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# Acculturation and Millennial Migration: A Cultural Congruence Framework

## L'acculturation et la migration des milléniaux : Un cadre de congruence culturelle

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Alexandra Robinson  
*University of Calgary*

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### ABSTRACT

As the world becomes more interconnected the impact of migration and acculturation have become an increasingly relevant topic. This article provides a review of the dominant theories of acculturation, a critique of these theories, and suggested revisions to current models that reflect the millennial context of migration. A revised perspective, the Cultural Congruency Framework, is proposed. A key premise of the framework is that individuals contextually engage in strategies to align their values, beliefs, and behaviours to experience cultural congruence. Suggestions are provided for implementing this framework in the context of counselling psychology.

### RÉSUMÉ

Dans un monde de plus en plus interconnecté, la question des effets de la migration et de l'acculturation revêt une importance grandissante. Cet article présente une revue des théories dominantes sur l'acculturation, une analyse critique de ces théories et certaines propositions de modifications à apporter aux modèles actuels pour tenir compte du contexte migratoire des milléniaux. On y propose une perspective révisée, le cadre de congruence culturelle. L'une des principales prémisses de ce cadre est que les personnes adoptent des stratégies contextuelles afin d'aligner leurs valeurs, croyances et comportements de manière à établir une congruence culturelle. On fournit aussi des conseils pour appliquer ce cadre au contexte de la psychologie de counseling.

Canada has a long history as an immigrant-receiving country and is internationally recognized for its development of a multicultural policy known as the Canadian Multicultural Act (Minister of Justice, 2016). Canada has defined itself as a multicultural nation, and this affects how newcomers to Canada are both received and perceived. Data from the Canadian Election Studies, 1988–2006, indicated that Canadians have become progressively more supportive of continuing to accept newcomers from non-western cultures (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010).

As Navas et al. (2005) previously validated, positive attitudes towards migrant populations by the receiving country improves the likelihood of integration. Simon and Sikich (2007) found that Canadians indicated a more positive attitude towards immigration than other western nations. Indeed, Canadians are demonstrating their commitment as an immigrant-receiving country in the way that Syrian refugees are being welcomed—especially when compared to their

Western counterparts (Rubenstein & Spiegel, 2017). Although the most recent influx of migrants arrived as refugees, most individuals who migrate to Canada voluntarily arrive with the hopes of building a better life in a country that affords them new opportunities.

More than one in five Canadians are foreign-born, and in 2016 foreign-born Canadians represented 21.9% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Approximately 65% of recent immigrants were classified as economic immigrants, with the remaining 35% consisting of family class immigrants, refugees, and others admitted under humanitarian programs (Government of Canada, 2016). Entering Canada as an economic immigrant requires the applicant to undergo a rigorous application process meant to ensure that new immigrants to Canada are the most viable of applicants concerning physical and mental health, as well as their professional and economic contribution potential (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). Regardless of which category individuals immigrate under the application process takes a considerable amount of time and effort, suggesting that those who are eventually accepted to immigrate have already proven their commitment to the immigration process.

With recent events displacing millions of people across the globe, the effects of migration on both those emigrating and upon the receiving country have become an important topic among politicians and policymakers, educators, primary healthcare providers, mental health care providers, economists, epidemiologists, and of course, the media. Although the migration of individuals and groups is hardly a new phenomenon, dating all the way back to ancient times, the impact of migration in the millennial age of globalization introduces unique opportunities and challenges at the individual, group, national, and international level. Regardless of the level of positive anticipation and commitment to immigrate, inherent with migration is a transition from the culture(s) of origin to the culture(s) of the receiving country. This transition, which can be understood as the acculturation process ("Acculturation," n.d.), can be an exciting and rewarding experience for some but for others, it can have a destabilizing effect.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss immigration and the process of acculturation in the current Canadian context, and its implications for research and counselling interventions. Provided is a historical overview of acculturation research along with a description of the predominant acculturation models. A critique of the current models is provided, as well as suggestions for revisions to the current models. Finally, an alternative framework for understanding the acculturation process is proposed along with an explanation of how to apply the revised framework to professional mental healthcare practice.

#### DEFINITIONS OF ACCULTURATION

Acculturation refers to the process of change that occurs when exposure to a novel culture impacts the individuals or groups that are in contact (Rosenbaum, Trinh, & Rho, 2009). The term *acculturation* first appeared in the literature in

1880 to describe the changes that occur with prolonged exposure to a novel culture (Rudmin, 2003). The construct of acculturation was first operationalized by anthropologists (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936) and has since become a topic of interest to psychologists (Chirkov, 2009), sociologists (Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002), political scientists (Wade, 2011), politicians (Policy Horizons Canada, 2008), economists (Hadley, Zodhiates, & Sellen, 2006), mental health care providers (Cabassa, Zayas, & Hansen, 2006), and even biomedical researchers (Fox, Entringer, Buss, Dehaene, & Wadhwa, 2015). Across disciplines, acculturation is generally understood as a process that occurs when two or more cultures interact together (Rosenbaum et al., 2009), which often results in individuals adopting the attitudes, values, customs, beliefs, and behaviours of another culture (Clark & Hofess, 1998).

