CULTURAL TRANSITION, INDIVIDUALITY, AND THE ARTS: EXAMINING INDIVIDUALITY IN ACCULTURATION THROUGH A MIXED METHODS APPROACH TO ARTS-INFORMED RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Migrating to a new home often carries some degree of cultural, emotional, and mental plights for immigrants of all ages. Nonetheless, acculturation studies commonly overlook the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth. In addition, prevalent acculturation frameworks fail to acknowledge the presence and role of individuality in this population's acculturation process. This work aims to highlight key findings from the first author's dissertation research employing a mixed-methods approach to arts-informed research to examine the acculturation approaches of 15 immigrant and refugee youth. Through the integration of participant developed drawings, think-aloud responses, and the Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Multicultural Scale for Adolescents (AHIMSA) instrument, those findings highlighted a multidimensional approach to youth acculturation that prioritizes expressions of individuality over overt allegiances to any one cultural paradigm. Additionally, this paper highlights the implications of employing arts-informed approaches to examine complex issues in social sciences

Key words: arts-informed research, mixed methods research, youth acculturation

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture encompasses the very characteristics that allow communities to exist and sustain themselves (Goldbard, 2013). In part, it is for this reason, learning and understanding culture is critical to understanding human nature. It is also why examining cultural transitions or acculturation remains vital in the development of immigrant and refugee youth. The complexities of these cultural transitions extend far beyond the migration to a new home. Experiences of cultural, emotional, and mental plight plague immigrants and refugees of all ages. Even so, the acculturation experiences of immigrant and refugee youth are commonly overlooked.

One of the greatest challenges of migration for immigrant and refugee children is coping with internal and external trials of migrating while simultaneously navigating through the process of building self-identity (Morantz, Rousseau, &Heyman, 2011; Fazel Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). For these youth, developing self-identity is oftentimes dependent upon their cultural group identity (Cavazos-Rehg&Delucia-Waack, 2009). Immigrant and refugee youth are faced with

learning who they are and where they belong in a cultural society they are not yet fully a part of (Aronowitz, 1984). As articulated by Aronowitz (1984), the greatest risk immigrant and refugee youth face may not be deciding which culture group they belong to, but as individuals, if they belong to any group at all.

The challenges faced by migrating immigrant and refugee youth in developing a sense of who they are adds to the complications of examining youth acculturation. Examining acculturation in immigrant and refugee populations that are still developing individually and developmentally requires that we ask questions about culture that extend beyond the observable behaviors that are commonly measured in acculturation instruments. As defined in this work, expressions of individuality are communications of self that do not clearly reflect a cultural paradigm but still represent an important aspect of an individual's identity. While identity and individuality are interrelated, individuality is the core component of identity that separates a person from communities of which they belong and their environment (Barandiaran, Paolo, & Rohde, 2009). Examining this aspect of acculturation requires that we employ methodological approaches that allow for more complex and complete examinations of the experience of young immigrant and refugees. Arts-informed approaches may be a methodological medium by which this task can be accomplished.

Arts informed research is a viable approach for examining acculturation in immigrant and refugee youth because it utilizes holistic approaches to explore various views of reality and lived experiences (Cole & Knowles, 2007; Leavy, 2015). Furthermore, through arts-informed approaches researchers and participants are challenged to explore issues of social and self-awareness that defy stereotypes and dominant ideologies (Finley, 2008; Leavy, 2015). Arts-informed methods not only have potential to mitigate power dynamics in research methods, but also to illuminate theoretical implications.

Using a multiphase mixed method design, this study aimed to address the role of individual expression in the acculturation of immigrant and refugee youth, and how arts-informed research methods contribute to a more comprehensive examination of acculturation in immigrant and refugee youth populations. This examination was conducted by integrating participant developed drawings and think aloud responses with individual scores from the Acculturation, Habits, and Interests, Multicultural Scale for Adolescents (AHIMSA) ((Unger et al., 2002). This article highlights the findings from the arts-informed methods employed in a mixed methods study of the acculturation strategies of immigrant and refugee youth (Edwards, 2017).

