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Leveraging acculturation through action research

A case study of refugee and immigrant
women in the United States

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ABSTRACT

The demographic changes in contemporary American society portend serious consequences with far-reaching implications for the future development of the country. One of the more serious challenges is in the influx of refugees and new immigrants many of whom are not acculturating as easily as in the past. Unfortunately, the use of conventional research methods in studying acculturation has not yielded many actionable solutions to the adaptation problems, nor have newcomers been engaged as co-researchers. In this longitudinal study, action research approaches of participatory and community action research as well as action inquiry were used to identify the most pressing acculturation problems and also to engage the subjects (co-researchers) in proffering practical solutions to these problems. The results provide lessons for newcomers and resettlement agencies that are interested in promoting successful integration. The use of a variety of action research approaches for each of the three phases of this project illustrates the versatility of action research in different social contexts, especially in evolving situations with different social groups.

KEY WORDS

- Acculturation
- Biculturation
- Immigrants
- Interracial relations
- Phases of action research
- Refugee

Recent demographic changes in contemporary American society show that the country is going through significant shifts in the composition of the population. The ethnic composition of the nation has never been more diverse. At the national level, people of color now account for 100.7 million of the 302 million population, while, four states – California, Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas – as well as the District of Columbia, now have people of color as the majority (Hussain & Frankel, 2007). Much of these demographic changes is attributable to immigration. Whereas there were approximately 2.2 million foreign-born persons in the United States in 1850, accounting for 9.7 percent of the population (Smith & Edmonson, 1997), today, immigration accounts for more than 40 percent of the US population growth since 2000 (Hussain & Frankel, 2007). New immigrants make up a significant sub-section of the population of the US today and are responsible for some of the demographic changes that portend great significance for acculturation.

New immigrants differ significantly from the immigrants of yore, thus warranting serious attention. Unlike the immigrants of previous generations, many new immigrants are not assimilating to life and society in their new place. According to Huntington (2004) this is because of declining assimilationist demands on immigrants accompanied by a rise in multiculturalism and group rights. The great American experience in welcoming immigrants and acculturating them as ‘assimilators’ appears to be less successful with the new immigrants. In negotiating their settlement in and adjustment to their new abodes, new immigrants are often left on their own with little support from formal and informal resettlement agencies. Additionally, their status does not encourage active involvement in seeking solutions to successful integration. Studies of acculturation and integration tend to use mostly traditional research methods that marginalize new immigrants rather than empower them by giving them greater voice in proffering solutions to their problems. This study used action research approaches to overcome some of the problems of conventional research.

Acculturation involves adapting to a new culture and can be seen in behavioral and attitudinal changes (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006). The amount and quality of first-hand contact and interaction refugees and immigrants have with services, schools, media, people, and the community in the dominant culture affects their acculturation (Dumka & Roosa, 1997). Acculturation is a complex phenomenon and various models have been developed to explain the process and determine variations of success. Three models most relevant to this study are Berry’s (1986) two-dimensional process of adoption, Buriel’s (1993) stages of acculturation, and DeAnda’s (1984) conception of mutual competence and acceptance.

Acculturation models

Acculturation into a new country involves a process of selective adoption and rejection. Berry (1986) utilized a two-dimensional model suggesting that both the relationship with the traditional or ethnic culture and the relationship with the new or dominant culture play important roles in the acculturation process. This model demonstrates four possible outcomes of the acculturation process: 1) *integration (or biculturalism)* occurs when an individual maintains the culture of origin while also adopting the new culture; 2) *assimilation*, when the individual accepts the new culture and rejects the culture of origin; 3) *separation*, when the individual simply maintains the traditional culture with no acceptance of the new culture; and 4) *marginalization*, the alienation or rejection of both cultures. As with most social behaviors, these are not necessarily discrete compartments but can allow shades and gradations between any two adjacent positions.

Cognitive and emotional characteristics of persons involved reflect some difference. Individuals who are able to function within both the culture of origin and the new culture tend to exhibit increased cognitive functioning (Lamfromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). In the final analysis, the individual newcomer has to choose how much to adjust to the expectations of the new culture in a two-way process of pulling and pushing. Such an adjustment is not achieved instantaneously, but rather through stages that have long-term consequences. According to Berry (1997) these long-term consequences are variable and depend on social and personal characteristics existing in the society of origin, the new society of settlement, and phenomena that both exist before and arise in the course of adjusting to the new environment. Although acculturation is a complex phenomenon, there are two major issues (maintenance and participation) that encapsulate the four strategies of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization, as well as personal characteristics. In the long run, it is not easy to transition acculturatively (Berry, 2007).

Some researchers indicate that acculturation is a process with three varying stages: 1) low acculturation, which means maintaining the culture of origin with little or no acculturation; 2) high acculturation, indicating a strong integration into the new culture; and 3) biculturalism, or some acculturation into the new culture while maintaining the original culture (Buriel, 1993). Many researchers believe that being bicultural is the ideal stage in the acculturation process (Berry, 1980; Lafromboise et al., 1993; Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998).

