

**Envisioning and Actualizing a New Generation of Acculturation Research:
The International Academy for Intercultural Research Fellows Day 2023**

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Calls for new approaches to acculturation research have been growing (e.g., Ahn & Lee, 2023; Bierwiazzonek & Kunst, 2021). In fact, some contend that we are now on the cusp of a third generation of acculturation research incorporating new theoretical models and methods to understand the increasing complexity of intercultural relations (Sam & Ward, 2021). Debates have promulgated regarding the ontology and epistemology of acculturation, such as what constitutes culture (Komisarof & Zhu, 2016) and what it means to be acculturated.

These discussions carry important implications for conceiving and measuring the nature of cultural change, which is at the heart of the acculturation process. For instance, traditional approaches to acculturation research that assume inherent differences between national cultures are challenged by the notion of transculturality (Skrefsrud, 2021). Other models have proposed alternatives to measuring heritage culture retention and destination culture acquisition—opting instead to gauge biculturalism directly, such as Benet-Martínez’s bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martínez et al., 2021) or Ward’s cultural identity styles (Ward et al., 2018). Moreover, in our increasingly interconnected digital world, remote acculturation (as opposed to proximal, or face-to-face acculturation) has become an area of active research leading to expansive ideas as to how acculturation occurs (Ferguson et al., 2023). These controversies and new developments in the field

underscore the exigency of conceiving new approaches to respond to the dialectic forces of homogenization and fragmentation of cultures, people, and practices in the context of an interconnected global community. Thus, the need for acculturation scholars to envision and actualize a new generation of acculturation research is more significant than ever before.

The International Academy for Intercultural Research (IAIR) is an academic organization whose primary mission is to promote intercultural understanding through theory-based research and practice using interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. Its members hail from a plethora of academic disciplines, including but not limited to cross-cultural and acculturation psychology, intercultural communication, applied linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. The *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (IJIR) is IAIR's flagship journal, established by IAIR's founder, Dan Landis, in 1977. At IAIR's biennial conferences, the organization's fellows gather for a day-long event devoted to a pressing topic in intercultural relations—a meeting of minds centered upon discussing cutting-edge research, as well as related conceptual tools and methodologies—known as Fellows Day.

The goal of Fellows Day 2023 at IAIR's 13th Biennial Conference in Philadelphia was to answer the call for a new generation of acculturation research in an increasingly complex global society. Namely, we engaged in one day of dialogue, questioning, and debate about how to integrate new and traditional approaches to acculturation research to meet current and future needs for theory development, practice, and policy. The organizers, then-President Adam Komisarof and Fellows David Dalsky and Shuang Liu, conceived these goals as ideally accomplished not by ignoring past findings, but rather by bringing together fellows who advocate novel approaches to acculturation in their

work with fellows who have conducted seminal studies contributing significantly to our contemporary understanding of acculturation. By engaging in open, respectful, curiosity-driven scholarly discussion, we hoped to create conditions in which researchers could utilize the knowledge gained in the past, yet leap forward in innovative, imaginative ways that address acculturation in our increasingly multidimensional, multilayered world of intercultural interactions and identities. This special issue of IJIR shares the fruit of these interactions, as it brings together contributions from speakers at Fellows Day 2023 (who serve as the lead author of each paper).

This special issue is particularly timely given the rapid growth of interest in acculturation, which is driven by factors such as the increasingly contested nature of sociopolitical issues connected to globalization and the extensive movement of human capital across national borders (Komisarof & Leong, 2020). To wit, there has been an almost threefold increase in migration worldwide between 1985 and 2020, from 105 million to 281 million people (International Organization for Migration, 2023). Ahn and Lee (2023) found that the average annual growth in publications related to acculturation has been 10% since 1987, reaching roughly 1,000 per year as of the early 2020s, whereas Kunst (2021) noted over 13,000 publications between 1923 and 2020 addressing acculturation.

