Migration and Well-being: Beyond the Macrosystem*

Migración y Bienestar: Más allá del Macrosistema

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Abstract. This commentary reviews the contributions of the 6 papers to the emerging focus on migration within community psychology. This collection of articles on migration and community represents a growing interest in the field in immigration issues in general, and a community psychology focus on these issues in particular. The papers span a range of issues raised by migration in a variety of different contexts. The papers reflect principles of community psychology by articulating a perspective on migration and its outcomes within national and global contexts. Taken together, these articles demonstrate the increasing mutual enrichment of immigration and community research. The articles suggest the need to continue to articulate psychological constructs as transactional and contextual across multiple levels of analysis.
Keywords: acculturation, contextual perspective, ecological approach, macrosystem and positive adjustment, migration, psychological wellbeing.

Resumen. Este comentario revisa los seis artículos de este monográfico sobre el emergente enfoque de la psicología comunitaria de las migraciones y en su conjunto, constituyen un ejemplo representativo del interés creciente de esta disciplina. Los artículos abarcan un amplio rango de los tópicos en una importante diversidad de contextos, y muestran cómo los principios de la psicología comunitaria permiten articular una visión de las migraciones y sus resultados, tanto en el ámbito nacional como global. Tomados en su conjunto, muestran el enriquecimiento que las migraciones suponen para la investigación comunitaria y sugieren la necesidad de continuar articulando los constructos psicológicos como transaccionales y contextuales a través de múltiples niveles de análisis.
Palabras clave: aculturación, aproximación ecológica, bienestar psicológico, macrosistema y ajuste positivo, migraciones, perspectiva contextual.

This collection of articles on migration and community represents a growing interest in the field in immigration issues in general, and a community focus on these issues in particular. Taken together, the 6 papers span a wide range of issues raised by migration, and bring a contextual, ecological perspective consistent with community psychology.

The papers are very different from each other in terms of focus of inquiry and populations considered. Four papers address issues of adaptation of migrants, largely on the individual level of analysis. They focus on acculturation, social support, and well being, and depart from a traditional focus in psychological research on migration. The papers address a Liberation Psychology perspective on immigration (Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo), and studies of European immigrants in Italy (Cristini et al), and Muslim immigrants in New Zealand (Stuart & Ward). In addition, Xu & Palmer's paper considers adjustment in a very different migration context – of internal migrants within China. Such diversity in populations studied allows us to consider how cross-cutting concepts play out in different

contexts. Two additional papers (Robinson; Siankam) consider migration from the perspective of sending countries – something rarely done in migration research. Doing so expands our understanding to include a broader range of contexts that impact on adjustment of individuals, and raises new questions about immigration to be asked in future research.

All six papers reflect principles of community psychology in the following ways. First, all take a contextual perspective that understands the impact of the larger environment on behaviors that are frequently seen as matters of individual choice or preference. Second, consistent with an ecological approach, they raise the question of what represents positive adjustment. Rather than viewing adjustment as a universally consistent psychological phenomenon of individual well-being, an ecological perspective suggests that the same behaviors or sources of support may be linked to adjustment in some contexts and maladjustment in others; and "well-being" may be defined differently when viewed from the individual and national perspective. Third, when situations that propel migration in sending countries are considered, a contextual, ecological perspective is further extended beyond understanding the impact of national policies and cultural attitudes to incorporate a global sociopolitical and economic context.

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A Contextual Perspective on Acculturation

A contextual perspective is seen in the 3 articles that address acculturation (Cristini et al., Stuart & Ward; Paloma & Manzano Arrondo). Acculturation, including issues of ethnic and national identity, behavioral cultural participation, and its link to immigrant adaptation represents much of the research done by psychologists on immigration (APA, in press). The traditional approach is to understand acculturation at the individual level of analysis, as reflected in the dominant paradigm developed by Berry and colleagues (Berry, 1997). While all three papers appreciate the contributions of this approach to highlighting that acculturation is a bilinear process, they also criticize it for restricting acculturative options to the four categories suggested by the model. The marginality category is particularly difficult to interpret, since it's not clear what it means for someone to be disengaged from both cultures (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001). While studies that use this approach assume that marginality is associated with anomie and thus negative outcomes, others have raised the possibility that it may represent an alternative way of coping with cultural transitions, such as when immigrants prefer to identify as individuals rather than as members of a cultural group (Bourhis, Moise, Parreault, & Senecal, 1997). Finally, Berry's model assesses the type of acculturation immigrants prefer, rather than the type they adopt. This is a limitation of the model, because while immigrants may prefer particular ways of acculturating, the society within which they are adapting may not give them opportunities to do so.