An early definition of acculturation was provided by anthropologists Redfield et al., (1936) who described acculturation as, “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.” (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149). Perhaps the most prolific and predominantly cited acculturation scholar is the Canadian psychologist John Berry, who wrote that acculturation is, “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members.” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Thus, acculturation is a process that reciprocally impacts both the migrating group and the receiving culture.

#### ACCULTURATION MODELS

##### *The Ecological-Cultural-Behavioural Model*

The most well-recognized model of acculturation in the psychology literature is the ecological-cultural-behavioural model, frequently referred to as “Berry’s Model” (for a content analysis of acculturation research, see Yoon, Langrehr, & Ong, 2011). This model was originally developed to understand better the extent to which Western culture influenced “traditional peoples” (i.e., First Nations groups in Canada; Berry, 1966, 1970; Berry & Annis, 1974). Berry (1966, 1970) introduced his model of acculturation as a conceptual framework to understand the various ways that individuals move across what he described as eco-cultural settings. Berry proposed that the behaviour of an individual from a specific ecology or culture would typically fall within a certain range of variation depending on their culture of origin (Berry, 1974). According to this model, the various strategies that individuals choose to navigate the novel eco-cultural setting are called *acculturation strategies*. The eco-cultural framework is used to help social science researchers explore the interrelationship between cultures, ethnicity, sociopolitical landscape, and behaviour.

To adapt to the challenges of acculturation, Berry posited that individuals from the non-dominant culture engage in one of the following four acculturation strate-

gies: assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration (Berry, 1980). Berry proposed that these four acculturation strategies result from two separate issues: (a) the extent to which the individual intends to maintain (or abandon) their culture of origin, and (b) the level to which the individual desires to participate in the dominant culture. Using this two-dimensional organization, Berry categorized individuals into one of the four aforementioned acculturation orientations. Specifically, Berry (1980) categorized individuals who express neither interest in maintaining their culture of origin nor participation in the dominant culture as engaging in a *marginalization* orientation. Those who choose to identify exclusively with their culture of origin while resisting behaviours associated with the dominant culture are categorized as engaging in a *separation* orientation. Conversely, those who prefer not to maintain their culture of origin and orient exclusively towards participation with the dominant culture are considered to have an *assimilation* orientation. Those individuals who choose to maintain their culture of origin as well as participate in the new culture are considered to have an *integration* orientation. The categorization of these constructs creates a 2X2 quadrant model based on positive or negative attitudes toward the culture of origin and the dominant culture (Figure 1). Rather than referring to the above model as the eco-cultural model or Berry’s model, I will be referencing the model according to its organization into quadrants; hence the term Quadrant Model will be used (Rudmin, 2006).

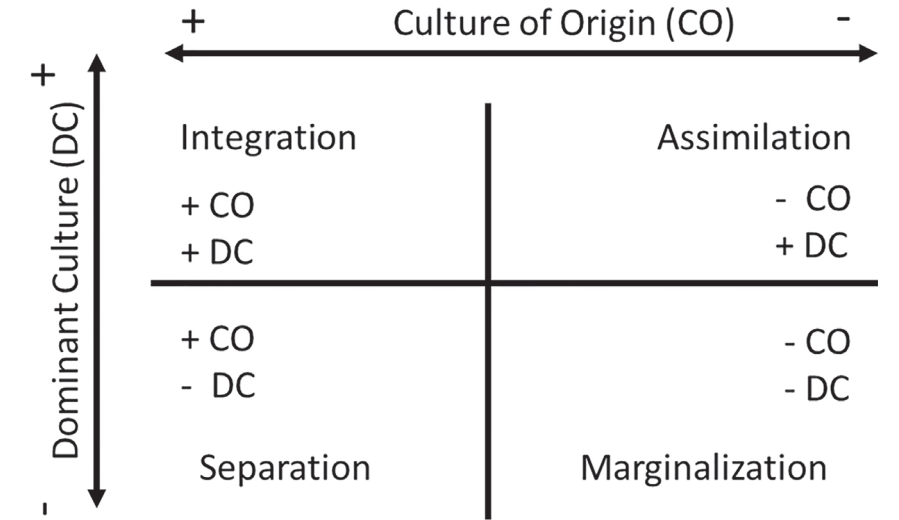


Figure 1. Depiction of the two-dimensional organization of the four quadrants in the Eco-Cultural Model. Integration (++) represents positive attitudes towards culture of origin (CO) and Dominant Culture (DC). Assimilation (-+) represents negative attitudes towards CO and positive towards DC. Separation (+-) represents positive attitudes towards CO and negative towards DC. Marginalization (-- ) represents negative attitudes towards CO and DC.

Berry & Annis, (1974) identified that the process of acculturation can be a significant psychological stressor for the nondominant or migrant group, and subsequently developed an acculturative stress model. Importantly, Berry described how individual variability in acculturation strategies is a form of psychological adaptation or coping with the stress of migration that differentially affects mental health outcomes over time. Additionally, he identified how acculturative stress was proportionally related to the behavioural disparity between the groups in contact (Berry & Annis, 1974). For example, individuals from a traditional hunter-gather culture were more likely to engage in a marginalization strategy and report higher levels of psychosomatic stress than individuals from more stratified societies (e.g., agrarian tribes). Other researchers have also identified that the greater the cultural distance, the greater the identity conflict that migrants will exhibit (Ward, 2007; Lin, 2008).

