

Advances in Immigrant Family Research  
*Series Editor: Susan S. Chuang*

Deborah J. Johnson  
Susan S. Chuang  
Jenny Glozman *Editors*

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# Re/Formation and Identity

The Intersectionality of Development,  
Culture, and Immigration

 Springer

# **Advances in Immigrant Family Research**

## **Series Editor**

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Deborah J. Johnson • Susan S. Chuang  
Jenny Glozman  
Editors

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*To the countless brave souls, youth and their families, and elders who seek change, betterment, freedom, and resist or are open to new identities to make the impossible possible.*

—Deborah J. Johnson, Susan S. Chuang,  
and Jenny Glozman

*To Lois and Richard Johnson who handed me the universe and chose not to repress my restless, inquisitive spirit; and to my husband Jimmy, who champions and inspires me.*

—Deborah J. Johnson

*To my father, Ching Chu Chuang, who continues to support me, wherever my path may go.*

—Susan S. Chuang

*To my parents, Alex and Marina, for your support and resilience, and to my husband, Jon, for always being there to catch me.*

—Jenny Glozman

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# Chapter 1

## Identity Formation and Re-Formation: Resistance, Growth, and Emerging Pathways for Immigrant Youth and their Families



Deborah J. Johnson, Susan S. Chuang, and Jenny Glzman

Nascent in our conception of immigrant identity are the crucial concepts of resistance and novel pathways. These concepts are integral to a framework focused on the dynamic and nuanced contextual influences, processes, and unacknowledged evolutions of immigrant identity development; particularly among those who must negotiate race, ethnicity, ethno-religion, and color in new ways. Of particular interest are the immigrant youth and families, many who originated in nations with poorer economies or are considered “of color” or “not white” by others within Western cognitive dimensions, and all that this entails in their acculturative process.

We also deeply consider the appropriate applications of ethnic-racial identity theories (e.g., Cross Jr, 1991; Fine, 1994; Phinney, 1996; Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and thus recognize that the experience of immigrant youth and families is not just one of identity formation but one of reformation of previously developed ethnic-racial and cultural identities that make use of knowledge and socialization from both origin and new homelands. *Identity reformation* refers to the numerous and dynamic transactions taking place to inform and reshape identity and self-systems in relation to new information ecologically and culturally generated in relational and community contexts. Is it not reform as in passive “give one’s self over,” but in selective adjustment judged best for managing those contexts and self-systems. We insist that the immigrant or “new shore” experience (Chuang & Moreno, 2008, 2011) is one of resilience, not only adaptation or acculturation to,

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but the development and use of new skills and identity-centered strategies to make sense of novel environments. These processes and pathways allow the formation of meanings not previously existing at the individual or the family level or as a member of the origin society.

As co-editors, our own positionalities shape our interpretive lens, as well as how we have situated and organized the book. Two of us are insiders of the immigrant experience, one first-generation, another as second-generation born of immigrants, and the third an outsider with no recent immigrant experience. The first-generation, immigrated from two countries before settling in Canada. We are African American, Taiwanese Canadian, and European Russian Canadian. Each of us has worked extensively with refugee and immigrant populations in research and public service for the balance of our careers. All of us are developmental psychologists from departments and programs where child development and ecological perspectives are prominent. We clearly view systems as predominant influencers on identity development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1995; Spencer et al., 1997).

It is important to note that in this volume, readers will encounter a range of terms used for origin, immigrant, and second-generation groups to depict national origin, ethnicity/race, transitional identities, and adopted identities (e.g., Latinx, Latino/a, Latine, Mexican American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, African American, Black American, BIPOC, Caribbean American, Nigerian, Asian, Asian American, Asian Indian, Chinese, Taiwanese). We chose not to standardize this language because it is dynamic in nature, and the terms reflect the complexities of cultural communities and the self-determination of those communities. Agreeing on specific terms can sometime reduce the richness of evolving accepted terms and does not approximate agreement. Racial-ethnic terms within the same cultural community may lack correspondence depending on origin, age, and geography (northern, southern, western, eastern, coastal, or mountain regions), even to the level of neighborhoods. Within each generation and between generations, meaning around race, ethnicity, and national origin can shift dramatically or subtly. The collection of terms and how they are employed across chapters captures a critical range of this dynamic process essential to immigrant adjustment and identity construction.

