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# Mixed Marriages' Cultural Adaptation and Spouses' Cultural Identity Based on the Research in Poland

## ABSTRACT

Article presents some research's results on cultural adaptation of mixed marriages in Poland. It uses model of cultural adaptation created by Berry. The results show that the most frequent cultural adaptation strategy among researched mixed marriages couples is integration. However the bicultural identity does not follow the chosen acculturation strategy.

**KEYWORDS:** cultural adaptation, acculturation strategies, cultural identity, mixed marriages

## STRESZCZENIE

*Adaptacja kulturowa małżeństw mieszanych i tożsamość kulturowa małżonków na podstawie badań przeprowadzonych w Polsce*

Artykuł przedstawia wybrane wyniki badań adaptacji kulturowej małżeństw mieszanych w Polsce. Badanie opiera się na modelu adaptacji kulturowej Berry'ego. Najczęściej wybieraną przez badanych strategią akulturacyjną jest integracja. Jednak tożsamość dwukulturowa pojawia się wśród badanych tylko w kilku przypadkach.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: adaptacja kulturowa, strategie akulturacyjne, tożsamość kulturowa, małżeństwa mieszane.

## Introduction

Since 1990 among immigrants<sup>1</sup> there are about 30% of people at the age between 20 and 39 and single people are second in a number of immigrants.<sup>2</sup> Since early 90's in Poland every year about 3000 to 4000 mixed marriages has been married, which is about 1,5 to 2% of all married in Poland every year.<sup>3</sup> It is a tendency that Polish women much oftener than Polish men decide to get marry with a foreigner or a person from the other cultural background.<sup>4</sup>

As we could expect, leaving one's homeland results in plenty of problems, beginning with gaining permission for residence, permission for work in a new country and last but not least dealing with challenges of psychological adaptation and cultural identity.

The aim of my research was to describe a process of cultural adaptation among culturally mixed marriages.<sup>5</sup>

## Theoretical outline

Firstly, I would like to explain the basic concepts: as a foreigner I treat every person, whose country of origin is not Poland, no matter if she/he has Polish citizenship.

Cultural adaptation, called also acculturation is a process of direct, continuous, permanent contact between at least two different cultures, which results in some changes in the cultural or psychological phenomena among the people in contact. We have to distinguish between cultural adaptation as a process and sociocultural and psychological adaptation

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1 Immigrants are people of other than Poland country of origin coming to Poland.

2 Compare: KĘPIŃSKA E., OKÓLSKI M. 2002. *Recent trends in international migration. Poland 2002*, Prace Migracyjne 48, p. 44.

3 Compare: ibidem; RZĄDOWA RADA LUDNOŚCIOWA. 2016. *Sytuacja demograficzna Polski Raport 2014-2015*: <http://bip.stat.gov.pl/organizacja-statystyki-publicznej/rzadowa-rada-ludnosciowa/publikacje-rzadowej-rady-ludnosciowej/> p.103-106 (downloaded: 13.12.2016).

4 RZĄDOWA RADA LUDNOŚCIOWA. 2016. p. 103

5 By culturally mixed marriages I mean that one spouse's country of origin is Poland and the other is not Poland.

that are states, which means that they are relatively stable and can be achieved after some time. Whenever I use a term “adaptation” I mean the state of adaptation, so either sociocultural or psychological adaptation. Whenever I mean acculturation I use a word “cultural adaptation” which means a process.<sup>6</sup>

Sociocultural adaptation as the state is a set of external psychological outcomes that link individuals to their new context, including their ability to deal with daily problems.<sup>7</sup> In my research there are following indicators of sociocultural adaptation: satisfactory family relations, satisfying job, social contacts providing psychological support, possibilities for religious practice, good command of language, which enables everyday communication.

Psychological adaptation is a set of internal outcomes. There are also following indicators of psychological adaptation: clear sense of personal and ethnic identity, good mental health, achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context.<sup>8</sup>

I would like to emphasize that clear ethnic identity is one of the indicators of effective psychological adaptation, so both these constructs are closely related.

