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Universal Principles of Intercultural Relations are a Basis for Culturally-Appropriate Research, Policies and Practices

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Reading the two commentaries (Birman, 2022; Schwartz & Cobb, 2022) has provided us with an opportunity to reflect further on many of the issues confronting researchers and policy makers in the domains of immigration, acculturation, and settlement. We are very grateful to the commenters for their direct and precise observations, questions, and suggestions, which greatly complement and clarify some places in Berry et al.'s meta-analytic review of the MIRIPS project (2022). Below we make some comments of our own on the main points raised by the commenters.

Stance with Respect to Positivism and Constructivism

With respect to how to understand human behavior, Berry has previously addressed this issue in his response to a discussion of “Critical Acculturation” (see Berry, 2009). He noted that there are two possible stances in psychology:

“1. Human beings are part of the natural world; as members of a single species, we share basic psychological processes and capacities. These commonalities allow for intercultural understanding, and for making comparisons. One task for psychology is to search for these commonalities, as part of our search for an understanding of our common humanity.

2. Human beings are part of the cultural world; we make various cultures, and are shaped by these cultures. One task for psychology is to sample these variations in order to appreciate our magnificent variety; another task is to employ them in comparative research in our search for our common humanity.

My claim is that both propositions are true... In my view, this ‘either/or’ position seriously limits the possibility of attaining a comprehensive knowledge of the processes and outcomes of acculturation.” (p. 361)

Berry's position is that the use of approaches from both the natural and cultural traditions of research are necessary; hence, we take both positions in the MIRIPS project. While we adopt the view that we are all the same at a deep level, we have previously argued that context matters in both intercultural psychology (Berry, 2006) and cross-cultural psychology (Berry, 2022). In short, we agree with Birman (2022) who writes persuasively that the interpretive stance is valuable, but we consider that it is not more valuable than the ‘positivist’ one. Our position involves going beyond the implicit position of constructivism that the *socially constructed* is arbitrary, that a social construct can take any form. In our view, natural and cultural evolution select adaptive variants of social order and social organization. That is, they are not constructed arbitrarily or by mere by convention. We do not agree with the implicit position of constructivism that a social construct can take any form; instead, we view them as being adaptive to context through the process of selection.

That is, we consider that acculturation and intercultural relations are developed and displayed in variable ways across cultures, ways that permit people to individually and collectively adapt to both their long-standing habitats, and to the external influences that impinge on and change them. This view is captured in the *ecocultural framework* (Berry, 2018) that proposes that these adaptations are rooted in two core principles: (1) psychological processes are universally shared by all cultural populations, and (2) these processes become variably developed and expressed in behaviors during the process of adaptation over time (historically) and during the individual's lifetime. Thus, Birman's suggestion includes only the second perspective, which could be reduced to intergroup dynamics that was well- outlined by Schwartz and Cobb (2022).

Universality. We note that Birman (2022) also questions the claim for universality, “that processes and relationships among variables studied are universal across societies and independent of context” (p. 2). We see two elements in this statement. First, although we do claim that the basic underlying processes of acculturation and adaptation are universal, we also agree that the development and expression of them are context-dependent. But second, we also recognize that while the processes are universal, the relationships among variables are highly context-dependent. To justify these claims, we need to make explicit our use of the concept of universality.

First, we consider that all human beings are members of the same biological species, and share all the processes and capacities that define this species. Except for abnormalities in physiology or anatomy, we do not know of any exceptions to this claim. We know of no cross-cultural study that has shown there to be a psychological process in one cultural group that cannot be found in another group. Nor conversely, no group has been found in the cross-cultural literature that lacks a basic psychological process.

Second, all human expressions of behavior are shaped by the ecological and cultural contexts in which they develop and are now exhibited. Thus, our view of universality is one of commonality at the basic level of processes, with variability in the competence and performance (to use the distinctions of Chomsky in linguistics). That is, we do not adopt an absolutist, nor a relativist perspective in attempting to understand human diversity; the universalist perspective occupies a middle-ground between them.