## **Social Historical Context**

The journey of this volume began several years ago under the historical retrograde of immigrant policy of the administration of the 45th President of the United States of America (USA). Despite the numbers that exist, this period has been referred to as the harshest climate for migrants in a generation (Edyburn & Meek, 2021). Anti-immigrant sentiment has long plagued Western society and influenced both assimilation and immigrant identity patterns (Massey & Sanchez, 2010) with its most consequential impact on youth and their families and their respective future trajectories. Each chapter offered in this volume was written amidst the backdrop of

xenophobic hegemony and threats, even terrorism. While this volume landed in a particular moment and historical period, it now emerges in a new era where many of these policies and enactments (travel bans against Muslim nations, threats to Deferred Actions for Children Arrivals (DACA) programs) were rescinded by the Biden administration that followed and within its first 100 days. Despite these advancements, the residual of acculturative processes begun under deep anti-immigrant attitudes linger, and the future immigration climate is uncertain. Public opinion largely supports immigration reform but does not address the specifics of that reform, contributing further to the uncertainty that exists.

While awaiting progress in immigration approaches and improvement in human rights conditions for newcomers, first- and second-generation citizens, this volume's emergence now sits at a powerful crossroads. The immigration experiences and all the identity and acculturative processes associated, shape families and who their youth become, how they adjust and adapt, or not, into the fabric of western receiving nations. These ecological issues represent a juncture in the thinking on identity formation, as well as social and historical contextual influences on immigrant children, youth, and families.

The work presented here underscores ecological, intersectional, developmental, and contextually based growth and transformation influences of immigrant and refugee families from a plethora of homelands. Counter to many assimilationist perspectives (Gordon, 1964; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996), immigrant youth and family processes are multidirectional in the formation and reformation of identity, propelled forward by much of their own agency. Latina/o communities are particularly vulnerable to anti-immigrant sentiment across multiple peaks in Western history. In addition, and more recently during the COVID pandemic, Asian immigrant groups have endured heightened negative reactive sentiment, and even violence. Reported incidences swelled from about 2600 in 2019–2020 to over 3795 incidences (March 2020–February 2021) in the USA. (Jeung et al., 2021).

Moreover, we particularly attended to African diasporic communities to aid in correcting the invisibility within the current literature and the understanding of their unique experiences. Ethno-religious immigrants (i.e., Muslim, Sikh) suffer many of the same vehemence directed at these other groups and are vulnerable like other immigrants of color for their visible markers of identity (clothing, hair coverings, etc.) (Rana et al., 2019). Black immigrants rarely enjoy full societal integration, and their identities are not only shaped by this exclusion, but by the “outsiderness” and rejection that often continues into the next generation (Massey & Sanchez, 2010).

## **Recent Demographic Patterns: Canada and the USA**

Immigration patterns in the USA and Canada have long historical ebbs and flows of open and closed immigration policies and racialized patterns of both exclusion and opportunity. Current patterns underscore exceptionally diverse immigrant



populations in these two nations. For example, immigration patterns globally are among the highest in the USA and Canada. In 2019, an historic high of 44.9 million immigrants resided in the USA (13.7% of the population). American immigrants are among the most diverse nationally and ethnically. The greater portion of these newcomers are Spanish speakers at nearly 61%, the next largest groups speak languages such as Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese and to the surprise of some, African diaspora group languages are well represented, Haitian French Creole, West African Twi/Igbo/Yoruba, and North Afro-Asian speakers of Arabic languages number above 3 million within the USA. Canada welcomes more than 300,000 new immigrants each year. About eight million immigrants with permanent residence were living in Canada in 2019—nearly 21.5% of the total Canadian population, second largest immigrant population in the world (Statista, 2019). Children represent a significant portion of migrants in Canada and the USA.

Refugees are a significant subgroup of immigrants to the USA. In 2019, forced displacement took place less than every two seconds, 79.5 million migrants experienced forced migration, up from 68 million in 2017, many fleeing violence and political assault in their home countries (Albu, UNHCR Global Trends Report, 2019). Children and youth represent 40% of that number, about 30–34 million. The USA admitted 29,916 refugees in 2019, a 34% increase from the 22,500 refugees admitted in 2018 (Baugh, Annual Flow Report: Refugees and Asylees, Sept, 2020), a minute fraction of the roaming migrants of the world.