Consistent with emerging research on contextual views of acculturation, all three articles suggest that acculturation is not just a preference. Stuart & Ward suggest that acculturation is shaped by opportunities presented in the environment, such as support or oppression experienced by acculturating individuals. Paloma & Manzano Arrondo argue that individuals' acculturation is shaped by society's attitudes toward immigrants, particularly discrimination. From the Liberation Psychology perspective that they propose, marginalization, as described in the Berry models is not a choice, but a reaction to discrimination.

Cristini et al, who also argue that discrimination is an important factor that shapes acculturative options, echo this point. In addition, they consider the impact of school support for multiculturalism on psychological adaptation of immigrants. The data presented by Cristini et al support the notion that the environment has an impact on the ways individual immigrants acculturate. First, discrimination was found to be negatively related to national and positively related to ethnic identity. These findings support the notion of "reactive identification" (Portes & Zhou, 1993), that immigrants who are rejected by the dominant culture reject it in turn (Birman & Trickett, 2001). Discrimination

makes it difficult for immigrants to adopt the national identity because they are perceived as foreigners; and embracing their ethnic identity in response can be protective. Further, Cristini et al found that school support for multiculturalism was related to more ethnic identity exploration; thus a school environment factor can support some acculturative options, such as an opportunity for immigrants to explore their connection to their ethnic heritage.

Further, these authors argue that acculturation is more complex than suggested by the four "Berry boxes" (Stuart & Ward). Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo argue that acculturation research needs to understand the development of multicultural identities, not just biculturalism. Similarly, Stuart & Ward extend understanding of a bilinear acculturation process beyond biculturalism. By conducting qualitative, exploratory studies of acculturation experience, they discovered diverse themes in how Muslim youth in New Zealand viewed their acculturation experiences. In particular, they found that these youth stressed the concept of balance, seen as not just "integration" or "biculturalism"; but that they strived for balance among their multiple identities, religious as well as cultural. Increasingly, studies are describing multiple identities of individuals acculturating in diverse and layered contexts, such as identification with Russian, Jewish, and American cultures for Jews from the former Soviet Union (Birman, Persky & Chan, 2010; Persky & Birman, 2005), or Chinese, American, and African American identities among Chinese Americans living in an African American community in the U.S. (Lee et al., 2006). Further, while prior models suggested that biculturalism is one of four acculturative styles, all the young people Stuart & Ward interviewed could be described as bi- or multicultural. However there were important distinctions in whether they approached their cultural and religious identities through alternation, blending, or minimizing difference. These findings affirm the emerging literature on multiculturalism that has described alternation and blending/ fusion as different ways of being "bicultural" (e.g. Birman, 1994; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Further, the "minimizing difference" category of youth who emphasized their individualism may represent a reflection of an alternative to marginality described by Bourhis et al. (1997). These findings stress the importance of research understanding multiple and more complex ways of acculturating and adapting than often described in the literature.

Importantly, these studies stress that receiving societies have a responsibility to be inclusive of immigrants. Stuart & Ward suggest that the notion of balance is not just a construct relevant to the acculturating person, but must be recognized by host societies. Cristini et al stress the importance of reducing discrimination and providing school support to improve immigrants' well-being. Paloma & Manzano Arrondo

argue that acculturation research should consider not only individual level process of behavioral acculturation and identity, but also the impact of oppression and socioeconomic factors.

Well-being as a Contextual, Multi-Level Phenomenon

In addition to understanding acculturation as a phenomenon that involves transactions between individuals and their environment, these articles consider well-being as a contextual phenomenon as well. Cristini et al emphasize the importance of the school context and school support for psychological adjustment. Stuart & Ward in their interview study found that Muslim youth defined success as involving multiple life domains, rather than narrowly defined categories as measured in quantitative studies. From a life domains perspective (Birman, 1998) the same way of acculturating may be adaptive in some contexts, such as at home, and maladaptive in others, such as the school. This suggests a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" view of acculturation as well as social support. For example, Stuart & Ward found in their study that family and ethnic community can be both a source of strength as well as problems; and pressures that are difficult to handle can come from both host and heritage culture settings. Similarly, in a very different context, and contrary to expectations, Xu & Palmer found a *negative* impact of family network size on life satisfaction for a subset of migrants: those of retirement age and traditional younger migrants with low levels of education. While both studies discuss the importance of family support for adjustment, the findings of both also suggest that the family support may have a negative impact on some subsets of populations in some circumstances. In other words, from a contextual perspective, there is no "best" acculturative style or social support network; rather varied personal and social factors can have a positive *and* negative impact on individual well-being, depending on the context (Birman, Trickett, & Buchanan, 2005).