Similarly, DeAnda (1984) theorizes that acculturation is a process of mutual competence and acceptance of one's own culture in the context of other people's cultures. Successful acculturation, according to DeAnda, is similar to Berry's integration or Buriel's biculturalism. This involves the individual in a dual socialization process. The end result is that 'One acquires values, beliefs, communication and behavioural styles from a culture of origin as well as becoming exposed to the

same dynamics of a majority' (DeAnda, 1984, p. 102). Newcomers become successful in bicultural adjustments to the extent that information and skills needed for adjusting to the mainstream culture are provided, while at the same time, they receive affirmation that their minority culture is still valued. Bicultural competence, then, takes place through a deliberate process of self-reflection and discovery in order to first understand one's own beliefs, traditions, and practices. Self-renewal is then possible through affirmation of one's beliefs within the dominant culture (Gordon, 2006).

Similar to these three models of acculturation (i.e. Berry's, Buriel's, and DeAnda's), Pipher (2002) explains four reactions refugee families have in their contact with a new American culture: '1) fight it because it is threatening, 2) avoid it because it is overwhelming, 3) assimilate quickly by making American choices, and 4) tolerate discomfort and confusion while slowly making choices about what to accept and reject' (p. 77). The fourth reaction is closest to integration or what is sometimes called selective acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Selective acculturation is linked with fluent bilingualism, less parent-child conflict, higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectations, and achievement. In documenting the benefits of bicultural families, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that the best pattern was one in which the family chose what to accept and reject in American culture.

Although earlier research had assumed that immigrants would invariably be absorbed and become fully integrated in their new societies in a linear, unidirectional process (Gordon, 1964), since the 1970s it is more acceptable to see acculturation as more complex and more than bi-dimensional. Safdar, Lay, and Struthers (2003) in their study of Iranian immigrants in Canada found the processes of acculturation to be complex and linked to outgroup and ingroup behavior as well as psychophysical and psychosocial forces. Using only two modes (separation and assimilation) of acculturation, they found that 'psychosocial adjustment was directly and positively linked to outgroup behavior and directly and negatively related to psychophysical distress' (p. 571). Furthermore, connectedness to family and culture was directly and positively related to ingroup behavior. On the whole, the immigrants showed marked differences depending on their characterization as separationists or assimilationists.

In a large international study of immigrant youths' acculturation, identity, and adaptation in 13 societies, Berry et al. (2006) identified four acculturation profiles, which they described as integration (relatively high involvement in both ethnic and national cultures), ethnic (clear orientation towards own ethnic group), national (strong orientation towards the society they live in now), and diffuse (endorsing contradictory acculturation attitudes of assimilation, marginalization, and separation). The youth profiles were found to have direct implications for their psychological and sociocultural adaptation, with integrationists identified as showing the best psychological and sociocultural outcomes.

In sum, models of acculturation provide a useful lens for understanding the experience of refugees and immigrants. Berry (1986) offers four potential outcomes of the acculturation process, Buriel (1993) describes different stages of acculturation, and DeAnda (1984) conceptualizes how acculturation is bicultural competence and acceptance of one's culture in the context of other people's cultures, in a dual socialization process. Although a consensual view is not sought, it does appear that the dominant paradigm is one that argues for new comers' ability to retain desired characteristics from their own culture while adopting or adapting to chosen characteristics of the dominant culture. This begets the least amount of stress and identity conflict. Berry et al. (2006) recommended in the case of immigrant youth that they (the youth) should be encouraged to retain a sense of their own heritage cultural identity, while establishing close ties with the new national society they live in now.

Masses of immigrants and refugees who enter the US each year struggle toward some degree of adjustment, which varies from one case to another. The process is often slow, incomplete, and rife with frustrations and painful experiences. Problems, therefore, are inherent in such involved and intricate processes. Action research approaches, with their emphases on participation, empowerment, active engagement and involvement of subjects as co-researchers (Cresswell, 2005), are adequate methods for exploring the complex processes of helping new members of society (especially refugees and immigrants) to proffer and help implement solutions to their problems.

The statement of the problem

Although we now know more about acculturation success, biculturation, directional impacts of cultural contacts, and selective acculturation, unfortunately, many new members of society are left to blindly navigate the tortuous processes of adjusting to a new culture, with little organized support from formal and informal agencies. Moreover, new members are hardly involved in seeking solutions to the problem, nor are they encouraged to be proactive in addressing their issues of adjustment. Because acculturation problems manifest at different degrees (Buriel, 1993; Pipher, 2002) they are often less obvious except in cases of outright violent confrontations and inter-group schisms. Action research is well suited to the study of underlying tensions, especially in evolving situations (Stringer, 1999).

This project was designed to use action research methods to involve a group of new refugee and immigrant women in the Fargo-Moorhead area of North Dakota and Minnesota to address their acculturation problems by focusing on two critical research questions.

RQ1: What experiences are decelerating successful acculturation, and what can be done about these?

RQ2: What aspirations do the women have for successful acculturation, and what opportunities do they see for achieving these in their respective communities?