Contemporary Debates and Recommendations Regarding Acculturation Research

This growth in acculturation scholarship has been accompanied by questions about the meaning of acculturation and optimal research methodologies for examining it. For instance, the debate over the epistemological nature of culture, which is at the heart of acculturation, has still not been settled. How can we study cultural-based change when

there remains a lack of agreement over what culture is in the first place (Berry, 2009; Ferguson et al., 2023)? Does culture exist outside of individuals, is it internalized psychologically, or are both simultaneously true (Akaliyski et al., 2021; Berry, 2009)? Also, is acculturation best studied as a causal phenomenon (Kunst, 2021) or a structural one (the latter entailing a set of theoretical concepts that describe *what* are phenomena and *how* they are interrelated without seeking or claiming causal inference) (Grigoryev & Berry, 2022)? Ultimately, are we asking ourselves misleading questions such as “To what extent are acculturation and integration related to adaptation?” rather than “How and when are acculturation and integration related to adaptation?” (Ward, in press)?

Further challenges regarding how best to conceive culture and acculturation have emerged from various paradigms of thought in the intercultural communication field (Komisarof & Zhu, 2016; Kulich & Tong, in press). Scholars of transculturalism emphasize the multiple cultural group memberships lived by many people in our highly interconnected, mobile world, highlighting the need to frame and examine acculturation as a multipronged process across various intercultural fronts (Baker, 2022; Zhu et al., 2022). Multidimensional acculturation studies have been executed, for example, by Birman et al. (2010), Ferguson et al. (2014), and Schwartz et al. (2015), and three- or four-dimensional acculturation models (or even more) are being envisioned and employed by a growing group of researchers (Ferguson et al., 2023).

Transculturalism further contends that the traditional perspective of acculturation psychologists conceiving connections between distinct, identifiable cultures is incomplete, as it is not always possible to specify what cultures people “represent” in intercultural communication (Baker, 2022; Komisarof, 2011). Moreover, the acculturation outcome of hybridization (Ward et al., 2018), they argue, does not go far

enough to capture the new cultural forms that are generated from intercultural contact (though Wasilewski and Seelye, 1997, cogently illustrated the difficulty of identifying “new” cultural forms and distinguishing them from hybridized outcomes of acculturative processes). Transculturalists, as well as scholars from other critical-interpretivist traditions, have also urged greater attention toward power structures, as they can limit the cultural identities and practices that people may potentially adopt through acculturation (Baker, 2022). Some transculturalists (e.g., Zhu et al., 2022) have further contended that making distinctions between cultural groups is inherently political, as it can perpetuate power inequities and reinforce racial and ethnic divides; hence, they urge reflexivity among researchers to understand the political functions and ramifications of the cultural categories that they utilize, so as to reduce social polarization, tribalism, and intergroup conflict.

Importantly, Baker (2022) argued that transculturalism and more traditional acculturation models can be used synergistically to inform each other. Wilczewska (2023) has done so, building upon Berry’s (2009) bidimensional model of acculturation strategies and conceptualizing acculturation in a manner that employs some of the assumptions of transculturalist, postmodernist, and constructivist scholars—specifically that cultural groups do not necessarily have clear boundaries and that acculturation sometimes leads to new cultural forms of expression that are not reminiscent of any group involved in the acculturation process. Practices are reconceived from Berry’s bidimensional model as familiar and unfamiliar (rather than representative of heritage or host cultures), and a new dimension assessing the creation of novel cultural practices has been added—thus constituting an innovative approach to how acculturation is conceived and measured.

Out of these numerous debates have emerged sound recommendations for moving the field of acculturation psychology forward (Sam, in press). For instance, in studies questioning the robustness of the evidence supporting Berry's integration hypothesis (Kunst, 2021) and the strength of the correlational link between acculturation and adaptation (Bierwiazek & Kunst, 2021), methodological recommendations include more longitudinal and experimental studies to establish causality (Kunst, 2021). Other scholars have advocated using longitudinal studies to untangle the relationship between acculturation and developmental processes (Ahn & Lee, 2023), the use of qualitative methods (Grigoryev & Berry, 2021), and more ethnographic work (Berry, 2009).

Ahn and Lee (2023) highlighted the dearth of acculturation research from non-Western countries in terms of both the locations of scholars conducting studies and the populations that form the targets of such research. Unless we increase diversity in both regards, they contended, we will limit our understanding of the impacts of the contextual factors on acculturation. Studies that investigate how majority groups acculturate have gained steam (e.g., Komisarof, 2009; Kunst et al., 2021), as have those that examine connections between personality and acculturation (Kunst et al., 2021). Others have urged greater attention to particular acculturation outcomes, such as belonging (Komisarof, 2021), which has been convincingly argued to be a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Jansen et al., 2014). Szabó (2022) advocated research addressing "the causes of the causes" (e.g., household income, employment, and education), or the social systems in which people's lives are embedded that create the conditions for acculturation, inequities across individuals and groups, and influence acculturation processes and migrants' capacities to achieve positive acculturation outcomes.