2. Literature
Through the vast history of empirical studies that examine cultural transitions, the nuances of the acculturation are better known. Thus, the conceptual models designed to enlighten the complex phenomenon of acculturation have progressed. Where acculturation was once conceptualized as a one-dimensional model in which individuals or groups engaged in cultural transition either adopted the cultures of their host or maintained their own cultural traditions, conceptualizations of acculturation are now dominated by multidimensional conceptual models that acknowledge mutual changes amongst host and migrant populations (Edwards, 2017).
Studies utilizing multidimensional models commonly stressed the conscious deliberate and strategic approaches to cultural transition by immigrating groups. Transitioning away from this trend, contemporary models address the complex and nuanced experiences of the cultural negotiations that

occur during the acculturation process (Nwosu& Barnes, 2013; Stuart & Ward, 2011; Ward, Liu, Fairbairn-Dunlop, & Henderson, 2010).   Research employing multidimensional models of acculturation relies heavily on Berry's (1997) four-dimensional model that centers on the perceived acceptance or rejection of various components of native and adoptive cultures. However, there is a distinct trend within the literature to expand upon this model in order to address the shortcomings within this prominent acculturation framework (Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, &Zagefka, 2014; Carpentier& de la Sablonnière, 2013).

Stuart and Ward (2011) incorporate multidimensional frameworks of acculturation that focus on examining the integration of multiple cultural paradigms as a for those in cultural transitions. Although the foundation of these conceptual frameworks are linked to Berry's (1997) original model, Stuart and Ward (2011) progress the argument for examining the negative aspects of acculturation such as: acculturation stress, problems with adaption, and the psychology influences of acculturation. Other studies have avowed the notion that conceptualizations of cultural transitions should examine acculturation in a more positive light, particularly those related to youth populations. Moving beyond examinations of culture that are solely based on behavior, these studies acknowledge other determinates like national identity, ethnicity, native language usage, national peer contact, family values, attitudes towards acculturation, and positive growth and development (Sirin&Balsano, 2007; Stuart & Ward, 2011; Stuart, Ward, Jose, &Narayann, 2010; Ward, Liu, Fairburn-Dunlop, & Henderson, 2010). Although empirical studies are moving towards a more comprehensive understanding of acculturation, lacking in these advancements are inquiries into how individual values and interests contribute to the acculturation strategies adopted by immigrating youth.

3. Methods
3.1 Participants and Procedures
Employing a purposeful sampling technique, fifteen Nepali, Karen, and Mexican youth attending two community-based afterschool programs agreed to participate in the study. After obtaining participant assent and parental consent, participants were included in the study based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) Participants were fluent in both written and verbal English, (2) Participants were first generation immigrants. (3) Participants must have attended the center(s) for at least one year. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information (i.e., age, gender, nationality) of the participants in the study.

Table 1
Demographic Summary of Participants

	Boy	Girl	Age Range	Immigration Classification
Ethnicity				
Karen	0	5	9-11	Refugee
Nepali	1	0	10	Refugee
Mexican	4	5	6-11	Immigrant

3.2 Arts Informed Approach

The arts-informed data collection was conducted in one, 90 to 120-minute session at two different community based after-school programs. During these sessions, participants were asked to construct a drawing in response to the following prompt:

1. Draw a portrait of yourself. In this portrait include some of your favorite things (hobbies, foods, music, television shows) and some of things/people that are most important to you.

The purpose of this prompt was to encourage participants to reflect on and convey their personal values and interests. While culture was not explicitly addressed, the prompt allowed for participants to include any and all aspects of their values interest they perceived as important and valuable. Ideally, this includes reflections of culture. Furthermore, items such as hobbies, food, and television shows were subjects of items on the AHIMSA scale (Unger et al., 2002) employed for the quantitative stage of analysis. Using similar items in the arts-informed stage of data collection and the quantitative stage allowed us to examine consistencies and inconsistencies in participant responses between these two methods of data collection.