### *Biculturalism*

More recently, the term “bicultural” has appeared in the acculturation literature (Birman, 1998; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Bicultural individuals are usually described as people who have internalized two cultures to some extent, such that they are actively engaged in both their culture of origin and the new culture (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). Although the term biculturalism seems to be synonymous with Berry’s (1980) integration acculturation orientation (orientation to both cultures), the literature on biculturalism describes in fuller detail how individuals can switch between cultures to guide their thoughts and behaviours depending on the context. The ability to contextually switch between cultures is a concept described as *frame switching* (Hong et al., 2000). Others have described bicultural individuals as having contextually alternating cultures (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

The main difference between the quadrant model and bicultural model is that the quadrant model proposes that, although there may be some contextual fluidity, individuals will ultimately choose one strategy, while the bicultural literature suggests that individuals will differentially choose to either engage in their culture of origin or the new culture depending on the situation. The dominant discourse in acculturation research is focused on either the quadrant model or variations of the model such as the study of bicultural identity formation; therefore, acculturation research that has not used these paradigms will be omitted from the discussion. The following section will provide a critique of the quadrant and bicultural models.

## CRITIQUE OF QUADRANT AND BICULTURAL MODELS

To date, the quadrant theory of acculturation has allowed for extensive qualitative and quantitative research to be conducted on the process of acculturation and has provided a platform from which acculturation constructs, methods, and findings can be critically examined. The quadrant and bicultural models have played a

pinnacle role in the psychological understanding of the acculturation process, introducing the concept of acculturation as a complex process that is dependent on individual differences as well as the role that one's ecology and culture contribute to acculturation strategies. However, contemporary researchers have identified several concerns with quadrant-type models of acculturation (see Rudmin, 2006). The following section will provide a systematic critique of the quadrant models that address many of the identified concerns that include the assumption of universal behavioural strategies, the notion of fixed strategies, the problem with linearity, the question of individual agency, considerations of cultural overlap and mutual exclusion, Eurocentric orientation, psychometric problems, consideration of cultural transformations, and the operationalization of culture.

### *Assumption of Universality*

A major concern with the four-quadrant categorization of acculturation is that acculturation is conceptualized as a linear process leading to one of four possible outcomes that become fixed over time. This reductive notion of acculturation tends to minimize the complexity of acculturation, pigeonhole identities, and in the case of maladaptive strategies, pathologize individual behaviour. Although Berry and Sam (1997) recognized that there might be considerable variation amongst individuals and groups undergoing acculturation, they argued that the underlying psychological processes are essentially the same. As Bhatia and Anjali (2009) have noted, foundational to this idea is an assumption of psychological universality. However, based on previous research that identifies the strong influence of culture on psychological processes such as emotional appraisal (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012; Shao, Doucet, & Caruso, 2014), the strategies that individuals engage in throughout the acculturation process are also strongly influenced by the values of the culture of origin. The influence of the culture of origin on basic psychological processes such as emotional appraisal is not well explained or explored in the quadrant models.

### *Fixed Strategies*

Quadrant models inherently confine individual agency as these models eventually funnel individuals to one fixed type of acculturation strategy. However, in-depth qualitative research conducted by Bhatia and Anjali (2009) found that acculturation strategies are not necessarily fixed and that individuals will change strategies depending upon changes in social or political environments. Bhatia and Anjali argued that individual acculturation is neither straightforward and linear nor universal or ever complete. For example, research exploring the acculturation process of new immigrants to New Zealand found acculturation strategies to be much more transactional, and noted that individuals shift their acculturation strategies "... minute by minute, hour by hour, as they engage in everyday occupations with mainstream society" (Nayar, 2015, p. 1151).

### *Linearity*

The linearity found in quadrant models also suggests that individuals move from culture A to culture B, whereas in the millennial context of migration and rapid globalization there are a growing number of transnational and multinational individuals (Hermans & Kempen, 1998), diasporic communities (Bhatia & Anjali, 2009), sojourners such as international students (Arthur & Collins, 2010), and displaced peoples (e.g., refugees) who do not reflect such a simple trajectory from culture A to B. Not only is cultural movement considered linear in the quadrant model, the psychological process is conceptualized as directional with A (behavioural shift) → B (psychological shift) = C (acculturation strategy) (Berry, 2005). Again, this linear trajectory does not take into account that perhaps A and B could occur in opposite directions: a psychological shift could produce a behavioural shift. Research by Djuraskovic and Arthur (2009) identified the acculturation process for refugees as a multifaceted and lifelong process. The quadrant categorization positions culture as a closed system that is nation-bound and stable rather than an open and dynamic system. It does not acknowledge the fluidity of political, economic, religious, and social factors that can shift cultural behaviour over days, months, or years. Thus, acculturation in the millennial context should be considered increasingly complex with considerable movement and fluctuation over time.