Further, Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo and Siankam both raise the question of whether it is sufficient to consider well-being only at the individual level of analysis. Paloma & Manzano-Arrondo suggest that promoting well-being of immigrants must not focus only on improving their psychological adjustment to unjust institutions. Rather, interventions designed to improve immigrants' well being need to question the status quo and change the oppressive nature of organizations and settings. Thus "well-being" is a construct that can be applied to organizations, and perhaps societies. Siankam suggests that while emigration of doctors from Sub Saharan Africa may be justified in terms of improving their individual well-being, from the perspective of the countries and patients they leave behind

well-being is worsened. These authors suggest that a community perspective on well-being needs to be considered along with a view of individual rights and preferences.

A Contextual Perspective on What Propels Migration

Two of the articles touch on the circumstances in sending countries that propel migration. By doing so, they extend the contextual perspective on immigration beyond the meso and macro levels to a global view of what propels and sustains migration. Both articles consider the extent to which migration involves voluntary decisions on the part of individuals, and to what extent meso, macro, and global factors create conditions under which migration becomes desirable, or individuals are forced into migration.

Both Robinson and Siankam talk about importance of push factors in propelling migration. Robinson describes an interview study of views of trafficking from Moldova – a country from which women are trafficked for the sex trade. In particular, she notes that dissatisfaction with life in Moldova is so great that over 80% of young people in Moldova would emigrate if they could. Similarly, Siankam reports great dissatisfaction with resources available to doctors in SSA including wages, equipment, and government support for the profession. In a different context, Xu & Palmer describe push and pull factors in rural to urban migration in China.

These push factors create moral dilemmas concerning migration. Robinson found Moldovans believed that a combination of "pull" and "push" factors encouraged illegal migration, and that there was a continuum in the extent to which women exercised free choice in becoming involved in the sex trade. Some women were described as being "pulled" by extra income, while others as violently coerced into prostitution. In this situation, Robinson suggests that given the strength of the "push" factors for Moldovans to emigrate, more liberal migration policies may reduce to trafficking, making it unnecessary to turn to illegal schemes for migration.

In a contrasting context, Siankam examines what propels migration of doctors educated in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) to leave for countries abroad such as the U.S.

He also notes economic "push" factors, as well as political instability, and the "pull" of greater economic opportunities in the U.S. Here, however, the emphasis of the analysis is not on the harm that comes to those who migrate, as is the case in most psychological literature on migration, but on the potential harm caused by outmigration to sending countries. Such a perspective views migration as depleting the resources of countries that are most in need of them (Albernethy,

1996). From this perspective, restrictive migration policies that stem the migration tide and the resulting "brain drain" may be preferable. In this way Siankan's discussion raises issues of migration beyond the usual concerns of psychological research with the adjustment of the immigrants themselves.

The discussions in these papers serve as a reminder that decisions to migrate are not just made by individuals who are in search of liberation and well-being. Rather, such decisions are propelled by economic policies. Siankam notes the impact of Structural Adjustment Plans that created requirements of African countries that led to devaluation of their currencies, and in turn "push" and "pull" factors propelling skilled migration. These factors must be understood not only on the "Macro" level of Bronfenbrenner's model, but from a global perspective that is now an increasingly important larger level of analysis. Increasingly we live in a global network where what happens in one country affects what happens in another.

Taken together, these articles demonstrate the increasing mutual enrichment of immigration and community research. Applying a community psychology perspective to immigration issues serves as a conceptual antidote to an over-individualistic perspective of traditional cross-cultural research. The diversity and complexity of immigration in the context of diverse sending and receiving countries helps push theories articulated within community psychology to extend to increasingly varied situations. The articles suggest the need to continue to articulate psychological constructs as transactional and contextual across multiple levels of analysis. In the increasingly global world in which we live such work is conceptually refreshing and expands the horizon of our field.

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