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Incorporating Immigrants: Integrating Theoretical Frameworks of Adaptation

Judith Treas

Objectives. To encourage research on immigrants and aging by analyzing theoretical commonalities in the two fields and identifying potential contributions of aging theories, specifically to the understanding of neglected age differences in the pace of immigrant incorporation.

Methods. Survey of the historical development of assimilation theory and its successors and systematic comparison of key concepts in aging and immigrant incorporation theories.

Results. Studies of immigrants, as well as of the life course, trace their origins to the Chicago School at the turn of the 20th century. Today, both theoretical perspectives emphasize adaptation as a time-dependent, multidimensional, nonlinear, and multidirectional process. Immigrant incorporation theories have not fully engaged with a key concern of aging theory—why there are age differences. Insights from cognitive aging and developmental biology, life-span developmental psychology, and age stratification and the life course suggest explanations for age differences in the speed of immigrant incorporation.

Discussion. Theories of adaptation to aging and theories of immigrant incorporation developed so independently that they neglected the subject they have in common, namely, older immigrants. Because they address similar conceptual problems and share key assumptions, a productive dialogue between two vibrant fields is long overdue.

Key Words: Assimilation theory—Immigrants—Life course—Time dependence—Generations.

IN 1965, legislative reforms ushered in a new era of U.S. immigration. Unprecedented numbers moved to the United States, setting the stage for changes in sending and receiving countries and communities. America was propelled toward a "minority–majority" population no longer dominated by non-Hispanic whites (Treas & Carreon, 2010). Immigrants built lives and many grew old here. Concerns with newcomers' assimilation (Borjas, 1999; Huntington, 2004) focused research on working-age immigrants and their children to the neglect of older adults. Immigrant incorporation research has not fully assimilated a key principle: the study of changes in human lives must address all ages from birth to death (Mayer, 2009).

Research on immigrants has tended to overlook older adults. Older immigrants have fared scarcely better in research on aging. Because heterogeneity is a hallmark of old age (Dannefer, 2003), our research privileges differences over similarities (Settersten, 2005) to focus on what sets a racial/ethnic group apart (Mutchler & Burr, 2011). While interested in ethnic distinctiveness and cultural competence, researchers on aging have been slow to consider the implications of legal status (citizens, naturalized or not, and residents, authorized or not) within and between racial/ethnic groups. Although immigration affects population aging (Keely, 2009), theorizing on the implications of demographic trends for, say, intergenerational relations emphasizes fertility and mortality, not immigration (Settersten, 2007; Treas & Gubernskaya, 2012).

The limited attention to aging in the study of immigrants and to immigrants in the study of aging is puzzling given the origins of the two fields. The roots of immigrant studies date to the Chicago School of Sociology in the early 20th century. Classic assimilation theory addressed the experience of European ethnic groups in an earlier great wave of immigration. Some tenets of assimilation theory stood the test of time (Alba & Nee, 1999), but the assumption of total assimilation was faulted for its ethnocentric and functionalist bias. Recently, empirical contradictions—such as declines sometimes observed in social standing across immigrant generations—prompted major theoretical revisions (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1997).

An enduring contribution from the earlier era of immigration was *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas and Znaniecki's (1918) pioneering life history study of immigrant adaptation. The book informed thinking about prior experience coloring personal lives and individual adjustment being embedded in family and community. The scholarly foundation for research on immigrants, *The Polish Peasant* was also the progenitor of longitudinal life course research (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Weyman, 2004). By the end of the 20th century, the intellectual descendants of *The Polish Peasant*—immigrant incorporation theory and the life course perspective on aging—fostered vibrant fields of investigation. Developing independently, they shared approaches and concerns.

This paper considers immigrant incorporation theories with reference to concepts and propositions relevant to aging. Others have taken important steps in this direction, including Rumbaut (2004) who unpacks the concept of immigrant generation, McDonald (2011) who surveys

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social gerontology theories as applied to immigration, Jasso (2004) who points to life course themes in migration research, Torres-Gil and Treas (2008–2009) who propose a macrolevel conceptual framework linking population aging and immigration, and Schunck (2011) who tests novel life course hypotheses predicting immigrants' transnational involvement. This paper identifies similarities between theories of immigrant incorporation and theories of aging, while emphasizing opportunities for theorizing age differences in the pace of immigrant incorporation.

