adopt" by Clare D'Souza, the study uses a diary method to analyze the data collected. The study involved students undergoing a study abroad tour. The results show negative intercultural sensitivity is much greater in participants who experience "culture shock". Those who experience culture shock have emotional expression and responses of hostility, anger, negativity, anxiety frustration, isolation, and regression. Also, for one who has traveled to the country before permanently moving, they would have predetermined beliefs about the culture and their status within the country. The emotional expression for this individual includes excitement, happiness, eagerness, and euphoria. This article addresses each theme, pre-travel, culture shock, negative cultural sensitivity and positive cultural sensitivity, their perception, emotional expression and responses, their gender and the interpretation for the responses.

Similar to Clare D'Souza's journal "Examination of cultural shock, inter-cultural sensitivity and willingness to adapt," another journal titled "International Students from Melbourne Describing Their Cross-Cultural Transitions Experiences: Culture Shock, Social Interaction, and Friendship Development" by Nish Belford focuses on cultural shock.<sup>[16]</sup> Belford

interviewed international students to explore their experience after living and studying in Melbourne, Australia. The data collected were narratives from the students that focused on variables such as "cultural similarity, intercultural communication competence, intercultural friendship, and relational identity to influence their experiences." The names of the students have been changed for privacy purposes. Jules, one of the students, stated "It's just the small things that bother me a lot. For example, if people are just walking on the floor with their shoes and then just lying on the bed with their shoes. It bothers me a lot because that's not part of my culture." Man and Jeremy commented "Like yeah ... I found few things as a culture shock. Like one of my housemates, once like she said I have a step-mother, so in India I was like in India we don't have step-mothers - yes she was Aussie. And I mean this was one of those things. The way people speak was different." Last, Jeremy described his experience as "Yeah, like in Chinese background we normally do not stare at people - when talking to people - so eye contact is quite different and when I walk down the street - like random people say hi, how are you? To me - so which I found it was quite interesting because we Chinese we don't do that, like when you stop someone and if you talk to strangers to China it can be considered that you want something from me - yeah. Yes, it is a completely different experience."<sup>[16]</sup> It is common that international students who come into a new country to study abroad are confronted with "strangeness."<sup>[16]</sup> This exert focuses only on culture shock and does not include the responses from the students about social interaction and friendship development.

## United States

Between 1880 and 1920, the United States took in roughly 24 million immigrants. This increase in immigration can be attributed to many historical changes. The beginning of the 21st century has also marked a massive era of immigration, and sociologists are once again trying to make sense of the impacts that immigration has on society and on the immigrants themselves.

Assimilation had various meanings in American sociology. Henry Pratt Fairchild associates American assimilation with Americanization or the *melting pot* theory. Some scholars also believed that assimilation and acculturation were synonymous. According to a common point of view, assimilation is a "process of interpretation and fusion" from another group or person. That may include memories, behaviors and sentiments. By sharing their experiences and histories, they blend into the common cultural life. A related theory is structural pluralism proposed by American sociologist Milton Gordon. It describes the American situation wherein despite the cultural assimilation of ethnic groups to mainstream American society, they maintained structural separation. Gordon maintained that there is limited integration of the

immigrants into American social institutions such as educational, occupational, political, and social cliques.

The long history of immigration in the established gateways means that the place of immigrants in terms of class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies in the traditional gateways is more structured or established, but on the other hand, the new gateways do not have much immigration history and so the place of immigrants in terms of class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies is less defined, and immigrants may have more influence to define their position. Secondly, the size of new gateways may influence immigrant assimilation. Having a smaller gateway may influence the level of racial segregation among immigrants and native-born people. Thirdly, the difference in institutional arrangements may influence immigrant assimilation. Traditional gateways, unlike new gateways, have many institutions set up to help immigrants such as legal aid, bureaus, social organizations. Finally, Waters and Jimenez have only speculated that those differences may influence immigrant assimilation and the way researchers that should assess immigrant assimilation.

## **Canada**

Canada's multicultural history dates back to its European colonization in the 16th century, when French settlers, British settlers, and indigenous peoples vied for control of the region:

### **1900s–present: Integration**

Canada retains one of the largest immigrant populations in the world. The 2016 census recorded 7.5 million documented immigrants, representing a fifth of the country's total population. Focus has shifted from a rhetoric of cultural assimilation to cultural integration. In contrast to assimilation, integration aims to preserve the roots of a minority society while still allowing for smooth coexistence with the dominant