Introducing “Remote Enculturation”: Learning your Heritage Culture from Afar

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Introduction

• International migration is at an all-time high (United Nations, 2013) and families are increasingly transnational. This has implications for enculturation or ‘first culture learning’ (also called cultural socialization) of youth who live outside the country of their cultural heritage, including second generation immigrants, international adoptees, and ‘third culture kids’.

• Traditionally, enculturation occurs in childhood and is facilitated by racial/ethnic socialization efforts of parents and direct interactions in the local community (Berryn, 2014). However, this may not fully capture the range of ways in which today’s youth learn about their heritage culture.

• Can youth become enculturated to their heritage culture from afar via modern globalization mechanisms (e.g., foreign media, skype, brief visits)? We propose a modern form of enculturation – “remote enculturation” – defined by learning aspects of one’s heritage culture via indirect and/or intermittent exposure. Remote enculturation may be facilitated by parents or it may be sought out independently by youth themselves (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Traditional Enculturation</th>
<th>Remote Enculturation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of contact between the encouraging individual and the encouraging agent</td>
<td>Direct, face-to-face</td>
<td>Usually indirect, not face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity of contact between the encouraging individual and the encouraging agent</td>
<td>Frequent, continuous</td>
<td>Can be intermittent or continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of encouraging individual to travel to the country of residence</td>
<td>Near, proximal</td>
<td>Far, remote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Early childhood to adolescence</td>
<td>Early childhood to adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive period in lifespan</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Childhood to young adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triggering events</td>
<td>Childbirth</td>
<td>Migration, onset of ethnic identity search, transition to college, transition to adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Local cultural community</td>
<td>Online, college, in heritage country, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>Observations and interactions with local community, coaching by adults and older generation</td>
<td>Online &amp; mobile phone communication, international ethnic media, artifacts and books, intermittent visits to heritage country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 Comparison of Traditional Enculturation and Remote Enculturation

Remote enculturation:

• Falls within the ‘cultural socialization’ category of ethnic/racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006) though uses new mechanisms (e.g., Knight et al., 1993).

• Is associated with ethnic identity development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006).

• Is parallel to remote acculturation and has implications for youth acculturation (Ferguson, 2013).

A Research Agenda

• Assess the range and frequency of remote enculturation strategies used

• Explore associations between traditional and remote enculturation

• Investigate the impact of remote enculturation on ethnic identity development and acculturation in the country of residence

• Use existing research on traditional enculturation, racial/ethnic socialization, and acculturation (remote and traditional) as a guide

Conclusion

• Remote enculturation brings traditional enculturation theory into better accord with the realities of 21st century transnational families

• Offers an exciting opportunity for researchers in cultural socialization, enculturation, and acculturation to include remote enculturation in their studies

References


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