Theories of Immigrant Adaptation

What characterizes theories of immigrant adaptation? What do they have in common with theories of aging? With its revisions, amendments, and theoretical successors, assimilation theory provides leverage on these questions. While its status as a formal theory is contested (Mayer, 2009), the life course conceptual framework illustrates relevant thinking on aging. Although I discuss other theoretical perspectives, the life course formulation shares intellectual origins with the formative theory of immigrant incorporation known as assimilation theory.

Elder and colleagues (2003) summarize five tenets of the life course perspective. First, human development is a temporal process that occurs over the long term with early experiences shaping later outcomes. Second, the course of lives reflects personal agency and the decisions that individuals make. Third, the broader context influences how lives play out, because individual experience is shaped by social structure and cultural understandings that differ across social environments and historical periods. Fourth, experiences have different consequences depending on their timing in the life course. Fifth, because lives are linked by social relationships, individual lives are influenced by the experiences of others. Treas and Gubernskaya (in press) offer a fuller treatment of the implications of the life course perspective for immigration studies. Here, I examine the points of correspondence between the research traditions on immigrant adaptation and aging.

Foremost among the commonalities is the fact that aging and immigrant adaptation are both *time-dependent* processes. The process of incorporation can be stated as a proposition: the longer the time spent in the receiving society, the greater the assimilation. Formulated to explain an ethnic group's progress over consecutive immigrant generations, this proposition from classic assimilation theory is often applied to individuals and receives support. Longer residence has been linked to greater English-language fluency (Stevens, 1992), less parental co-residence with grown children (Glick & Van Hook, 2002), greater health care service usage (Akresh, 2009), and higher rates of obesity (Singh, Siahpush, Hiatt, & Timsina, 2011). The many realms in which immigrant incorporation occurs demonstrate that change is *multidimensional*.

This multidimensionality is fundamental to the conceptualization of immigrant experience. Adaptation has been described in terms of both "acculturation" (taking up the culture of the dominant group) and "assimilation" (achieving equal footing in the host society's primary groups and social institutions). Taken together, these processes are often called "incorporation," a less value-freighted term that does not enshrine the annihilation of all ethnic differences as the end goal. Gordon (1964) identified seven dimensions of assimilation although none gained the prominence of the acculturation and assimilation facets. In psychology, Berry (1997) emphasized the level of analysis, distinguishing collective "acculturation," the outcome of group interaction, from psychological acculturation arising from individual experience. As with aging (Alwin, 2012), the lack of consensus on terminology and concepts can be problematic (Barkan, 1995; Berry, 1997; Rumbaut, 2011). For our purposes, the terms matter less than the general concept—immigrant adaptation in response to living in the receiving society.

Immigrants incorporate when they gain English fluency, move to a neighborhood not dominated by co-ethnics, earn incomes comparable to U.S.-born counterparts, see themselves as American, or adopt the health behaviors of U.S. natives. Telles and Ortiz (2009), Chavez (1994), and Jiménez (2008) describe various aspects of the incorporation of Mexicans, America's largest immigrant group. While distinct, the dimensions are not independent. English language fluency is positively associated with other indicators of incorporation, including homeownership (Myers & Lee, 1998) as well as U.S. citizenship and schooling (Espenshade & Fu, 1997).

The multidimensional nature of immigrant incorporation is the foundation for one challenge to the generalization that incorporation increases with time. "Selective acculturation" acknowledges that immigrants accept some aspects of the host culture but reject others (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Recognizing that immigrants pick and choose conveys a less mechanistic, more multidimensional, view of immigrant incorporation than did assimilation theory. Selective acculturation acknowledges human agency beyond the initial decision to move.

The multiple dimensions of time-dependent processes invite theorizing about their sequence and articulation (Elder et al., 2003). Gordon (1964) posited that "acculturation" was a necessary precursor to "structural assimilation" into the majority's primary groups and, hence, to accommodation along other dimensions (e.g., "identificational assimilation," the subjective sense of belonging). Barkan (1995) argues that "(a)ssimilation is the end result of a multistep process that includes overlapping phases of contact, acculturation, adaptation, accommodation, and integration." Just as stage theories offered simplistic, heuristic models for human development (Kohli & Meyer, 1986; O'Rand & Krecker, 1990; Schaie, 1977–1978), stage models theorize a uniform sequence of progressive incorporation.