## Racial and Ethnic Identity

The critical components of our self-systems include identity. The complex transactions between multiple contexts and the individual contribute to their development and adjustment over time. Accordingly, Quintana and Scull (2009) argue that ethnic identity development is a component of the acculturative process among immigrant groups as well. Racial-ethnic identity becomes a prophylactic imperative in American culture against xenophobia and hierarchies of values associated with some identities over others. Not all identities or identity associations are available to all immigrant groups, and the constraints are learned quickly (Quintana & Scull, 2009; Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). The values placed on those identities and their inherent limiting properties become multicultural forces that influence the development and direction of evolving identities. Of importance to the diverse populations in this volume is the explicit focus on support for formation of both heritage and destination-country identities and the ongoing negotiation of these identities within family, national, and community contexts. (Schwartz et al., 2018).

## Acculturation, Assimilation, and Identity

What can researchers learn about the two poles of the acculturation continuum as well as the middle? Berry (1997, 2007) developed one of the most influential and commonly used models, the Bidimensional Acculturation Framework. Berry's models (1997, 2007) put forth a bipolar continuum conceptualized with each end representing one of two extremes, termed marginality and assimilation. The first dimension pertains to the extent to which immigrants adopt the host culture and the second dimension refers to the extent to which they preserve their heritage culture. Marginality, referred to the experience of individuals who maintained strong ties with their heritage culture and rejected the receiving culture. In contrast, assimilation, referred to the experience of individuals who created strong ties with the receiving culture and foreclosed on their heritage culture. It was assumed that assimilation was the ultimate goal leading to optimum adjustment including success outcomes. Within these assimilationist frameworks, the bicultural center of this continuum was not seen as a point of its own, but merely as a transitional state. This focus on the benefits of assimilation was rooted in a strong belief in the superiority of the mainstream host culture over the heritage cultures of most immigrants (Buriel & De Ment, 1997; Buriel et al. 2006).

More recently, researchers have fervently challenged and revised the multidimensionality perspectives of acculturation to reflect the complexities inherent in individuals' change and transformation (Chuang, 2019). For example, Ferguson and Bornstein (2014) proposed the compelling argument that the dynamic, multidimensional, and multipurposed identity is not solely for acculturation (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2014; Ferguson, Bornstein, & Pottinger, 2012). Bolstering these explorations is critical for setting a future course for identity theory and research. As Nguyen and Ferguson (2019) reported, racial, ethnic, and national identities that fused land of origin and receiving cultures, creating a fourth beneficial "hiphop" identity for youth. In this hiphop identity, youth were able to express efficacy and confidence more consistent with global youth culture borrowing from the bravado of African American youth culture wherein hiphop originates. These developments supported self-esteem, neighborhood and school integration, and were noted as a form of resistance in the new setting. This was critical as other identities associated with national origin or cultural origin more often constrained such features of identity (Nguyen & Ferguson, 2019). This work is one example of future formulations and what it may mean to embrace the concept of immigrant identity reformation.

Following resettlement on new shores in Canada and in the USA, immigrant and refugee youth and families often face new challenges and stressors that significantly impact a range of health outcomes. Changes in these and other outcomes may also force reorganization and expansion of their identities with the added potential for new modes and contexts of thriving. While this volume provides research and theoretical perspectives consistently grounded in the literature on immigrant identity and acculturation, most chapters break the boundaries of traditional approaches rooted in segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Zhou, 1993; 2005) and the

narrow confines of bifurcated theories of immigrant identity (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Berry & Sabatier, 2011) and definitions of health adjustment. Rather, many of the chapters presented here consider the multiplicity and fluidity of identity alignment, as well as purpose of identity development and dynamic reformation. From the ecological perspective the notion of place or geographic location as a critical identity anchor provides another mechanism for resistance to reformation. Under some circumstances, researchers have found that family socialization practices are oriented toward retaining strong identity and ties to the place of origin while embracing some necessary adaptations in the new homeland and arresting full assimilation. Several chapters suggest that this approach supports success and positive development. Nevertheless, success may come at the price of increased isolation as integration increases. In one study, Chinese immigrant students were found to do well academically but suffer from mental health challenges derived from stress and isolation (Qin, 2008). Many families understand the unspoken demand of western societies that they assimilate and find ways to make accommodations that often lead to breakdowns in cohesion and intergenerational cultural learning. As parents, Sudanese immigrant refugees emerging adults promoted their children's Americanization, sometimes against values of collectivism, language, and cultural understanding (Johnson et al., 2014; Luster et al., 2009). Oscar Lewis (1959) more than 60 years ago reported similar dilemmas among Mexican American families making sacrifices of their family systems at the cost of hard-won assimilation of their children.

