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# Theorizing identity in transnational and diaspora cultures: A critical approach to acculturation

Sunil Bhatia <sup>a</sup> ... Anjali Ram <sup>b</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper examines the various ways in which the concept of “diaspora” has important implications for rethinking traditional notions of acculturation in Psychology. In this paper, we argue that the idea of a fixed, invariant, and apolitical notion of acculturation dominates much of Psychology, and as such it needs to be revised and reexamined in light of transnational migration and global movements. Drawing on our previous and current scholarship on acculturation and identity [Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2001). Rethinking “acculturation” in relation to diasporic cultures and postcolonial identities. *Human Development*, 44, 1–17; Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2004). Culture, hybridity and the dialogical self: Cases from the South-Asian diaspora. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 11(3), 224–241; Bhatia, S. (2007a). *American Karma: Race, culture, and identity and the Indian diaspora*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

and Identity and the Indian Diaspora. NEW YORK, NY: NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, Bhatia, S. (2008). Rethinking culture and identity in psychology: Towards a transnational cultural psychology. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 28, 301–322], we provide a counterargument to models of acculturation that claim that all immigrants undergo a universal psychological process of acculturation and adaptation. More specifically, we show how members from the Indian diaspora reexamined their acculturation status after the events of 9/11. We use interdisciplinary research to critically examine the role of race in the acculturation process. In addition, we provide a new analytical framework to understand the larger structural forces that shape the acculturation and assimilation process of transnational and diasporic migrants.



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## Keywords

Diaspora; Acculturation; Migration; Identity

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**Sunil Bhatia** is an associate professor of Human Development and Director of the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy. His research examines how globalization, formation of postcolonial diaspora, and transnational migration have

globalization, formation of postcolonial diasporas, and transnational migration have forced us to redefine the meaning of culture, identity, community, acculturation, difference and development in the field of theoretical and cultural psychology. His book titled, *American Karma: Race, Culture and Identity in the Indian Diaspora* (New York University Press), was published in July 2007. His articles have appeared in journals, such as, *Human Development, Theory and Psychology, Journal of Intercultural Studies, History of Psychology, Culture and Psychology, and Mind, Culture and Activity*. In 2006, American psychological Association awarded him the Sigmund Koch early career award.

**Anjali Ram**, (PhD, Ohio University), is an associate professor of Communication at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI. Her research examines gendered identity in the context of popular culture, migration, and globalization. She has presented numerous conference papers and her publications have appear in journals such as *Women's Studies in Communication, Human Development, Mind, Cultural and Activity, Cultural and Psychology* and in various edited books. Currently, she is engaged in a research project that examines how children in middle-class, urban India actively engage with an increasingly global television culture.

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