Process of acculturation can be easily described in terms of acculturation strategies. As a model<sup>9</sup> chosen for my study it was the one created by Berry,<sup>10</sup> who suggests four strategies, which are based on two dimensions:

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6 vid: TRIMBLE Joseph E. 2003. *Introduction: Social Change and Acculturation*, in *Acculturation. Advances in theory, measurement and applied research*, CHUN Kevin M., BALLS ORGANISTA Pamela, MARIN Gerardo (eds.), Washington: American Psychological Association, p. 5-7

7 vid: BERRY John W. 2003. *Conceptual approaches to acculturation*, in *Acculturation. Advances in theory, measurement and applied research*, CHUN Kevin M., BALLS ORGANISTA Pamela, MARIN Gerardo (eds.), Washington: American Psychological Association, p. 32

8 vid: BERRY John W., SAM David L. 1997. *Acculturation and Adaptation in Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, BERRY John W., SEGALL, Marshall H., KAGITCIBASI Cigdem (eds.), vol. 3: *Social behaviour and applications*, Boston, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Allyn and Bacon, pp. 291-325.

9 There are some models of acculturation, which enable to conceptualize this process and its outcomes. Compare: BOSKI Paweł. 2010. *Psychologia migracji i akulturacji w społeczeństwie wielokulturowym*, in *Drogi i rozdroża. Migracje Polaków w Unii Europejskiej po 1 maja 2004 roku*, GRZYMAŁA-MOSZCZYŃSKA Halina, KWIATKOWSKA Anna, ROSZAK Joanna (eds.). Kraków: Nomos; NAVAS Marisol, GARCIA Maria C., SANCHEZ Juan, ROJAS Antonio J., PUMARES Pablo, FERNANDEZ Juan S. 2005. *Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM): New contributions with regard to the study of acculturation*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29, pp. 22-37.

10 e.g. BERRY John W. 2003. *Conceptual approaches to acculturation*, in *Acculturation. Advances in theory, measurement and applied research*, CHUN Kevin M., BALLS ORGANISTA Pamela, MARIN Gerardo (eds.), Washington: American Psychological Association, pp. 22-25.

cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered important by individuals, and their maintenance strived for) and contact and participation (to what extent should individuals become involved in other cultural groups or remain primarily among themselves). Simultaneous consideration of these two dimensions leads to distinction between four acculturation strategies:

- a. integration – when the individuals both: care for their culture of origin, they aim at cultural maintenance and want also participate in a larger society, so they strive for contact with a larger society
- b. assimilation – when the individuals do not care for the culture of origin, but they want to become a part of a larger society, so they strive for contact and participation in a new culture, but in some sense do not maintain their culture of origin
- c. separation – when the individuals decide to maintain their culture of origin and do not aim at taking part in a larger society, so do not strive for contact and participation
- d. marginalization – when the individuals do not care for their cultural maintenance and do not aim at contact within a larger society, this strategy leads to the maladaptation.

“Ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group”.<sup>11</sup> It is not a fixed categorization but rather flexible and dynamic understanding of self and the one’s ethnic background. It is construed and changed according to the level of awareness that there are differences between various ethnic groups and that these differences play important role within the larger setting. Ethnic identity usually changes over time, it depends on individuals’ age and development. In this paper I concentrate on the changes which occur during the process of acculturation, so the most significant changes for this subject are changes referring to a new cultural surrounding. As a new cultural surrounding for foreigners I mean Poland and living with the Polish spouse and as a new cultural surrounding for Polish I mean living in Poland, but with a foreign spouse. Changes in cultural surroundings are the core of the process of acculturation, so these two concepts: acculturation and ethnic identity are very close to each other, which enables showing their common dimensions. Phinney<sup>12</sup> suggests that both changes in acculturation and ethnic identity can best be conceptualised in terms of at least two dimensions: firstly, maintenance of or identification

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11 PHINNEY Jean, *Ethnic Identity and Acculturation*, in *Acculturation. Advances in theory, measurement and applied research* CHUN Kevin M., BALLS ORGANISTA Pamela, MARIN Gerardo (eds.), Washington: American Psychological Association, p. 63.

12 PHINNEY Jean, *Ethnic Identity and Acculturation*, pp. 63-82.

with the ethnic or original culture and secondly, adaptation to or identification with a dominant, host or new culture. One of the advantages of that categorization is that it enables description of often presented in researches bicultural identity, which is not middle point between an original and host identity, it is rather the result of identification with two cultures. As it is clearly seen, both categorizations: first explaining the acculturating strategy and second referring to ethnic identity are based upon the same two questions: of a relative preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity and a relative preference of having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethno-cultural groups.