### *Erroneous Assumptions of Agency*

The quadrant model also suggests that the acculturating individuals are necessarily the ones “choosing” their orientation. This simplified perspective suggests that acculturation happens in a contextual vacuum and those who engage in a marginalization or separation strategy are choosing a maladaptive coping strategy. However, it may well be the case that acculturating individuals face systemic barriers that prevent them from interacting with the dominant culture even if they would choose to do so (Nayar, 2015). A contraindication that individuals choose a marginalization orientation is provided by Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) who asked a follow-up question to individuals who indicated a marginalization strategy. Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) found that despite identifying with a marginalization strategy, *all* participants in the study indicated a preference for the integration strategy, even those who were categorized as having a marginalization orientation when using acculturation scales. Thus, it may be that systemic barriers imposed by the receiving country prevent migrants from implementing an integration strategy.

### *Cultural Overlap and Mutual Exclusion*

The quadrant model also implies that cultural identities have little or no overlap and identifying with one is mutually exclusive of another. Even in the integration or bicultural orientation, the culture of origin is considered maintained in some areas while the new culture is adopted in other domains, suggesting that the individual still chooses between the two and the choice of one excludes the other in that particular domain. Indeed, there are situations where one value or



belief truly is mutually exclusive of another and culture switching, or bicultural behaviour, would not be possible. For example, one could not be both a theist and an atheist or a vegetarian and a meat eater. However, as previously discussed, we can no longer consider cultural identities as polarized entities. There are also many situations when the values, beliefs, and behaviours (VBBs) of two or more cultures can be in harmony with one another. In the quadrant models, neither the fluidity of cultural identities nor the impossibility of culture switching in certain situations are adequately addressed.

### *Eurocentric Orientation*

The very research foundation of the quadrant model does not reflect the millennial context of migration. Upon its inception, the eco-cultural model was primarily concerned with “acculturative influences which [sic] bear upon traditional peoples.” (Berry & Annis, 1974; p. 387). Berry and Annis (1974) categorized non-dominant persons as individuals or groups identifying with “traditional” culture and behaviour. As such, traditional cultures are described as those from hunter-gatherer cultures with low social stratification. Again, this research foundation may not be applicable in the millennial context.

In particular, due to globalization and the unprecedented rate of social change over the past century, there are very few extant hunter-gatherer cultures. Thus, in the millennial context, the idea of a purely traditional culture is somewhat dated. In this context, the typical migrant to Canada is a well-educated and/or qualified professional from a highly stratified culture. Furthermore, one would be remiss not to consider that individuals who choose to leave their country of origin may already be considered less traditional and more open to embracing a new culture and experience if the host country is amicable to such engagement. Although there has been a shift in acculturation research from focusing primarily on the influence of European colonization of indigenous peoples to those sojourning or migrating (Berry, 2005), the model still reflects the original Eurocentric orientation.

### *Acculturation Stress Model Reference Group*

Regarding the acculturation stress model, at a community level it makes sense that acculturative stress will be proportionally related to the behavioural disparity between the groups in contact. To come to this conclusion, Berry and Annis (1974) compared acculturation strategies and level of psychosomatic symptoms, indicators of marginality, deviance (from cultural norms), and social attitudes amongst First Nations groups. Indeed, First Nations peoples are an important demographic in Canada, and the stress of colonization cannot be overlooked. However, the experience of First Nations people is arguably more akin to cultural genocide inflicted by the invading European settlers (Mako, 2012) and, therefore, it seems inappropriate to reference these groups to identify universal acculturation strategies—especially if there is an underlying assumption that individuals choose their acculturation strategy. Using First Nations groups seems to be an inappropriate comparison to millennial migrants to Canada when, as previously discussed, most individuals immigrate to Canada voluntarily.



### *Psychometrics*

Several psychometric problems with how acculturation is measured have also been identified (Rudmin, 2006; Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001; Ward, 2007; Ward & Kus, 2012). Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh (2001) argued that the construct of marginalization is confounded by the convoluted use of language in the marginalization scale, while the psychometrics of the acculturation inventory violate the norms of psychometrics by using double-barreled questions. Rudmin and Ahmadzadeh also identified that acculturation research regularly produces data with strong and positive correlations between the quadrants (e.g., between integration and separation domains), showing that individuals contradict themselves when defining intergroup relations. The use of current acculturation psychometrics to identify individual preference for the integration strategy has also come into question when measured by standard psychometrics.

For example, Ward and Kus (2012) found that when independent scales were used, the preference for integration collapses. Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind (2006) also reported that although individuals preferred an integration orientation when using the integration scale, 64% of those who favoured integration still fell below the standardized mean and above the scale midpoint and were therefore classified as non-integrationist. Sam (1995) reported test-retest reliability for the measures of integration that use double-barreled questions to be low, at  $r = .55$  (p. 245). The measures previously used to support the argument that those who engage in an integration strategy have the best mental health outcomes have also come into question. Rudmin (2009) has noted weak and contradicting relationships between acculturation strategies and mental health outcomes.

### *Cultural Transformations*

Although quadrant models recognize that both the receiving culture and the novel culture are influenced by one another to varying degrees, the recursive nature of prolonged cultural contact was not fully developed in the quadrant models. More recently, Wong, Wong, and Scott (2006) proposed that the ways individuals adapt to their host culture can be expanded to consider the ways that cultures can be transformed at a national level in response to cultural stressors. Wong et al. (2006) introduced the idea of the positive psychology of cultural transformation at the national level. It is theoretically and historically supported that cultural transformation can occur as an adaptation to social stressors experienced by entire nations. Wong et al. described this as a form of macro-stress management that reorganizes whole systems rather than attempting to solve isolated or specific problems. This could be as extreme as a regime change or a political shift such as was observed in the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump.