These formulations may be associated with poor acculturation. However, contributors in this volume applying new ideas and formulations argue that it is not poor acculturation. Rather, these are conscious decisions about aligning with a set of values judged to be to those available in the new U.S. home setting. Moreover, collectively, these chapters question and perhaps redefine optimal and healthy acculturation in socially dynamic societies.

## **Learning from the Identity Framework**

This volume intentionally focuses from an inclusive significant place for non-European, non-Western experiences of immigration upon which immigrant identities theories were not conceptualized and developed. While having some validity, more conventional theories clearly are not sufficiently flexible to encompass the full range of experiences among immigrant youth and families to illuminate their identity, socialization, and acculturation processes.

To date, several critical issues have been understated or overlooked in the literature. What has not been captured previously are: (1) standing ground in identity as a strength, (2) iterative identity processes, remaking of individuals from the culture of origin, (3) reformation is adaptation and not only accommodation as previously

implied in the literature, (4) exploring the factors that fit, are maintained, and developed into new identity streams for adjustment and resilience, (5) moving beyond unidirectional identity reformation process to transactional process and is a continuous adaptive process (identity formation and reformation), (6) understanding how misidentification fits into immigrant identity experience, and (7) the narrow and repressive orientation of assimilationist orientations that impact the theoretical considerations in the field. It is necessary to reclaim the concept of reformation as action prompted by personal or family agency. Many of the volume's chapters move in these directions, interweaving acts or orientations of resistance and resilience that are necessary to succeed in adjustment.

## The Organization and Content of this Volume

In this volume, we explore identity as it is shaped and reshaped by “new shore” experiences. The chapters address the demands on youth and their families, ecological and inter/intra-identity and acculturative processes, as well the pathways to positive development. There are five segments in this volume that provide a deep exploration into identity reformation among immigrant groups. While we address the common experiences of identity development among immigrant groups as a whole, we also elevate the experiences that vary among these populations.

Each section shares multiple cultural viewpoints on both unique and similar experiences. We begin where the current theory exists, in Part A: *Acculturation, Multidimensional Identity, and Family Socialization Processes*, where the critical connections among these concepts are advanced. Part B: *Language, Language Role Identity, and Literacy* underscores that for most groups, language is a key identity element and one upon which acculturation rests. From an ecological perspective, place is an important context of identity formation and also can form the basis for resistance to traditional notions of the “model” or “good” immigrant. Thus, Part C: *Transnational Place and Identity: Resistant Re/Formation* addresses these ideas. The functional purpose that identity and adjustment serve for immigrant families and their children are discussed in Part D: *Identity as a Protective Factor: Coping with Depression, Distress, and Adjustment Stress*. These chapters explore whether identity is protective for these groups. The final section, Part E: *Positive Youth and Emerging Adult Development*, delves further into the complexities of harnessing identity for positive development across a variety of national settings. Though organized into clear segments, many of our chapters have content that speaks to other segments of the book. Thus, this book should be taken as an elegant dinner served in courses, each course can be savored on its own, while the full course is to be relished for all its notes and flavors.

## **Acculturation, Multidimensional Identity, and Family Socialization Processes**

The interconnections among acculturative, socialization, and identity formation processes are underscored in the diverse immigrant experiences of youth, emerging adults and their families in this opening collection of the volume. Single pathways or even dual pathways are shown to be antiquated understandings of the experiences and identity transformations occurring within contemporary immigrant families. Here, we are able to address many of the ecological factors central to immigrant identity development.