Although conceptualisation of both phenomena: acculturation and ethnic identity is based on the same two dimensions they are not the same. Ethnic identity can be thought of as one aspect of acculturation process, distinguished from other constructs by virtue of its focus on one's personal feelings about one's own ethnicity. Two aspects of ethnic identity can be identified: first is the ethnic self-identification or self-label, that people use to identify themselves ethnically, second is the subjective sense that people belong to an ethnic group and their feelings about their group membership. Changes associated with acculturation may differ for each of these components.

Cultural identity has a special role among mixed marriages, because firstly this very significant event that they come from various cultures make them aware of the differences in their sense of identity, secondly, that awareness forces them to think or rethink their ethnic or cultural identity so the matter of maintaining or rejecting the original identity or changing it into bicultural one becomes very important. So it is obvious that changes in ethnic identity during lifetime, especially when acculturation process is experienced, are typical. In that case age at time of immigration and the length of time in the new culture are important markers of acculturation and ethnic identity.

## Method

I decided on qualitative instead quantitative methods. I used specially created questionnaire, which examined following areas: country of origin and its culture, evaluation of country of origin's and Polish cultures, earlier acculturation experience, reasons for visiting Poland, residence in Poland, relations with compatriots, children and their religion, languages they speak, their knowledge of both countries' cultures, idea of marriage and common duties and privileges, real marriage, psychological adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, future plans.

Based on above theoretical outline following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Among the Polish spouses as the most numerous presented acculturation strategy integration is expected. And among spouses of not Polish country of origin as the most numerous presented acculturation strategies integration and assimilation are expected.
2. Among foreign spouses, who chose integration as a dominant strategy, the bicultural ethnicity will follow. Among Polish spouses, who chose integration as a dominant strategy either bicultural or Polish ethnicity will be declared.

Contact and participation in new culture and on the other hand attitude toward the country of origin were the two independently compared indicators of chosen acculturation strategy.

As the indicators of ethnicity self-identification and the attitude toward the ethnicity and the culture it comes from was considered.

From July to November 2002 I interviewed 14 couples, 24 people. I spoke with both spouses, only in 4 cases one of them rejected taking part in my research. One spouse was always Polish and the other were: Russians, German, Chechen, Bulgarians, Romanian, British, Australian, Algerians, Senegalese, Guinean, but both of them lived in Poland.

## Results

As had been anticipated, most of the spouses (16 from 24) chose integration as a dominant acculturation strategy. Among those, who chose integration as a dominant strategy 7 were Polish and for the other 9 Poland was not the country of origin. Among Polish spouses 1 chose separation as a dominant strategy, by the others the dominant strategy was unable to define (they applied different strategies according to the different areas of life). Among foreign spouses 4 other chose assimilation as a dominant strategy. The results of the research confirmed 1 hypothesis.

But only 4 of the spouses, who chose integration as a dominant strategy. were of bicultural identity, so their strength and valence of both ethnicities were very positive and very strong. Three of them were foreigners, they came from Guiana, Great Britain and Algeria, so they also used bicultural self-label and last one was a wife of Guinean, so although her feeling of belonging to Guinean group were very strong and very affectionate she didn't use bicultural label, which I suppose is rather obvious taking into consideration that whole her life she spent in Poland and she has Polish citizenship. But as Phinney claims<sup>13</sup> strength and valence of

13 PHINNEY Jean, *Ethnic Identity and Acculturation*, p. 68.

ethnic identity is its most fundamental aspect. These strong sense of membership in both ethnicities are confirmed by such comments by the Guinean: “I feel Guinean, but I am also Polish.”, “I think we Polish are overconfident”, “I am Polish, who really loves Guiana” or such statements of his wife “Guiana is always present in our daily life”, “I feel very bound to Guiana and I do not feel like a stranger among Guinean, they are like our family”. The British declared also: “Sometimes I feel more like Polish than British”, “I have two homelands now, I am bicultural”. Among these two marriages do not exist any ethnic conflicts. Their senses of ethnic identity are respected and two cultures are present in the process of bringing up their children, so they speak two languages, have name, which is pronounced the same in both language or has completely different name, children know much about both cultures and their customs. Although the wife of the British use Polish identity, there are no conflicts between them, probably because of great tolerance to mutual distinctness.