3.3 Think-Aloud Approach

While arts-informed methods can provide a rich source a data, their subjective nature may also produce a great deal of room for error in researcher interpretation. As Cross, Kabel, and Lysack (2006) posit, the interpretation of visual methods is optimized when employed with the researcher alongside the participants who construct them. Guided by this philosophy, we engaged the participants in the think-aloud. Doing so, aided in maximizing the clarity and understanding of the meaning communicated through their drawings. These think-aloud responses were documented using a written protocol. The primary objective of this approach was to gain further insights regarding the various details of the drawings such as colors, shapes, and positioning of items in the drawings.

3.4 AHIMSA Scale

The AHIMSA (Unger et al., 2002) scale examines the acculturation strategies of young immigrants by measuring the acculturation strategies in which they employ during cultural transitions. Informed by Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, the AHIMSA scale measures acculturation based on four dimensions; integration (the balance of native and adoptive cultures), separation (the rejection of adoptive culture in favor of native culture), assimilation (the rejection of native culture in favor of adoptive culture), and marginalization (the rejection of all culture). This scale draws from four central themes; ethnic identity and classification, cultural heritage, ethnic behaviors, and ethnic

interactions. The AHIMSA scale is an eight-item scale, with four response options associated to a level of acculturation, for example, "1. I am most comfortable being around people from…",(a). The United States (assimilation), (b).The country where my family is from (separation) (c).both (integration), (d). neither (marginalization). In addition, the eight items that comprise this scale can be organized in to five cultural domains including, pop culture, social relationships, food practices, observed holidays, and overall way of thinking (Edwards, 2017)

The AHIMSA scale was administered to all participants (n=15). Participants were also asked to provide demographic information including: age, gender, grade level, language, and country of origin. Following the completion of the AHIMSA scale, the demographic information sheet and the completed AHIMSA scale were collected and collated. Additional measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants' identities.

4. Analysis
4.1 Initial Coding
Initial coding serves as a means to identify conditions, while highlighting regularities in participants' participation of a phenomenon (Anfara, Brown, &Mangione, 2002). In this study, initial coding was the first analytic approach employed. Participant drawings and think-aloud responses were coded with opens codes. Participant drawings were coded first. Following the initial coding of drawings, think-aloud responses were coded. Member checking were conducted during the initial stages of coding to verify that the researchers' interpretations of drawings and think-aloud responses were in line with those of the participants.

4.2 Focused Coding & Theoretical Coding
Focused coding is usually the second phases of analysis that involves the sorting of large amounts of data based upon emerging patterns in the initial codes (Charmaz, 2002). Theoretical codes are a form of focused codes that draw from prior theories and analytical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding allows for a new way of connecting codes and categories while maintaining connections to previously established theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014).

Initially, Edwards (2017) used a focused coding approach to develop categories. These preliminary categories were numerous and reflected loose connections to concepts related acculturation. To develop more conceptually relevant categories and examine possible connections among the concepts of acculturation measured in the AHIMSA instrument with those emerging from the qualitative data, we employed theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). As the AHIMSA scale was constructed based upon the framework presented by Berry (1997), we used the same theoretical framework to inform the theoretical coding process. We recoded the categories developed through the initial focused coding to more clearly reflect the conceptual framework of acculturation theory. Once all of the relevant focused codes were categorized through theoretical coding, the remaining codes were categorized inductively. This resulted in one additional category. The new category emerged from constructs reflecting culturally ambiguous expressions of individuality that proved to be relevant to the cultural transitions of the participants in this study. In addition, this new code offered an opportunity for new theoretical insights.