As nearly a quarter of the Canadian population identifies with a non-dominant group, Canadian acculturation research should include the study of national transformations that may be required to respond to cultural stressors. On a global scale, with the current influx of Syrian refugees several countries, in particular places such

as Greece and Turkey, would likely benefit from a better understanding of how they may need to reorganize at a national level in response to this sudden influx.

### *Operationalizing “Culture”*

Perhaps the most important consideration in assessing the utility of quadrant models in the millennial context is to note that the understanding of culture itself has changed since these models were developed. In the modernist era, culture was generally understood as the VBBs of a particular race or ethnicity. In the millennial context, culture is not necessarily contained within national, ethnic, or racial boundaries. For example, relatively recent literature in psychology has recognized culture as encompassing broader dimensions such as sexual orientation, gender, religion, abilities, socioeconomic status, rural/urban dweller, and other social identities, as well as their intersections (Collins & Arthur, 2010). These aspects of cultural identity are not captured in the quadrant model. Sam, Vedder, Ward, and Horenczyk (2006) argued that the quadrant model is more nuanced than previously thought and should consider factors such as ethnic origin, social class, age at the time of migration, receiving country, and gender.

#### SUGGESTED REVISIONS TO QUADRANT AND BICULTURAL MODELS

Although several problems with the quadrant and bicultural models have been identified, they remain the dominant discourse in acculturation research. The following suggestions are proposed as a way of re-conceptualizing current models to address the concerns mentioned above:

1. Operationalize culture to include the intersectionality of ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, ability, social identities, and any other salient factors to individual identity.
2. Avoid assumptions about assigned group membership by recognizing that all individual behaviour falls on a continuum, regardless of the culture of origin or cultural affiliation.
3. Recognize the fluidity of cultural identity over time and context.
4. Recognize that acculturation is not necessarily linear and that individual attitudes and behaviours may change according to changing psychological and/or environmental interactions.
5. Avoid using acculturation theory to essentialize identity by acknowledging that individuals continue to change and develop throughout their life course.
6. Stop pathologizing acculturation strategies (i.e., presuming people “choose” maladaptive strategies). Identify that all people desire self-actualization and that systemic barriers may be preventing a preferred (i.e., adaptive) strategy.
7. Recognize the influence of political, social, historical, and religious factors that contribute to behavioural outcomes, taking into consideration that the process of acculturation does not happen in a contextual vacuum.

8. Recognize that individuals may have acculturated to several cultures before arriving in Canada. Thus, acculturation models need to consider the multifaceted aspects of transnational, sojourning, diasporic, refugee, and multinational individuals.
9. Recognize that globalization minimizes cultural distance.
10. Identify that human behaviours fall on a continuum regardless of the culture of origin. In particular, to recognize that there can be overlapping values and cultural identities expressed even in the most disparate of cultures (Schwartz, 1994).
11. Use only reliable and valid psychometrics to assess acculturation strategies and mental health outcomes.
12. Do not assume that the integration strategy is the most adaptive strategy based on past research that used questionable psychometrics. Re-test if integration strategies result in better mental health using valid and reliable psychometrics.
13. Recognize that beyond individual adaptations, cultural transformations may need to occur to adapt to challenges faced when cultures are in continued contact.
14. Recognize that acculturation introduces cognitive dissonance when VBBs contradict, thereby incorporating cognitive dissonance theory to consider how individuals engage in strategies to resolve cognitive dissonance and establish cultural congruency.

The suggestions provided are intended to help to resituate acculturation theory into the millennial context. The above suggestions take into consideration the utility of the quadrant models while addressing the theoretical and methodological problems previously identified. The next section will outline a revised framework meant to incorporate the above recommendations, and introduce aspects of cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) to consider the cognitive process acculturating individuals may be engaging in, as well as the broader context of social, political, cultural, global, and environmental influences.

#### CULTURAL CONGRUENCY FRAMEWORK OF ACCULTURATION

The cultural congruency framework (CCF) is proposed to explore acculturation from a positive psychology and strength-based lens, which reorients explorations of human phenomena from a deficit orientation that identifies pathologies to the study of strengths and qualities that enable individuals and communities to thrive (Tayyab, 2015). The CCF focuses on adaptive strategies used in the process of navigating new cultures in the millennial context. The proposed framework recognizes different types of adaptations that can still be loosely categorized using the operational definitions of marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration. However, these strategies are not viewed as fixed, universal, or exclusive of one another. The CCF addresses, directly or indirectly, all of the identified concerns to the quadrant and bicultural models previously described.

Also, the proposed framework takes into account how the process of acculturation introduces cultural incongruence when the VBBs of cultures are not aligned. At an individual level, this incongruence introduces cognitive dissonance, which is a mental state that occurs when an individual holds conflicting or inconsistent knowledge leading to psychological conflict (Festinger, 1957). The following section introduces a CCF to consider the various strategies which individuals may engage in to resolve such dissonance and experience cultural congruency.