The issue of relationships among variables is more complex. We do not argue, nor do we find, that relationships among variables are constant across cultural groups. We do note that some relationships are found more often than not, but they are not always found. These relationships include those that underlay our three hypotheses that are evaluated in the MIRIPS project: (1) *security* is related to positive intercultural attitudes; (2) *contact* is related to the acceptance of others; (3) the *integration* acculturation strategy is related to better adaptation. The cases where these relationships are not found reveal the probable impact of contextual factors.

Dominant and Non-Dominant Groups

The use of terms such as ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ in intercultural psychology has two problems: it focuses on demographic size rather than on other features of interacting communities such as their cultural attributes and their relative power.

First, with respect to the cultural features of groups, we argue that these are important cultural features that people develop and bring to their intercultural encounters (see Figure 2 in Berry et al., 2022). In the MIRIPS project, cultural and societal features of the samples are provided for the use of readers to understand ‘where they are coming from’.

Second, with respect to the relative power of interacting groups, we have used the terms ‘dominant’ and ‘non-dominant’ in the MIRIPS project to draw attention to the issue of who has the right to decide how to try to live together. The issue of power was part of the original conception of acculturation strategies (Berry, 1980), and has continued in our usage ever since. In one respect, the majority/minority usage reflects a conception of a society as being made up of a ‘mainstream’ and many other fringe groups. Berry’s view is rooted in his own society (i.e., Canada) in which there is no single ‘mainstream’; who is dominant and has the power depends on where and when you look. Instead of referring to a ‘mainstream’, a leader of an Indigenous Peoples organization in Canada coined the term ‘larger society’ to capture the notion of a shared civic framework that includes the institutions, laws and economic practices

of the society as a whole, one that is constantly changing. It does not represent any one cultural tradition, but represents many ways of trying to live together in mutual accommodation.

There is no doubt that these different cultural and power feature of the interacting groups are important contextual features influencing the acculturation process. This is why the development and expression of the behaviors of acculturating people are variable, even while (we claim) they are rooted in common processes.

We also agree about the crucial role of status in intercultural relations. For example, we have repeatedly emphasized (Grigoryev et al., 2019; 2021) that the stereotypes of cultural groups result from observations of their daily life's practices, circumstances and outcomes. These are primarily in terms of *vertical inequality* (e.g., prestige and respect) and *perceived status* (e.g., education, professional prestige, connection with crime), which largely shape intercultural relations and in particular acculturation expectations. Moreover, focusing exclusively on intergroup relations *within* countries, the literature often overlooks the status differences *between* countries as an outcome of international inequality (see Grigoryev, 2022).

Policy Implications

Given the above comments on the scientific stance, universality and relative power across interacting groups, we agree with the position of Birman (2022) that the policy implications are likely to vary across acculturation contexts. While we assert the presence of universality (in our usage) in the psychological findings of the MIRIPS project, we still need to take other factors into account when transitioning from the research to practice in our attempts to improve intercultural relations in plural societies. Indeed, we need to deeply understand intergroup the dynamics as noted by Schwartz and Cobb (2022).

First, we may need to assess the presence of the very goal of improving intercultural relations. It may be that in some societies, the goal is to create animosity and conflict among groups (as we see in some current situations). In such a case, reducing security (increasing threat), segregating people (by creating enclaves), and increasing single ingroup identities (by enhancing 'us and them' thinking) may well be the best policy and practice.

In contrast, assuming that the goal of a society is to improve positive mutual acceptance, then it is reasonable to start in any society with what we know works best in other plural societies. Providing a secure place for everyone in the society, increasing the opportunities for intergroup engagement, and promoting multiple identities are more likely to achieve this goal than the opposite policies and practices.

Of course, these principles may not work because they are not appropriate for a particular society; perhaps not all people will share a sufficient level of multicultural ideology, or desire for mutual accommodation. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding of core concepts of a policy such a multiculturalism (resulting in declaring it has failed). Or there may be a lack of financial resources or of political will required to implement the policy.

Thus, we believe that universal principles of intercultural relations are the starting point for both the investigation of cultural dynamics and culturally-appropriate development and implementations of intercultural policies and practices.

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