While there can be stressful or even negative forces that produce such development, researchers have found that family closeness and love are pathways leading to positive strengths and outcomes among first- and second-generation offspring. Focusing on families, South Asian youth develop their identities within the context of strong family socialization experiences and practices. Subramaniam and Carolan (Chap. 3) demonstrate the complex interplay of the rapid acculturation of grandchildren and the steadfast cultural anchoring of their immigrant Indian grandparents. Though cultural imperatives and demands of grandparents appear unidirectional, there is evidence that reformation, identity shifts, and accommodations take place among all generations of the family system. Katsiaficus and Chung (Chap. 5) expound on the critical nature of families' socialization, obligation, and identity shaping function. Among the Latinx youth in this study, the mutual obligation and identity using the hyphenated framework are discussed. Mutually supportive obligations provided youth with new opportunities to contribute to family transactions that round out their cultural and personal identities.

Understanding and accepting obligations are a harmonious aspect of how families shape identity. Kalia, Aggarwal, and Raval (Chap. 6) describe a range of processes influencing identity development and experiences. Where South Asian emerging adults saw conflict between the two cultures through the lens of their families seems to challenge their academic and well-being outcomes. The ability to find bicultural harmony and the absence of perceptions of conflict allowed for the balance or melding and led to greater adjustment. All occurred in a dynamic reformation of identity that required not only an integration of family processes but socio-cultural processes.

Glozman and Chuang (Chap. 2) and Yoon, Johnson, Qin, and Bates (Chap. 4) both address the inadequacy of uni- or bidimensional theory to explain the complex, contextually influenced, dynamic and responsive nature of Sudanese refugee and Russian-Jewish immigrant identity formations. Yoon et al. (Chap. 4) demonstrate that emerging identity dimensions of South Sudanese refugee young adults form out of necessity where identification and misidentifications derive from contextually based social cognitions of identity. To a South Sudanese refugee, "African" as an identity is a new dimension of identity born of the lack of knowledge among others of national origins on the continent and as such it become functional to make meaning of this externally driven identity. "Sudanese American" is the term used to

describe adaptation for both bicultural identity meaning and hybrid identity concepts. The chapter goes beyond segmented theories of assimilation and following tridimensional acculturation theory adopts a quad-dimensional perspective on African diaspora immigrant identity theory.

In Glozman and Chuang's (Chap. 2) study on Russian-Speaking immigrant youth, Whiteness, and the appearance of Whiteness afford choices that are typically unavailable to other immigrant groups. Identity expression and revealing identity were determined by critical factors interwoven with religion, and the desire to avoid prejudice and bias. Some decisions were influenced by factors centered around enhancing belongingness. Still, these factors are not addressed in formulations less considerate of diversity among immigrant acculturative and identity experiences. In a later segment on space and place, similar issues among Israeli and Jewish identified groups are refined even more. As Gold (Chap. 11) revealed, among immigrant subgroups some maintain identities strongly tied to national or cultural origins while taking full advantage of educational and economic opportunities available on U.S. shores.

## **Language, Language Role Identity, and Literacy**

Among immigrant families, language, language usage, as well as the language role identities of children and youth are among key factors associated with adjustment and well-being. Yet language and literacy are intimately intertwined with evolving immigrant and ethnic-racial/cultural identity. What are the family and contextual dynamics of these identity formations? For youth with the responsibility of navigating language as a family broker across a range of contexts brokering is adultifying. The role is embedded in the family dynamic contributing to identity formation or added to identity as part of a reformation process. Simultaneously burden, family obligation and competency contributes to a sense of efficacy (Chen et al., 2020).

Investigating how youth develop and embrace language brokering as part of their identities and responsibilities, Sim, Kim, Velez, Shen, and Shang (Chap. 8) address parenting practices and parent socialization as influences on the formation of their early adolescents' language broker identities among Mexican origin youth. Parent identity reformations are also prominent in the shifts and outcomes of children's identity roles.

Two qualitative studies explore the use of language in the personal narrative of the immigrant journey. Language fuels the formation of, brings meaning to, and further shapes identity during adjustment. Quintana, Benjamin, and Turan (Chap. 7) apply a cluster analysis approach to describe the power of journey narratives among immigrant youth. Family socialization and cohesiveness are among the themes that contribute to the four typologies of the journey narratives. Quintana et al. (Chap. 7) critically point out that the narratives that immigrant identities and journey are not monolithic and do not reside in a single theoretical home. Thelamour (Chap. 9) addresses yet another aspect of language and identity among immigrants of