### *Overview*

The CCF posits that individuals will engage in whichever acculturation strategy helps to reconcile cognitive dissonance. Individuals will choose their acculturation strategy based on the VBBs that are most salient to them in a specific context (Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION

When individuals leave their country of origin, it inevitably introduces situations where the VBBs of their culture of origin differ from the new culture, introducing cultural incongruence. When an individual experiences cultural incongruence, and simultaneously finds themselves in a situation where they have to decide which culture to align with, cognitive tension is introduced that leads to cognitive dissonance. The CCF proposes that at this juncture an individual chooses which culture, or which aspects of a given cultural expectation, to align with and engages in an acculturation strategy that serves to reconcile cognitive dissonance. The CCF posits that acculturating individuals contextually and situationally change alliances according to core value alignment.

Humans are arguably the best species at adapting to novel environments, and while quadrant models identify individual coping strategies as either adaptive (e.g., integration or assimilation) or maladaptive (marginalization or separation), the proposed framework identifies adaptive strategies as fluid and contextual. This framework for understanding the acculturation process recognizes that acculturation potentially involves the introduction of several situations that create cognitive dissonance. The more disparate the cultures of origin are to the host culture, the greater the cultural incongruence and the more likely it is that an individual will experience cognitive dissonance. As the contemporary authority on cognitive dissonance theory explains:

We do not like inconsistency. It upsets us, and it drives us to action to reduce our inconsistency. The greater the inconsistency we face, the more agitated we will be and the more motivated we will be to reduce it. (Cooper, 2007, p. 2)

To resolve inner conflict, individuals will choose a variety of strategies such as seeking congruent information, modifying their attitude, or trivializing. For example, an individual from a patriarchal culture may consider talking to the opposite sex inappropriate and feel uncomfortable in situations where the

individual must engage professionally with a member of the opposite sex. Due to perceptions about values in the new culture around professional equality, individuals may choose to modify their beliefs around talking to the opposite sex to justify engaging in a new behaviour, which will allow for them to resolve cognitive dissonance. If individuals do not adjust their personal beliefs and values around engaging with the opposite sex, cognitive tension will remain high. Research suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in the behavioural aspects of the new culture before integrating new cultural values (Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980), as values are typically the last to be influenced (Marín, 1992).

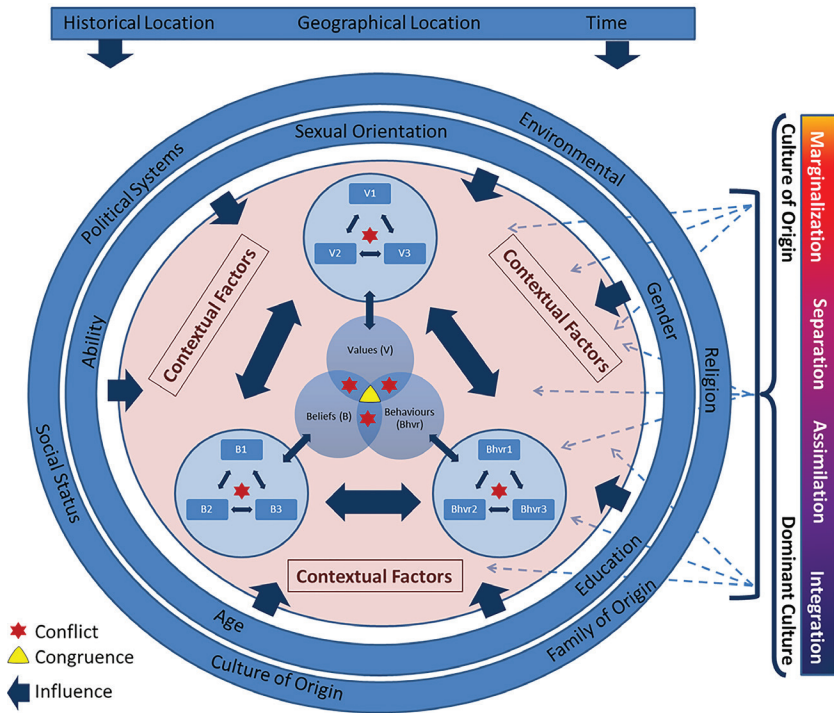


Figure 2. *Cultural Congruence Process*. Cultural congruence, represented by the yellow triangle, occurs when values, beliefs, and behaviours (VBBs) are not in conflict. VBBs are influenced by several factors such as the ones noted in the outer circles. When VBBs do not line up it creates conflict (i.e., cognitive dissonance). Individuals seek to resolve cognitive dissonance by aligning VBBs. The extent to which VBBs line up with the culture of origin and the dominant culture lead to cultural congruency or incongruency depending on the preferred strategy of the individual and the alignment of their VBBs.

Congruency is typically considered exclusively at the individual level (Festinger, 1957); however, individuals may also seek to establish congruency at a group level (McKimmie, 2015). Previous studies have demonstrated the complex psychological processes individuals and groups engage in to reconcile cognitive dissonance (van Veen, Krug, Schooler, & Carter, 2009). Considering acculturative stress regarding the psychological process which subsequently manifests in behaviours, the CCF expands our interpretation of the acculturation process from a simple causal relationship to a more nuanced interaction. Recognizing the psychological tension that can arise when conflicting cultural expectations create psychological dissonance helps to elucidate the interaction of human agency, culture, and systems that influence the behaviours and attitudes an individual engages in to reconcile cultural incongruence. It is well established in psychology that reconciling cognitive dissonance and experiencing congruency increases overall life satisfaction (Pichl & Clark, 1984).