Given the aforementioned debates, the field of acculturation psychology faces ongoing theoretical and methodological challenges. However, we can also observe directions in current research that are responsive to many of these issues and provide optimism that the field is vibrant and moving forward to discover new ways of conceptualizing and measuring acculturation. This special issue aims to advance such efforts as described next in the overview.

Overview of this Special Issue

Thus, there is an exigent need to understand how people acculturate (and can potentially acculturate) in our increasingly intercultural, interconnected, and mobile world. Namely, when human beings experience intercultural contact in all its forms (e.g., remote or proximal, voluntary or imposed, etc.), how do people change, and how can acculturation be structured and engaged with in ways that nurture positive intercultural relations? In response to this call, the papers in this special issue detail innovative approaches to acculturation research from various perspectives.

David Sam (in press) reflects on the advancement of acculturation psychology during the past 50 years, especially recently, due to the rapid expansion of migration worldwide. The field's criticisms and controversies are highlighted, arguing that researchers investigating acculturation should reconsider foundational theories, models, and objectives to adapt to the present time. Recommendations are also made for methodologies that can play an essential role in future acculturation investigations.

Colleen Ward (in press) grapples with recent meta-analytic findings that present a significant challenge to the widely accepted assumptions that acculturation consistently correlates with adaptation, and that integration is the optimal acculturation strategy. In

this provocative paper, she proposes a shift in our inquiry, moving from asking, “To what extent are acculturation and integration related to adaptation?” to “How and when are acculturation and integration related to adaptation?” The need for an increased focus on acculturation processes and contexts to advance acculturation theory is emphasized.

Valery Chirkov (in press) argues that traditional quantitative approaches are inappropriate for understanding the mechanisms of acculturation. Specifically, they impose a positivist, reductionist lens upon phenomena that are far too complex to be captured through binary correlational or causative associations. He also contends that such approaches yield little insight for mental health practitioners to help immigrants adapt in the face of acculturative stress. Chirkov proposes an alternative theory of sociocultural models and highlights its suitability for understanding acculturation mechanisms through a paradigmatic lens of critical realism.

Seth Schwartz and colleagues (in press) assess six acculturation components at both macro and micro levels in a longitudinal study involving Hispanic college students in Miami. The methodology and results of this study uniquely link the same acculturation components across daily and longer-term scales, contributing to the advancement of measuring and investigating acculturation. Their approach provides a greater understanding of the dynamic interplay between acculturation indices across different time scales.

Chan-Hoong Leong and colleagues (in press) examine immigrant exclusion, life satisfaction, and generalized trust in Singapore, considering spatial evidence in racial and class segregations at the neighborhood level. Neighborhoods with higher concentrations of ethnic minorities and immigrants showed more significant diversity exclusion, lower trust, and quality of life, with proximity to shared spaces mitigating these effects. The

findings provide valuable insights into the intergroup processes shaping intercultural contact and acculturation, emphasizing the impact of social (e.g., ethnic or immigrant concentration) and built (e.g., access to amenities) environments and the potential of spatial big data for a nuanced understanding of Singapore's diverse demographic landscape. Similar approaches to using spatial big data to examine intergroup processes can be potentially applied beyond Singapore in future acculturation research.

In contemporary mass media, acculturation as a topic attracts less attention than cultural appropriation—a term which speaks to the experiences of marginalized groups as well as people looking to rectify hegemonic power imbalances in and across societies. Jonas Kunst and colleagues (2024) examine the nature of majority-group acculturation—what they call “genuine cultural change”—and cultural appropriation. They also propose criteria to differentiate the two and recommend avenues for future research to clarify this distinction further.

Though the papers in this issue have been published non-sequentially as soon as they were completed, they are available online as a cohesive unit on IJIR's webpage (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/international-journal-of-intercultural-relations>). We invite all of IJIR's readers to travel back to July 23, 2023, to IAIR's Fellows Day and engage with the thoughts of some of the most prominent scholars in the field of acculturation psychology. Together, we can continue to construct a vibrant field that addresses the most pertinent contemporary issues related to individual acculturation and broader cultural change.

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