The Algerian used bicultural label “I am Polish and Algerian, I have two homelands now and I feel very comfortable in each of them”, “I am very toward Poland and Algeria, but for me more important is that I am a Muslim, not Polish or Algerian”. In that case religious identity is much stronger than ethnic one, maybe this is a reason for no conflicts or doubts according to using bicultural ethnic identity. Unfortunately, there are only a few information about his wife’s attitudes toward ethnicity because that couple was separated.

There was one more person, who used bicultural identity, although she chose assimilation as a dominant acculturation strategy, it is the Chechen woman. She emigrated from the Chechnya as soon as she could, she probably left her former husband there. During the research she was married with Polish, and she claimed that Poland were at that time her new homeland, She used Chechen label because of her birth, but for her this label was not so important. She felt very attached to Chechens and sympathized with them, but she preferred to live in Poland for the sake of bad treatment for women in Chechnya, which „was there connected with Muslim culture”, She emphasised, that Poland was also her second homeland. She felt comfortable in Poland, because Polish sympathised with Chechen especially according to Russian-Chechen war. There were no conflicts about ethnicity between her and her man, maybe because he did not care much about the ethnic identity, he concentrated on matter of tolerance. Moreover the Chechen wants her son to be Polish, she wants him to have knowledge and she approves if he wants visit Chechen, but only because of his sex. Chechen culture favours men over women, so she wouldn’t accept her daughter to visit or live in Chechnya.

The other 12 people (6 Polish and 6 foreigners), who chose integration as a dominant acculturation strategy remained using country of origin’s

self-identification, most of them felt very attached to both countries, but closer to their hearts is their countries of origin.

The results of this part of research did not confirm hypothesis number 2.

There was only one marriage, where a conflict about ethnicity exists. It is Russian-Polish marriage. Because of a perceived low approval Polish have for Russians, the man experienced prejudices, so he decided to hide his cultural background and origin. It is possible, because he has Polish sounding surname and perfect command of Polish without any accent. Moreover, because he was not accepted by Polish as a Russian, he treated Polish identity as a threat to his own identity "I am Russian, so I cannot be accepted by Polish, therefore I cannot be Polish, if I lose my Russian identity, I will have no identity at all, that's why it is so precious to me". His feeling of uneasiness increased as his wife forced him to feel here as at home and to be Polish, his resistance grew stronger, so sometimes there are conflicts between them, because Polish wife did not accept that Russia remain his homeland.

Other 11 people, who chose integration as a dominant acculturation strategy do not suffer from any negative emotions connected with it. They respect each other's identities and present open and tolerant attitude toward the spouse, who is of other ethnic identity. Moreover, they try to care for bicultural identity of their children.

Only one more person suffered from maladaptation. One of the Algerians chose assimilation as a dominant acculturation strategy, remaining Algerian ethnic identity. He felt deep sorrow and great nostalgia. Although he is convinced about his strong feelings to Poland, he is much more attached to Algeria, and he is the only one among his family, who presented such an attitude. His wife and children are Polish, not Algerian, which he treats as a kind failure. He is sure, he could do nothing about it, but cannot accept it.

## Discussion

Although the hypothesis 1 was confirmed there is a question why among Polish spouses 4 (out of 11) participants do not chose integration strategy. One chose separation as a dominant strategy. It was impossible to define unambiguously the dominant strategy among 3 of Polish spouses. Few explanations are possible. First, it can be asked whether the acculturation strategy is usually so global as it was presumed. It is possible, that one may use different strategies to different life's area (e.g. religion, pattern of marriages, cultural traditions, cuisine).



1 of Polish spouses chose separation as a dominant strategy. It is possible that despite initial openness for the foreign culture living together may lead to greater consciousness of cultural differences. So after some time one may recognize the values of her country of origin's culture as more significant than she earlier assumed.

Bicultural identity occurs not so often as it might be expected according to popularity of integration as a dominant acculturation strategy, but on the other hand my results are consistent with other researches<sup>14</sup> that show that such an identity usually is common for second not first generation of immigrants. Most of examined couple's children has gained knowledge about both countries' cultures, they are bilingual and try to visit both countries, so it is highly probable, that their developed ethnic identity will be bicultural.

Bicultural identity is not forced or does not result from integration as a dominant acculturation strategy, which does not lead to any tensions or conflict, so the tolerance seems to be the most important issue. Some problems may occur in the future when children will be born. It is possible to maintain country of origin's identity and be well adapted participating in a larger society and not experiencing any serious psychological or social problems.

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