

Negotiating Social Psychological Identity in Reyna Grande's 'The Distance between Us'

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Abstract:

This essay examines how social psychological identity is constructed and negotiated in Reyna Grande's autobiography, *The Distance between Us*. The study explores how Grande's early experiences of parental absence, poverty, migration, and cultural displacement shaped her developing sense of self, using on Erikson's psychosocial model of identity formation, Berry's acculturation framework, and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory. An immigrant youth navigating two distinct and frequently opposing cultural contexts—Mexican and American—while grappling with questions of resilience, exclusion, and belonging is vividly described in the memoir. This essay makes the case that Grande's identity creation is a dynamic, continuous process influenced by both internal psychological resilience and external social constraints by examining issues of language, education, family relationships, and social marginalization. In the end, *The Distance between Us* provides a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of transnational people by illuminating the intricate ways in which migration, culture, and class connect to shape immigrant identities.

Keywords: Social, Psychological, Reyna Grande, Identity, Memoir, Immigrant, Negotiating, Childhood, Marginalization

Rationale of the Study:

This research is significant because it emphasises the connection of literature and psychology, bridging the gap between personal narratives and academic frameworks. The study examines Grande's memoir using Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, Erikson's model of identity development, and Berry's acculturation framework to show how identity formation is influenced by forces beyond the individual, such as poverty, systemic exclusion, and cultural conflict.

The reasoning also stems from the wider ramifications of the immigrant experience: Grande's tale speaks to millions of migrating children around the world who face challenges related to language, cultural hybridity, and belonging. As a result, the study advances our psychological knowledge of resilience and adaptation in addition to literary scholarship.

Objectives:

- 1) To analyze *The Distance between us* through the framework of social psychological identity.
- 2) To explore how Grande's narrative illustrates the tension between cultural belonging and alienation.
- 3) To highlight the role of resilience and adaptation in the construction of immigrant identity.

Hypothesis:

In the present study the researcher intends to study that children of migrant parents experience long-term identity conflicts due to disrupted attachments and cultural displacement.

Methodology:

The researcher intends to use a literary review followed by analytical, explanatory, interpretative and comparative methodology in Reyna Grande's memoir 'The Distance between Us'

Discussion:

1) Childhood and Parental Absence: Fragmented Beginnings of Identity:-

Reyna Grande's *The Distance between Us* chronicles her childhood in Iguala, Mexico, which was distinguished by poverty and parental absence. Both parents departed for the United States to earn money, leaving Reyna and her siblings in the care of family members. Erikson's psychosocial theory states that childhood is a vital period for forming trust, security, and identity. However, the absence of parental figures shattered Grande's sense of belonging, making her open to feelings of abandonment and rejection.

This emotional gap is present throughout the memoir, influencing her psychological difficulties with self-worth and belonging.

According to social psychology, children's early sense of identity is shaped by their primary in-group, their family. In Grande's case, parental absence damaged this link, forcing her to acquire resilience while also instilling profound uneasiness. Her desire for parental acceptance exemplifies the interplay of love and alienation that shapes identity in transnational families.

2) Migration and Cultural Duality: Between Two Worlds:-

Migration teaches Grande about the complications of manoeuvring between Mexican and American cultural systems. According to Social Identity Theory, people get a sense of identity via categorising themselves as members of social groupings. Grande had to balance her Mexican background (home, customs, and family relationships) and American identity (education, opportunity, assimilation).

In the United States, she feels both the benefits of education and the sorrow of marginalisation. Being labelled a "outsider" at school emphasises the in-group/out-group dynamics that underpin Tajfel and Turner's thesis. She is both pressured to assimilate and reminded of her differences, which exacerbates her identity crisis.

Berry's acculturation model sheds more light on Grande's experiences: she has moments of integration (embracing education as a pathway into American society while retaining her cultural heritage), but she also experiences marginalization, particularly when economic hardship and discrimination cause her to be excluded from both groups.

3) Language as Identity: Communication and Belonging:-

Language serves as an important sign of identity in the memoir. Her home tongue, Spanish, connects her to her family and cultural heritage, but English serves as the entrance to education and social mobility in the United States. However, language becomes a source of conflict, as her weak English skills initially places her as an outsider at school. Social Identity Theory emphasizes how language defines group membership. Reyna's difficulty with English places her on the periphery of the American in-group, fuelling sentiments of inferiority. However, mastering English subsequently empowers her, allowing her to exert agency and reinvent her identity as a writer. Her eventual multilingual indicates a more integrated persona in which she reclaims power in both cultural contexts.

4) Class and Social Hierarchy: Poverty and Marginalization:

Grande's biography eloquently depicts poverty as a key component in shaping identity. In Mexico, her family's economic adversity causes hunger, bad living conditions, and a sense of inferiority when contrasted to wealthy friends. Despite having more chances in the United States, poverty nevertheless distinguishes her from middle-class Americans. From a psychological standpoint, class-based exclusion exacerbates identity issues. Being poor has an impact not just on one's material well-being, but it also produces stigma, reinforcing out-group status. This is consistent with Tajfel's idea that identity is frequently linked to social comparisons—Grande compares herself to others and battles with feelings of inadequacy. Nonetheless, her perseverance in education reveals a psychological rewriting of identity: poverty becomes not only a cause of guilt, but also a motivator to succeed.

5) Gender and Familial Roles: Negotiating Identity as a Daughter and

Woman:

Reyna is subjected to additional pressures as the daughter of a patriarchal family. Her father's authoritarian expectations, along with traditional gender norms, lead to friction as she strives for freedom. Erikson's adolescent stage—identity versus role confusion—is most visible here, as she tries to balance obedience to familial authority and the urge for self-determination. Her story also underlines how immigrant daughters frequently bear additional responsibilities, balancing family loyalty with personal ambitions. These gendered expectations complicate her identification since she must balance cultural commitments with her developing sense of self as a woman.

6) Psychological Resilience: Reconstructing the Self:

Grande is incredibly resilient in the face of adversity. Education becomes a critical gateway for identity restoration. Her hardships become sources of strength as she excels academically and later becomes a writer. From a social psychology standpoint, resilience serves as an adaptive identity strategy—an active negotiation of belonging that allows her to move between exclusion and inclusion.

Her memoir itself is a type of identity reclamation. By recounting her experiences, she takes control over her past and positions herself as both a survivor and a cultural mediator. This final act exemplifies the transforming power of immigrant identity, in which trauma and displacement may be transformed into empowerment and self-definition.

Findings:

The analysis of Reyna Grande's *The Distance between Us* through the lens of social psychological theories reveals several key findings:

1. Identity as Fluid and Negotiated: Grande's identity is not fixed but constantly reshaped by the forces of migration, family separation, poverty, and education.
2. Impact of Social Exclusion: Tajfel and Turner's in-group/out-group dynamics highlight how exclusion based on language, class, and ethnicity intensifies Grande's struggle for belonging.
3. Acculturation Strategies: Berry's model shows that Grande alternates between integration (embracing both Mexican and American identities) and marginalization (feeling excluded from both).
4. Adolescent Identity Crisis: Erikson's framework demonstrates how parental absence and cultural displacement exacerbate role confusion but also push Grande toward independence.

5. Resilience as Identity Reconstruction: Grande transforms trauma into strength, using education and writing as tools to reconstruct her selfhood.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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