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Incorporation Trajectories

Assimilation theory and reactions to it have shaped expectations for immigrant adjustment (Alba & Nee, 1999). Assimilation theory continues to be an influential empirical generalization, even as the structural conditions that supported it (e.g., the racial match between immigrants and natives, the expansionary economy promoting upward mobility) fade into history. In recent decades, its assumptions have been challenged; many of its tenets rejected (Alba & Nee, 1999; Brubaker, 2001). Not questioning the desirability of assimilation, assimilation theory's enthusiasm for the extinction of ethnic differences led to charges of ethnocentrism (Rumbaut, 1997). Similarly, early aging theories assumed the decline of older individuals benefitted humankind. Adaptive senescence posited a genetic program purging the species of unproductive older organisms (Austad, 2009). Disengagement theory justified the replacement of the old by the young (Cumming & Henry, 1961). Pioneering aging theories now seem uncomfortably compatible not only with structural functionalism's defense of the status quo, but also with ageist ideologies supporting mandatory retirement.

The trajectory that adaptation follows is highly contested. In the Chicago School's study of European immigrant groups (Park & Burgess, 1921), "assimilation theory" described a time-dependent, monotonic process of growing assimilation. Incorporation was *unidirectional* and, in its strongest version, *linear* (Figure 1). This "straight-line assimilation" implies an end of ethnic loyalties across successive immigrant generations (Warner & Srole, 1945). Because most new information about the host society is acquired early on, a more reasonable model might trace a rising curve of rapid acculturation flattening out later in the life course. Applied to group experience, the "bumpy-line approach" assumes adaptation by fits and starts (Gans, 1992; Figure 2).

Aging perspectives anticipate observed deviations from linearity. "Reactive ethnicity" points to the resurgence of ethnic loyalties among young adults (Rumbaut, 2008). More marginalized by race than earlier European immigrants, less committed to a way of life than their seniors (Ryder, 1965), they reject incorporation. As a historically situated, self-conscious generation (Mannheim, 1997 [1952]), they reassert ethnic identity. Ethnicity is especially salient at some points in the life course. Americanized immigrants invoke native language and ethnic customs to transmit a sense of heritage to their children (Umana-Taylor & Bamaca, 2004). Old age may prompt immigrants' reengagement with ethnic communities (Tiamzon, 2013). Nonlinearities in incorporation experiences parallel age-related transitions, turning points (Rutter, 1996), and counter-transitions (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985).

Not only do contemporary theories take nonlinearity for granted, but they also allow for *multidirectionality*. "Segmented assimilation" assumes different ethnic groups have different trajectories (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Some see

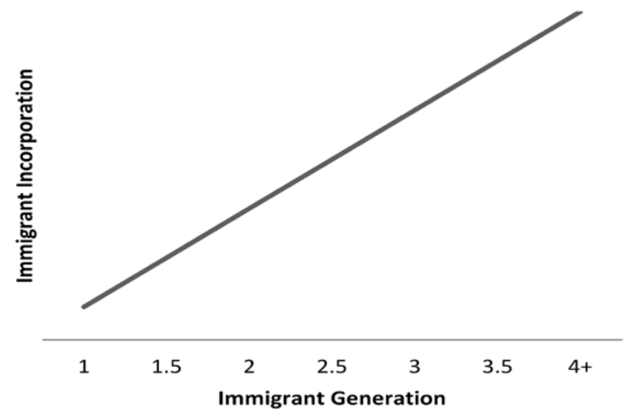

Figure 1. "Straight-line" assimilation.