At the time when acculturation theories were developed, culture was understood as overarching structures governed by constant and interrelated laws (Blackburn, 1972). This context may explain the gravitation towards universalism and essentialism implicated by the quadrant model. However, in the millennial context, constructivist perspectives (e.g., Strong, 2014) are useful to inform acculturation processes. A constructivist perspective takes into consideration that cultural identities are contextual, flexible, interactive, and continually adaptive (or maladaptive).

The CCF acknowledges the phenomena of biological, social, political, cultural, and other salient factors that contribute to an individual's acculturation experience. This framework recognizes the complexity of human experience and the impact of factors that lead to or interrupt cultural congruency. For example, a woman may express VBBs that are based on religion and culture of origin such as wearing a niqab (i.e., a full religious covering). In her culture of origin, wearing a niqab is culturally congruent with her VBBs. However, in Canada, systemic pressures to remove the niqab for situations such as participating in the citizenship ceremony can introduce cultural incongruency and would cause cognitive dissonance if the desire to become a Canadian citizen (and all of the VBBs related to her initiative) conflicts with her religious beliefs and behaviours that include wearing a niqab. To reconcile this dissonance the woman must choose to either participate in the citizenship ceremony (i.e., to assimilate to the behaviours of the dominant culture) or to separate from the dominant Canadian culture and behaviours to maintain the beliefs and behaviours of her religion and culture of origin. If the religious conviction is stronger than the desire to engage in the dominant culture, then an individual will resolve her dissonance by choosing to maintain her religious beliefs and behaviours. She would then engage in a separation strategy.

Systemic discrimination such as limiting cultural or religious clothing forces individuals to choose between their culture of origin/religion and the dominant culture. This is obviously an example of the ways that an individual is forced into an either/or strategy when, if the systemic barriers were removed (i.e., allowing



women to wear a niqab at the citizenship ceremony), it would not be necessary to choose between cultures and force a strategy that leads to either marginalization, separation, or assimilation (note that integration is not an option because, in this scenario, she can not participate in the ceremony while wearing her niqab). In this type of situation, cognitive dissonance would remain high, leading to elevated levels of acculturative stress. If systemic barriers were removed integration would be a more likely choice. In the situation described above the individual may also be at risk of being marginalized from her culture of origin if she removes the niqab, or be marginalized by the Canadian society if she refuses to remove the niqab. Conversely, if an individual values participation in the dominant culture more than maintaining the values and behaviour of the culture of origin they may choose to abandon the behaviour of the religion and/or culture of origin to participate fully in the dominant society. This could be done in one domain (e.g., changing behaviour) or in all (e.g., adapting VBBs). Regardless of which acculturative strategy is used, if cognitive dissonance is not resolved, the level of acculturative stress would remain high.

The CCF identifies that individual strategies are situationally variable. For example, an individual could experience cultural congruency by engaging in a strategy such as assimilation in a situation where personal values and beliefs are more aligned with the Canadian culture than their culture of origin. An example of this may be that a mother from a culture that practices female circumcision chooses to align with Canadian VBBs related to such practices and abandon or reject practices from her culture of origin when her daughter comes of age for female circumcision (i.e. assimilate by accepting Canadian practices and abandoning the practice of female circumcision). However, in other domains, such as religion, the same individual may adhere to beliefs or practices contrary to the dominant culture (e.g., she may adhere to praying five times per day), and thus in religious domains experience cultural congruency when using a separation strategy.

This framework does not assume that individuals experience better mental health outcomes if they choose the integration strategy. Instead, the CCF posits that acculturative stress is reduced when cultural congruency is achieved, and that this could be achieved based on integration, separation, or assimilation strategies. Marginalization is not assumed to be the choice of the individual but due instead to systemic barriers that prevent an individual from experiencing cultural congruency. Aligning with cognitive dissonance theory, psychological tension will remain high when an individual engages in a behaviour that is incongruent with their values or if it has negative consequences. In the context of cultural norms choosing to engage in those that conflict with the dominant culture (or vice versa) may lead to negative consequences such as social isolation, embarrassment, harassment, or discrimination. According to dissonance theory if an individual determines the consequences of their behaviour to be aversive, then the individual will explore alternative possibilities to either accept or reject responsibility for these consequences. Perhaps ironically, dissonance increases when a person perceives freedom to choose in which behaviour to engage (Cooper, 2007). If an individual



is placed in a high choice situation, they will consider alternative behaviours to minimize the aversive feelings resulting from their behaviours.

As is illustrated in Figure 2, both internal and external factors are situationally influenced and ever-changing. The revised framework recognizes the dynamic interactions of multiple factors, including gender, the culture of origin, socioeconomic status, level of education, religion, sexual orientation, and a range of systemic factors that influence individual VBBs. External factors are understood as fluid and change according to geographic location, political influence, cultural transformations, historical location, globalization, etcetera. Internal factors are also influenced by several elements such as genetics, biology, neurochemistry, learning, spirituality, and the psychological process of appraisal and alignment.