4.3 Scoring AHIMSA Scale

All item responses were recoded to the corresponding acculturation level. "A", responses are recoded to assimilation, "B" response are recoded to separation, "C" response are recoded to integration, and "D" responses are recoded to marginalization. Following the recoding process, each item response was assigned a value of one and scored. A frequency analysis was conducted on each analysis. Higher frequencies of a response indicate prevalence of the corresponding acculturation level (Unger et al., 2002). Frequencies were calculated to examine the responses of all participants, immigrant participants, refugee participants, and within each cultural domain (Social Relationships, Pop Culture Preferences, Food & Holiday Preferences, Overall Way of Thinking).

5. Results

Various themes of culture, family dynamics, and expressions of individuality were prevalent in the participant drawings and subsequently, the think-aloud responses. While these themes reflect some cultural aspects of immigrant and refugee youth experiences of acculturation, the emergence of expressions of individuality introduced the idea of culturally ambiguous expressions of self in the youth acculturation process. Illustrations of individuality emerged from images and statements in which participants appeared to prioritize depictions of themselves that are situated in cultural ambiguous areas. In doing so, participants highlighted various aspects of their individuality while refraining from communicating any clear cultural paradigm. This trend diverged slightly in the AHIMSA scale results (see Table 2) as participants conveyed a preference for separation and integration as strategies for acculturation. With the AHIMSA scale focused largely on cultural behaviors when integrated with the arts-informed and qualitative strands, each strand of data collection appeared to inform different dimensions of the acculturation process. More specifically, the qualitative and arts-informed strands addressed values and interests while the quantitative strand addressed behaviors and practices.

Table 2
AHIMSA Scale Results: Frequency of Participant Responses by Population

Population		Percent of Selection by Acculturation Strategy			
		Integration	Separation	Assimilation	Marginalization
Total Population (*N*=15)		46.60%	28.45%	21.60%	3.45%
Immigrant (n=9)		57.36%	11.76%	25.00%	5.88%
Refugee (n=6)		31.25%	52.08%	16.67%	0

Note: Duplicated from Edwards (2017). Percentages for immigrant participants are calculated based on total responses of immigrant participants. Percentages for refugee participants are calculated based on total responses of refugee participants.

5.1 Communicating Values and Self in Self-Portraits

The presence of culturally ambiguous depictions was most clearly seen in participant drawings that portrayed self-portraits. These drawings lack overt reflections of any cultural paradigm. Instead, participants prioritized developing depictions of themselves highlighting physical features in their portraits that they most valued or desired to have.

While some participants depicted themselves with physical features that differed from the actual appearances, most participants conveyed positive self-images. This was commonly demonstrated in drawings where participants included hearts around themselves or within their articles of clothing as well as in the think-aloud sessions where participants commonly stated, "I am beautiful" or "I love myself" to explain their drawings. This sentiment is further exemplified in Participant A's think response regarding Drawing 1. When asked to describe their portrait and explain the inclusion of the heart and the word "Love" written on their shirt, Participant A stated, "Look at my beautiful face and my beautiful hair. My rosy cheeks and my nose and my beautiful eyes…I love myself".

Arguably, participants who have a positive perception of their physical appearance may be reflecting an appreciation for their ethnical and cultural heritages. However, these portraits were overwhelmingly void of clear cultural references, suggesting that the participants valued themselves as individuals.

Drawing 1. Participant A self-portrait

5.2 Expressing Aspects of Individuality through Hobbies

While most the self-portraits exemplified culturally ambiguous depictions of individuality, drawings that focused on interests and hobbies had a similar pattern. We labeled these drawings interest portraits. Interest portraits were drawings in which a participant included an image of themselves but also included images of their interest and hobbies (Edwards, 2017). These drawings highlighted participants' interest and values without any link to overt cultural patterns. This is exemplified in Participant B's drawing (see Drawing 2) statement, "I am in the recycling club at school. I think learning about recycling is fun. It is important to the environment.". In this statement, the participant expressed an interest in a club and ideology that represents personal interest and values. Other participants noted similar culturally ambiguous activities and interest such as painting, singing, reading, and listening to music affirmed participants' inclinations to communicate their individual values.