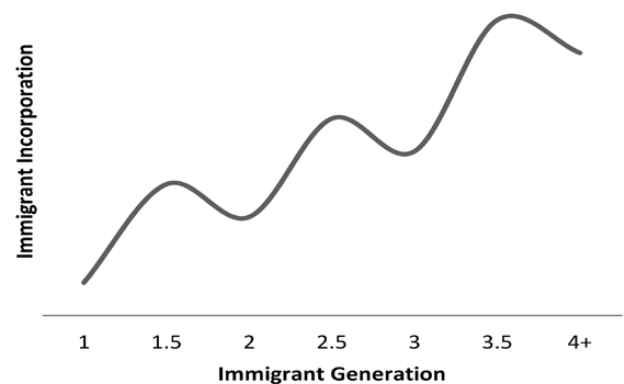

Figure 2. "Bumpy-line" assimilation.

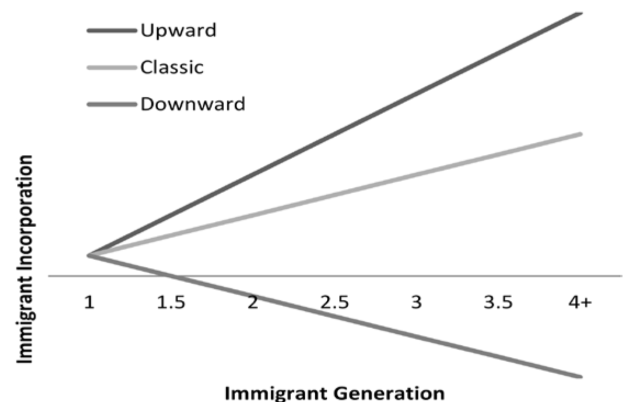

Figure 3. Segmented assimilation.

their social standing rise as assimilation theory would predict. Other immigrant groups experience downward mobility, perhaps incorporating into an American underclass (Figure 3).

Based on European immigrants, assimilation theory assumed all groups start at the bottom, working their way up the socioeconomic ladder. Some contemporary immigrants, including many Asians, start at the top. Children are more likely to go to college if their immigrant parents have higher socioeconomic

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status and come from the educationally advantaged in the sending country (Feliciano, 2005). Structural assimilation is not always upward. Acculturation is not universally beneficial. Immigrants and their children are more likely to attend college than later immigrant generations, whose parents hold lower aspirations for offspring (Glick & White, 2004).

Abandoning the assumption that assimilation is monotonic and unidirectional, contemporary theories acknowledge that sociohistorical context shapes the trajectory. Consider the legal provisions and public opinion that shape the historical "context of reception" (Van Hook, Brown, & Bean, 2006), which may be more or less welcoming and facilitating of immigrants' assimilation. The contextual reality of historical period is captured in quantitative analyses by the "double cohort method," which traces the differing life course incorporation trajectories as specific birth cohorts age within immigration cohorts defined by a common historical period of arrival (Myer & Lee, 1998). The reception varies by race/ethnicity, nativity, and legal status. Hostile receptions for some groups reflect the nature of their immigration. According to Blalock's (1967) classic theory of minority relations, larger groups experience greater hostility, because the majority sees them as threatening. Because continuous migration replenishes the stock of unincorporated newcomers, their visibility encourages discrimination even against native-born descendents (Jiménez, 2008). Particularities of context cast doubt on the broad generalization of linear assimilation.

Summarizing the multilevel, multidimensional, and time-dependent foundation of these two fields, their commonalities set the stage for a closer examination of the role of time and generation in immigrant incorporation (Table 1).

What Time Measures

In any time-dependent process, the theoretical challenge is to specify what time measures. For aging, answers range from ontogenic accounts of intrinsic changes with age to sociogenic explanations of structural forces channeling lives. In assimilation theory, immigrant exposure to the dominant society captures the time-dependent process. Exposure is consistent with Allport's (1954) "contact hypothesis" for race relations, which anticipates reduced social distance the more that the majority and minority interact. Immigrant exposure harkens back to Mannheim's (1997 [1952]) concept of "fresh contact," whereby members of each historical generation meet their culture anew. Mannheim observed that fresh contact also characterized immigrants who left one group to join another. Evidence supports the exposure thesis. For example, proficiency with the majority language depends on contact with native speakers (Vervoorta, Dagevosa, & Flap, 2012).

