



## Introduction to “Acculturation Theory, Research and Application: Working with and for Communities”

Colleen Ward<sup>a,\*</sup>, Cigdem Kagitcibasi<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington, School of Psychology, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand

<sup>b</sup> Koc University, Turkish Academy of Sciences, Turkey

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Accepted 19 January 2010

#### Keywords:

Acculturation  
Community  
Applied research  
Participatory action research  
Immigrants

### ABSTRACT

The paper counters the claim that current acculturation research has very little practical utility and provides an overview of the special issue on “Acculturation Theory, Research and Application: Working with and for Communities.” The overview indicates that community-based research is widespread and that although it is characterized by a diversity of locations, populations and investigative methods, the studies share common objectives of empowering acculturating individuals and communities, enhancing social integration and psychological well being, and improving interpersonal and intergroup relations.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This special issue has its roots in a sweltering seminar room at Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. It was there, at the 2008 XIX International Congress of the International Association for Cross-cultural Psychology (IACCP), that Valery Chirkov and Dan Landis convened a lively round table discussion entitled “Is there a crisis of acculturation psychology and what can we do about it?” Since then, Chirkov has edited a controversial issue on Critical Acculturation Psychology in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, which drew on and advanced many of the ideas that arose from the Bremen discussions. But it was one particular theme that emerged at that time that specifically attracted my attention—the notion that acculturation research was rarely applied and did little to assist or support acculturating individuals and communities. Or as succinctly stated by Chirkov (2009a, p. 89) in his subsequent publication “...modern acculturation psychology has become almost useless for the immigrant communities and for the immigrant-assisting organizations...”

I was not convinced. I knew that our Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand was conducting applied research with acculturating communities, and I was aware that there were other exciting initiatives around the globe. At the time I suggested that research was being undertaken, but that it was unlikely to be found in IACCP’s *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*. The type of work Chirkov was searching for would lay primarily, though not exclusively, at the cross-roads of cross-cultural and community psychology and action-oriented research. As I was reflecting on this state of affairs at the Bremen round table, I heard Cigdem Kagitcibasi express a similar disappointment with regard to European acculturation research. She said that she had brought up the issue in another symposium of the Congress, and it had caused some controversy. As she spoke passionately about the importance of returning our research to immigrant communities in need, thoughts of a special issue began to stir. After consultation with Dan Landis, I invited Cigdem to join me to edit an *IJIR* issue on Acculturation Theory, Research and Application: Working with and for Communities.

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +64 4 4636037; fax: +64 4 4635402.

E-mail address: [Colleen.ward@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Colleen.ward@vuw.ac.nz) (C. Ward).

In this issue we have assembled seven papers that reflect a variety of theoretical and empirical approaches to acculturation with a range of short and long-term immigrant groups. But in the diversity is unity—all share common objectives of empowering acculturating individuals and communities, enhancing social integration and psychological well-being, and improving interpersonal and intergroup relations.

The seven papers and the special issue are timely on two counts. First, we are experiencing a global era of increasing international mobility and intercultural contact. More than 191 million people live outside their country of origin (United Nations, 2009a). In addition to international immigrants, there are 14 million refugees and asylum-seekers who have been involuntarily displaced across international borders (USCRI, 2009). There are also short-term immigrants, such as the almost three million international students in tertiary institutions on a worldwide basis and an estimated 30 million expatriates, employees and their family members (Anber, 2007; UNESCO, 2009). Above and beyond increasing international migration is within-society intercultural contact amongst diverse ethnic and cultural groups and over 300 million indigenous peoples around the world (United Nations, 2009b). The sheer volume of intercultural contact and the challenges presented by socio-cultural and political change demand the attention of psychologists and other social scientists.

Second, these changes are occurring at a time when our discipline is engaged in critical reflection on our acculturation theory, research and development. Chirkov's work represents but one example of critical reflection, but in the *IJIR* special issue he does make a range of useful recommendations that are addressed to varying degrees in this volume.<sup>1</sup> Although these contributions were not specifically assembled to meet the overarching challenges posed there (Chirkov, 2009b), the papers go some way in:

- (1) framing acculturation as a process that promotes personal growth;
- (2) incorporating a developmental dimension in acculturation research;
- (3) situating acculturation research in a social, political and historical context;
- (4) critically examining the notion that acculturation is defined by an individual's rational choice; and
- (5) using multiple methods and paradigms in acculturation research.

This special issue is designed to demonstrate what insights acculturation research can provide and how such insights can help serve acculturating individuals, families and communities. The studies were conducted in diverse countries and socio-cultural contexts. The receiving countries are Spain, New Zealand, Turkey, Australia, and the United States—Boston and Guam. The acculturating groups in these countries are Moroccan women; Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants, and young Assyrian women; international students; rural–urban migrants; and Cape Verdean adolescent girls, and Kurdish and Burmese asylum-seekers, respectively. The diversity of the countries, the acculturating groups and their experiences reflect the complexity of the phenomenon under study.

The issue commences with a paper by Paloma, García-Ramírez and de la Mata based on work with AMAL, a grassroots organization of Andalusian Moroccan women in Spain. Cultural and community psychology perspectives are used to understand acculturation as an empowering process by which immigrant women acquire and develop critical awareness that transforms both “self” and society. The research is based on a partnership between academics and a grassroots organization and draws on archival resources and the narratives of AMAL activists, participants, community workers and policy-makers to propose a new model of the acculturative-integration process. The model goes well beyond the framework proposed by Berry (1997); it critically examines the parameters and components of integration; situates the acculturation experience in a social and political context; and incorporates, individual-, community- and societal-level dimensions.

A collaboration between university researchers (the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research) and a grassroots organization (the New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils) is also at the core of research by Stuart, Ward, Jose and Narayanan in their study of harmony and conflict in acculturating families. The research arose from a needs assessment in the ethnic communities and was followed by a joint funding application, community input into the research design, data collection by members of the participating ethnic groups, and subsequent return of the findings to the community in the form of workshops and reports. The study served to identify common areas of agreement and disagreement between parents and adolescents and allay fears amongst Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants about cultural maintenance in their communities. At the same time the project contributed to acculturation theory and research by: (1) assessing areas of both conflict and harmony in families; (2) including perspectives of both parents and children; (3) adding a developmental dimension to acculturation research; and (4) demonstrating that acculturation experiences may be a source of personal growth and increased family cohesion.

Elise DiDenti Christiansen contributes the third paper based on her work with Cape Verdean girls in Boston. Her study incorporates participatory and action research strategies to explore reactions to violence, incarceration and deportation through the implementation of the Values affecting Learning our Roots program (V.A.L.O.R.). Christiansen's work is noteworthy on four counts. First, she uses multiple, often novel, methods including group work, field notes, focus groups, digital stories and creative projects embedded in the V.A.L.O.R. program as sources for inductive thematic analysis. Second, she documents the challenges of working within the community, the day-to-day practical obstacles (e.g., transportation, conflict amongst members) that limit or prevent participation. Third, Christiansen demonstrates that the challenges facing the Cape Verdean girls include familiar acculturation issues such social and economic disadvantage, stereotyping and

<sup>1</sup> For criticisms of concepts, measurements and methods see Rudmin (2003) and Guerin and Guerin (2007).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947512>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/947512>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)