Drawing 2. Participant B interest portrait

5.3 Highlighting Multiple Domains of Culture through Multiple Methods

A comparison of the results of the AHIMSA scale and findings from the analysis of participant drawings and think-aloud sessions yielded some unexpected results. The emergence of culturally ambiguous expressions of individuality highlighted a vital factor in the acculturation of immigrant and refugee youth that is absent in the literature. Through participant drawings and think-aloud responses, participants communicated personal values, interest, and other culturally ambigious aspects of individuality. These did not show participants actively accepting or rejecting cultural practices as prominent acculturation framework suggests (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, &Vedder, 2006).

As Cabassa (2003) states, acculturation can be observed across various domains such as attitudes, behaviors, and sense of cultural identity. While previous studies have focused on examining cultural behaviors across various domains, the role of individual interest and values in acculturation is often omitted in these studies. The findings of this study suggest that not only is there a place for examining individuality in acculturation studies, but it is a vital component of understanding how acculturating youth view themselves during and after their transitions as well as how they mitigate the challenges of balancing multiple cultural paradigms. Future research should focus on examining the acculturation process from multiple dimensions (e.g. values, interest, and behaviors) and not limit examinations to summaries of behaviors that are perceived to be culturally relevant.

5.4 Value Added by Arts-Informed Research

The examination of acculturation in immigrant and refugee youth populations necessitates flexibility in approaches and methods. Additionally, conducting research within a population of immigrant and refugee youth participants requires methods that not only appeal to the participants but also diminish the imbalance power between the participants and the researchers. Employing arts-informed approaches mitigated many of the challenges of this study while offering a flexible medium for collecting data.

Most importantly, the insight gained through the arts-informed method was imperative to this exploration of acculturation in immigrant and refugee youth. In their drawings, participants conveyed the values and interest that were not communicated through the survey instrument. Children's art is believed to include drawings that are both familiar to them and demonstrate their culture's values and preferences (La Voy et al., 2002). In this case, the drawings demonstrated both cultural values and individual values. These findings contribute a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the acculturation strategies of immigrant and refugee youth.

6. Discussion and Conclusion
The attitudes surrounding immigrant and refugee communities in the United States continue to shift as new communities of people enter the country. For this reason, the need to examine how these communities acculturate becomes more pertinent. This is especially true for the immigrant and refugee youth communities as our educational and social systems are vastly impacted by these youth's presence in the U.S. (Edwards, 2017).

The results of this research diverge from the theoretical assumption that individuals not adopting, maintaining, or balancing the cultural practices of their adoptive or native cultures are actively rejecting these cultures. The visual data and think-aloud responses that informed this theme suggested that participants did not consciously reject any cultural paradigm. To the contrary, participants communicated a priority for expressing aspects of themselves and engaging in activities that reflected their personal interest. The findings imply that youth have agency in that they can adopt acculturation strategies and identities that exist outside of clear cultural lines. Furthermore, some acculturating youth may cope with cultural transitions by adopting values, behaviors, and interest that don't require them to commit to any one culture, but rather to the development of their own individuality.

Literature pertaining to acculturation in immigrant and refugee youth populations suggests that not only doesinterplay between expressions of individuality and expressions of cultural paradigms exist, but that they are contingent upon each other. Findings from previous studies imply that the cultural learning that occurs during acculturation enhances youth's ability to define self and identity (Oppedal, 2006; Reitz, Motti-Stefanidi, &Asendorpf, 2014). Inversely, youth development of individuality is theorized to shape an individual's ability to function within different cultural communities (Reitz et al., 2014). It is likely that this interplay has been overlooked because acculturation is examined as a group process and not an individual process. Furthermore, acculturation is commonly not examined as an individual process that occurs simultaneously with other stages of human development (i.e. adolescences) (Edwards, 2017).
Limiting the experiences of cultural transitions that occur within immigrant and refugee youth to a range of behavioral adjustments not only diminishes the importance of individual values and interests in this process, it also diminishes researchers' ability to comprehensively understand the acculturation process in youth populations.

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