In aging research, chronological age, the measure of temporal duration in individual lives, is inadequate as a metered "cause" of change (Baars, 2009; Baltes, 1987). Rather, chronological age serves as a stand-in for specific age-related processes (e.g., occupying particular social roles, experiencing changes in health). Having similar drawbacks for gauging contact, duration of residence in the host society is a useful heuristic, a convenient theory-building placeholder for specific incorporation processes, such as identification or intermarriage.

As a measure, duration of residence leaves much to be desired. Chronological age starts from birth. Duration of residence dates from immigration (time of arrival). Immigration is more ambiguous than birth. Because the foreign-born often come and go several times before permanently immigrating, the Census Bureau year of arrival question—used to derive duration—is problematic (Redstone & Massey, 2004). Circular migration reflects historical contingency (e.g., stricter U.S. border enforcement has "locked in" unauthorized immigrants). Furthermore, acculturation predates arrival. Media and transnational networks introduce American culture long before immigrants leave home

Table 1. Comparing Theoretical Assumptions of Immigrant Incorporation and Aging

	Immigrant incorporation theories	Aging theories
Time dependence	Duration of residence	Age
	Sociohistorical time	Sociohistorical time
Direction of change	Unidirectional→multidirectional	Unidirectional→multidirectional
	Linear→nonlinear	Nonlinear
Level of analysis	Micro, meso, macro interactions	Micro, meso, macro interactions
Outcome	Multidimensional	Multidimensional
	Assimilation	Social
	Acculturation	Economic
		Psychological
		Physical
		Biological
Mechanism of change	Contact	Ontogenic (internal)
		Normal aging
		Sociogenic (external)
		Age stratification
Primary change unit	Generation	Individual

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(Kim, 2008; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). Thus, time in the United States may understate incorporation. On the other hand, families, ethnic neighborhoods, and economic enclaves—important supports in immigrant adaptation—can insulate from the influences of the host society; thus, duration of residence may overstate incorporation (Logan, Alba, & Zhang, 2002; Wilson & Portes, 1980). Certainly, the precarious legal status of unauthorized immigrants discourages "contact," however long they reside in the United States.

Subject to historical influences, residential duration as a proxy for incorporation may become a textbook example of history as a threat to measurement validity. Immigration once meant a virtual end to meaningful contact with a homeland. If "knifing off" of prior experience and social ties encourages changes in criminal identity and delinquent behavior (Sampson & Laub, 2005), knifing off may similarly compel immigrant incorporation. Given globalization (market integration, cheap airfare, communication advances), immigrants today not only arrive with greater familiarity with the host society, but also avoid sharp breaks with their origins. Immigrants lead dual lives, maintaining close, continuing connections to a homeland (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Waters & Levitt, 2002). Meanwhile, ongoing immigration refreshes immigrant communities as newcomers bring ethnic culture with them (Jiménez, 2008). Placing duration-of-residence in the context of historical time suggests the association of duration of residence and incorporation may be weaker today than in the past.

The Life Course Timing of Immigration

A younger age at migration translates into greater incorporation. This does not just result from a longer period "at risk" of incorporation. Although arriving in childhood means more acculturating years of residence ahead than arriving in late adulthood, the timing of experiences in the life course is consequential for later outcomes. Early arrival portends life course experiences more akin to those of the native-born population. This insight is born out in research on age-at-arrival differences in incorporation.

Noting that immigrants who come as children adapt more quickly than their older siblings, Rumbaut (2004) coined the term, "the 1.5 generation," to describe child immigrants set on a course of rapid incorporation. They come to be more incorporated than other first generation immigrants, but less incorporated than second-generation offspring born in the United States. At the other end of the life course is what I have called "the 0.5 generation," late-life immigrants whose incorporation lags behind that of both their children and older adults who migrated at younger ages (Treas & Gubernskaya, in press). Mexican immigrants cast doubt on the notion that age or "generation" groupings best characterize the age-at-arrival gradient in outcomes (Myers, Gao, & Emeka, 2009). Given the multidimensionality of incorporation, continuous measures of exact arrival age outperform categorical measures for some outcomes. Calculated from immigration year, age at arrival shares many measurement limitations described for duration of residence.