### *Implications for Professional Practice*

This revised framework for acculturation has significant implications for counselling psychology. First, in using this framework, counsellors would seek to understand the salient VBBs of the individual's culture concerning the situation that is causing cognitive dissonance leading to acculturative distress. Counsellors can inquire to learn which areas (i.e., VBBs) are culturally incongruent and subsequently causing acculturative distress. By identifying the underlying cause of the acculturative distress, counsellors can help the individual explore scenarios to help reconcile the dissonance and create cultural congruency.

Conversely, if the VBBs are irreconcilable, counsellors can help normalize the situation for the client (i.e., assure them that the cause of their distress is justified to avoid blaming the client for experiencing distress). Once the client decides which behaviour is most congruent with their values and beliefs, counsellors can support the client in navigating the implications of aligning with either their culture of origin or the new culture. In situations where the client faces systemic barriers to establishing congruency, counsellors would ideally engage in advocacy work for their client. The practitioner may also seek to explore other resiliency factors with their client to help them cope with the systemic stressors.

As provided in the examples above, this framework aligns well with culturally-infused counselling practices (Collins & Arthur, 2010). These core competencies of culturally-infused counselling as described by Collins and Arthur (2010) are to (a) establish trusting and respectful relationships with clients that take into account cultural identities, (b) work with clients to develop salient and responsive counselling goals that reflect their cultural identity, (c) collaborate with clients to establish client and counsellor tasks that are responsive of cultural identity, and (d) engage in social justice activities to directly influence the systems that negatively affect the lives of non-dominant populations. The model helps to identify where individual agency can be explored, but also challenges counsellors to recognize systemic barriers and (ideally) engage in social justice activities to address these barriers.

The proposed framework also necessitates that counsellors maintain a client-centred collaborative stance concerning acculturation strategies. Rather than trying

to impose an integration strategy on individuals, counsellors can collaborate with clients to help set goals concerning reconciling cognitive dissonance, increasing cultural congruency and therefore minimizing acculturation distress. Counsellors can inquire about the influence of various interpersonal, organizational, and systemic influences (Collins & Arthur, 2010). This form of inquiry has been found to enhance the therapeutic relationship and facilitate change (Pope-Davis et al., 2002).

Feminist critics argue that traditional psychotherapy often fails to consider the broader social context of human psychology (Jordan, 2003). Jordan (2003) argued that traditional psychotherapies are both androcentric, representing the White, heterosexual male as the norm, and Eurocentric, viewing the values of non-dominant cultures as deviant or pathological. These norms are represented in the valuing of autonomy, independence, and separation. The CCF is intended to be value-neutral regarding the culture of origin and keeps the individual's need for congruency central to the counselling process. Helping an individual develop strategies to reconcile cognitive dissonance honours diversity while recognizing the systemic barriers that may be contributing to acculturative distress.

Finally, this model recognizes that systems may negatively affect the lives of non-dominant populations. As counsellors, it is important to consider our influence as professionals to advocate for social justice and address the systemic issues that negatively impact mental health. Counsellors have been both invited and challenged to use their professional position as a platform to engage in advocacy to promote change in the systems that negatively affect the lives of non-dominant populations (e.g., Arthur & Collins, 2010; Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). For example, if a client is not receiving adequate obstetric care due to Eurocentric practices such as not considering male-female interactions, counsellors can contact the primary care network to communicate the concern. It may be that the primary care providers were not aware of the cultural beliefs and the client, due to being marginalized in that situation, may not have felt empowered to express her concerns. Counsellors can also help the client explore options for more culturally appropriate care such as explaining the option to request a female obstetrician as she may not have been aware that she could change care providers. The above examples provide a starting place to improve counselling practice to align with a theoretical model.

#### CONCLUSION

The transition between countries—whether for work, study, asylum, economic opportunity, or family—introduces exposure to new cultures, inevitably initiating an acculturation process. The study of acculturation has evolved from an anthropological curiosity to one of the most researched subjects in the field of multicultural psychology. As discussed in this paper, the dominant discourse in the acculturation literature does not adequately address the complexity of the acculturation process in the millennial context. Just as individuals change and develop throughout their life-course, acculturation theory requires revisions to

reflect more recent developments in the discipline of psychology. This framework considers how the historical and geographical location of an individual, as well as the genetic and systemic influences that have shaped their own cultural identity, influence the strategies in which an individual will engage. Additionally, this framework identifies contextual factors that situationally influence individual behaviour.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this framework is that it incorporates a well-established theory of cognition, providing a theoretically sound framework for counsellors to help clients reconcile acculturative stress. Using this framework researchers and practitioners can identify how an individual may engage in different acculturation strategies based on all of the influences mentioned earlier. The proposed CCF offers a contemporary framework to situate acculturation theory in the millennial context. Counsellors are encouraged to utilize this framework for working with individuals and groups in the process of acculturation and to test the utility of the main tenets proposed in the framework through additional research.

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### About the Author

Alexandra M. Robinson, Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology, University of Calgary. Alexandra Robinson is a postdoctoral intern in clinical psychology at University California Santa Barbara. Her main research interests are in stress, coping, immigration, and acculturation.

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Address correspondence to Alexandra Robinson, 2101 Chapala Street, Santa Barbara, California, USA, 93105. Email: [robinson-a@ucsb.edu](mailto:robinson-a@ucsb.edu)