A typology of generational dissonance versus consonance acknowledges age differences in the speed of acculturation (i.e., dissonance) (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The disparate pace of incorporation is framed as only one of several possibilities, including identical trajectories where parents and children reject acculturation, acculturate at the same pace, or agree on acculturating selectively. The rapid incorporation of the young and slower adaptation of the old is not just a developmental imperative. The pace of assimilation is shaped by the particularities of time, place, and origin group. Ethnic family and community may reduce the generation gap in acculturation, largely by slowing acculturation of the young, say, by limiting exposure to the host society. Illustrating a range of outcomes, these ideal types do not explain generalized age differences in the pace of acculturation. There is no comprehensive theory of age variation in the pace of assimilation over the life course.

Theories of immigrant adaptation explain why some immigrants incorporate faster than others, but explanations focus on differences between ethnic groups and over historical time. Predicting that better educated immigrants incorporate faster, human capital theory explains the rapid success of high-skill migrants (South Indians) and the slower gains of low-skill migrants (Mexicans). Segmented assimilation and selective acculturation suggest why particular groups assimilate more quickly, but theories engage only tentatively with the puzzle of why the young assimilate more quickly than the old.

What is a Generation?

Generation is variously defined and inconsistently applied in research on aging (Kertzer, 1983). In immigrant studies, individuals are assigned to 2nd, 3rd, and higher generation groupings anchored not temporally by birth year or year of immigration, but rather by family genealogy. Membership in a macrosocial "immigrant generation" is defined by membership in the microsocial "generation" of family lineage. Following assimilation theory, the incorporation of first generation immigrants is a function of their exposure to the host society. For 2nd and higher generation descendants, exposure to the ethnic roots, not to the host society, is taken as problematic. Incorporation of later immigrant generations is gauged by distance in a family lineage from immigrant forebearers and, hence, ethnic culture.

Immigrants, their children and grandchildren identify their place in the generational counting schema, but its salience is not assured. Mannheim (1997 [1952]) reminds us that "actual generations" share a unique social and historical location from which they fashion interpretive principles

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for understanding their circumstances. Due to the 1924 law cutting off Japanese immigration, coupled with World War II internment, Japanese–American generations (*Issei*, *Nisei*, *Sansei*, and *Yonsei*) were meaningful group identities in Mannheim's sense (Spickard, 2009). Because their immigrant generations lined up with historical periods, the generation schema was useful for European immigrants whose incorporation early in the 20th century inspired classical assimilation theory.

Today, in groups with long and continuous immigration histories (e.g., Mexicans), the second immigrant generation encompasses everyone from babies to older adults. Still widely embraced, the usefulness of the immigrant generation concept is limited by developmental differences and diverse historical experiences, that is, by within-group heterogeneity. Generation continues to have salience within families, but offers a limited understanding of incorporation at the group level.

By and large, immigrant generations today are not Ryder's (1965) cohorts defined by birth year. Exposed to different historical circumstances, they are not Mannheim's (1997 [1952]) self-conscious "actual generations" forged of common experience (Bengtson & Cutler, 1976). Immigrant generations may differ in their proximity to an ethnic heritage. But, the content of that heritage depends on the historical epoch of their progenitors' immigration. Furthermore, the transnational character of contemporary life means that higher-order immigrant generations today are not nearly as cut off from the ethnic culture of a homeland as in earlier eras.

Incorporation for immigrant generations probably owes more to microlevel intergenerational family interactions than to contacts between collective generations. Immigrant children living with non-English-speaking grandparents, for example, are more likely than other children to retain a mother tongue (Ishizawa, 2004). Grandparents also transmit ethnic culture, religious values, and family history to younger generations (Treas & Mazumdar, 2004). The life course perspective anticipates this importance of intimately linked lives (Elder et al., 2003).

Learning From Aging Theories

Three broad literatures illustrate the promise of aging theory to contribute to the understanding of immigrant incorporation: (a) cognitive psychology and developmental biology, (b) life-span developmental psychology, and (c) age stratification and the life course. Drawing from these broad fields, examples demonstrate ways of addressing age differences in the pace and degree of incorporation.

Cognitive Aging and Developmental Biology

Inherent, age-related differences may affect the capacity to learn a new culture and incorporate into a host society. Consider age differences in language learning. Long debated is whether childhood is some neurologically critical period for language or acquisition ability simply declines slowly with age (Kuhl & Rivera-Gaxiola, 2008; Wiley, Bialystok, & Hakuta, 2005). Older immigrants, however, point to age-related physical and cognitive problems (dentures, poor memory) which undermine English mastery (Treas & Mazumdar, 2002).

For Mannheim (1997 [1952]), incomplete acculturation would have been consistent with "imperfect elasticity of mind," ascribed not to cognitive failings but to the challenge of "unlearning" acquired modes of thought, feeling, and action. Today, researchers credit older adults with greater cognitive plasticity (Willis, Schaie, & Martin, 2009). Consistent with the lifelong openness hypothesis (Sears, 1983), older people are capable of change (Alwin, 2007; Danigelis, Hardy, & Cutler, 2007). General cognitive processes show reasonable stability from into the late 50s or early 60s, when modest declines set in that may accelerate at the end of life (Hofer & Alwin, 2008; Schaie & Hofer, 2001). Basic cognitive trajectories hold across cultures (Hedden et al., 2002). Long-distance immigrants are selected for good health, but older immigrants no doubt follow general patterns of organic change. How much "normal aging" affects assimilation and acculturation is a promising area for investigation.

Routine problem solving is probably more critical to immigrant adaptation than processing speed or other cognitive competencies (Berg, Skinner, & Ko, 2009). The ability to solve everyday problems may increase with age (Baltes & Kunzmann, 2003; Cornelius & Caspi, 1987). But, if older adults rely more on "context" to problem-solve (Bird, 2007), prior experiences in a homeland may not map to a new environment. If a reserve of knowledge from another culture is not helpful to problem solving in the host society, older immigrants may incorporate slowly. The unique circumstances of immigrants, especially late-life newcomers, invites attention to context in adaptation.

Besides "normal aging," severe cognitive impairment impacts assimilation. With dementia, even long-term immigrants may experience a decline in acculturation and return to their mother tongue (Yamada, Valle, Barrio, & Jeste, 2006). Physical disabilities (hearing, vision, and mobility) inhibit assimilation. They narrow an older adult's social world and reduce social contacts, including exposure to the host society.

Life-Span Developmental Theories

Emphasizing changes in goals, motivations, and orientations, developmental theories of psychology inform age differences in immigrant adaptation. Developmental changes may be a response to physical and mental declines of later life or to shifts in opportunities. Following theories of "adaptive regulation of development" (Riediger, Li, & Lindenberger, 2006), older immigrants may assimilate slowly due to age-related differences in investments of attention and energy.

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In the "selective optimization with compensation" (SOC) model (Baltes, 1997), effort is directed toward growth in childhood, maintenance and renewal in adulthood, and loss management in later life. This schema suggests greater commitment to assimilation earlier than later in the life course. Older immigrants may favor the adaptive mechanism of *selection*, whereby personal goals are restructured to emphasize those that remain attainable. With declining health, older immigrants will focus energies selectively and strategically—say, maintaining supportive relationships with kin instead of pursuing new friendships at a senior center. Perceiving less potential for growth and less control over their lives, older adults embrace age-appropriate goals minimizing age-related losses, rather than new activities maximizing developmental gains (Heckhausen, 1997; Wrosch, Heckhausen, & Lachman, 2006). Theories of developmental regulation—SOC (Baltes, 1987), socioemotional selectivity (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999), motivational theory (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010)—are promising directions for understanding age differences in immigrant incorporation.

Age Stratification and the Life Course

Bridging microsocial and macrosocial levels of analysis (Bengtson, Burgess, & Parrott, 1997), the age stratification and life course theories of sociology speak to age differences in immigrant incorporation. Age stratification emphasizes the social institutions organizing age-graded social roles which individuals assume as they grow up and grow older (Riley & Foner, 1968). This suggests a powerful explanation for the slower acculturation of older adults. Via the socializing influences of school and workplace, younger immigrants are routinely exposed to opportunities to learn about American society. Older immigrants are not.

Linked lives, human agency, and other life course principles have great salience (Elder et al., 2003). Timing of lives is a sensitizing concept directing attention to the intersection of age and immigration. Becoming a citizen in later life, for example, does not confer the old age health benefits associated with naturalizing in young adulthood (Gubernskaya, Bean, & van Hook, 2013). Immigration itself depends on age. The workforce is an age-graded institution. Most immigrants worldwide are labor migrants in prime working years. The unusual family reunification provisions of U.S. immigration law welcome parents of *adult* naturalized citizens; those arriving on parent visas are inevitably middle aged or older. In short, the constraints and opportunities posed by age-graded social structures show potential to contribute to theories of immigrant incorporation.

Discussion

Theories of immigrant incorporation and theories of aging reveal ample ground for constructive dialogue. Both traditions offer multilevel, multidimensional, and time-dependent explanations for individual change in sociohistorical context. Both confront questions of what time means and what trajectories are implied over the life course. In contrast to aging, immigrant incorporation theories settled early on a definition of generation. Theories were formulated, if not necessarily tested, at this unit of aggregation. Historical changes call into question the continuing adequacy of immigrant generation and time since arrival as causes of immigrant incorporation. At the same time, there is growing appreciation of the importance of age in immigrant adaptation. Largely unanswered is the question of age differences in the pace of acculturation. Demonstrating the potential for cross-pollination, three broad aging literatures (cognitive aging and developmental biology, life-span developmental theory, and age stratification and life course approaches) suggest explanations for why young immigrants incorporate more quickly than older ones.

The challenge of theoretical integration arises, in part, from the heterogeneity of immigrant experience. From the life course perspective, the emphasis on time and place captures the historical and cultural contingencies that shape immigrant incorporation. The immigration literature, however, has moved beyond a focus on country of origin to appreciate that forces of selection determine who migrates from different countries. The economic success of Asian immigrants, for instance, reflects the fact that they are more highly educated not only than other immigrant streams, but also than their countrymen who do not migrate (Feliciano, 2005). Similarly, immigrant health in later life will reflect the influence not only of U.S. residence, but also health status at immigration.

Heterogeneity in the immigrant experience comes from the political and social circumstances of immigration. Although it is useful to look backward at the historical context in the homeland (e.g., conflicts propelling refugee migration), contexts of reception have implications for incorporation of immigrants at different ages. Three aspects of reception merit attention. First, there is the intimate support offered by families and ethnic communities that facilitate adaptation, if not necessarily acculturation. In contrast to working age migrants, older newcomers invariably join kin in places where other co-ethnics have established a foothold. Second, there is the culture of the receiving society, which may be more or less welcoming not only of immigrants, but also of particular kinds of immigrants. Being less acculturated, older newcomers are more insulated in the day-to-day from native hostility than younger immigrants, but their fortunes, too, depend on the warmth of reception. Lastly, public policy is a pivotal element in the integration of aging and immigration literatures. As the product of U.S. immigration law, legal status (unauthorized, refugee, permanent resident, naturalized citizen) is arguably a more profound indicator of divergent life chances than cultural differences or place of origin. U.S. citizenship, for example, is especially attractive to late-life immigrants because it confers Medicare eligibility (Gubernskaya et al., 2013).

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For the aging and immigration fields, the common concerns and the potential gains from collaboration are clear. Pragmatic obstacles stand in the way of realizing the advances from this productive exchange. Key is the lack of adequate data. Because many surveys have too few immigrants for reliable estimates, particularly for subgroup comparisons, researchers are often limited to census products (e.g., the decennial census, American Community Survey, Current Population Survey). Even the admirable New Immigrant Survey, which follows cohorts of new legal immigrants, misses the large, unauthorized population. The tenets of the life course call for longitudinal microdata across human lives, but this aspiration is rarely achieved even for small, local, nonscientific samples. Researchers make do with specialized studies of a segmented life course (Health and Retirement Study, Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health). The life course approach requires a broad sweep of historical context—for now best approached with the limited content for repeated cross-sections of IPUMS harmonized censuses. The principle of linked lives invites studies informed by network members in the sending and receiving societies, but there are few ambitious exemplars (the Mexican Migration Project). While many questions cannot yet be addressed with certainty, the intersection of aging and immigration remains largely unmapped and can support a substantial research effort well into the future.

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