Method

An action research approach was adopted in the design of the study because of the need to involve the women as active participants who can use their personal experiences as sources of analytic information in suggesting practical solutions to leverage acculturation. Unlike traditional social science research, action research encourages participation, subject involvement in seeking answers to problems, and the development of practical new knowledge in genuinely participatory contexts (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The women participants and their situation are a good fit for the use of action research which has been found recommendable for guiding efforts towards social transformations and improvements especially in times of change and misunderstanding for people (like these women many of) who are on the fringes of society (Bargal, 2006; Dick, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). John Collier (1945), one of the originators of action research, found this method ideal in studying and providing solutions to problems of inter-ethnic relations. Kurt Lewin, who was credited with coining the term ‘action research’ in the 1930s (Mills, 2000) recommended it for improving intercultural group relations, similar to the use in acculturation and cultural adaptation.

Although there are more than a dozen varieties of action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), this project used a combination of three major approaches: participatory action research (Fals Borda, 2006; Swantz, Ndedya, & Masaiganah, 2006) in phase one, community action research (Senge & Scharmer, 2006) in phase two, and action inquiry (Torbert, 2006) in phase three. The first phase was implemented in spring 2006, the second phase in fall 2006, and the third phase in spring 2007, each new phase yielding practical knowledge that was employed in subsequent action research activities of interviewing, discussing, analyzing, and offering individualized and group suggestions to the acculturation problems of the women participants.

Phase one: spring 2006. Participatory action research

The first phase involved the selection of 12 women representatives from the communities of African refugees and immigrants in the Fargo-Moorhead area, through identifying community leaders who served as liaisons between the research team and the women groups. A cultural agent, who knew both the research team and the women, facilitated the recruitment of participants. Both

the cultural agent and some of the women leaders had served in similar roles in an earlier research study of nutritional practices of refugee and immigrant women (Gold, 2005).

Following individual briefings and consultations with the women leaders in preparation for this phase, two focus group discussion sessions were held with the women representatives who were originally from Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan, but had lived in the US between two and 10 years. These women were subjects and objects at the same time, and were able to complement the researchers' academic knowledge with their experiential wisdom, as is the case in many participatory action research situations. As Fals Borda (2006, p. 32) observed about this research approach, it easily combines 'praxis and ethics, academic knowledge and popular wisdom, the rational and the existential, the regular and the fractal. It (also) breaks down the subject/object dichotomy.' The discussions, focusing on participants' interactional communication since they arrived in the US were taped, transcribed, and coded for analysis to ascertain their experiences (Pearson, Sendlak, Amundson, & Kudak, in press).

Phase two: fall 2006. Community action research

Whereas the first phase used mostly the participatory action research approach, with its emphasis on encouraging individual participants to be active subjects and perceptive objects, this second phase adopted community action research, with its emphasis on multi-sectoral involvement of stakeholders. Successful acculturation requires collaboration from different organizations, institutional reflection, and sustained transformations, which are some of the hallmarks of community action research. In using community action research here, we were mindful of the need for building collaboration among different organizations, as well as encouraging researchers and the subjects (co-researchers) to engage in collective reflection. As Senge and Scharmer (2006) have explained, community action research is ideal for:

fostering relationships and collaboration among diverse organizations, and among the consultants and researchers working with them; creating settings for collective reflection that enable people from different organizations to 'see themselves in one another'; leveraging progress . . . to sustain transformative changes that otherwise would die out. (p. 195)

Because action research is cyclical in nature, the first and second phases were linked together through training sessions developed by the researchers and several first phase participants. Five training sessions were organized between August and December 2006 for a total of 40 participants, many of who had taken part in the focus group discussions of the first phase. New participants joining the research team at this second phase were recruited by the cultural agent and the community leaders of the first phase, largely through a snowball technique of

asking ‘participants to identify others to become members of the sample’ (Creswell, 2005, p. 149).

The goal of this second phase of the project was to work with the women in a collaborative sense to overcome their reported barriers to successful acculturation. The training was conducted to help foster cordial relationships and equip the women with necessary new knowledge to integrate themselves more successfully in their communities. The trainers were primarily African professional men and women now living in the US. Each of the five training sessions attracted an average of 25 refugee or immigrant women. Whereas phase one had helped them to identify a common purpose, create a shared set of principles, and develop a common understanding between each other and the consultants, phase two went further by incorporating diaries, sessional reports, group discussions, and individual narratives to provide opportunities for the women participants, the trainers, and other community stakeholders to exchange intelligence on various mechanisms of successful integration. Community action research is often fraught with tension, but it is also laden with benefits. As Braithwaite, Cockwill, O’Neill and Rebane (2007, p. 72) observed ‘this (community action research) can cause very real anxieties but also very real benefits’.

Phase three: spring 2007. Action inquiry

Phase three built on the previous two phases of participatory and community action research by using an action inquiry method. Action inquiry interweaves first-, second-, and third-person research to create a unified picture of an issue. As Torbert (2006) explains, action inquiry is based on three categories, first person as a self-reflective action of ‘listening through oneself both ways’, second person through ‘speaking-and-listening-with-others’, and third person which ‘presupposes first- and second- person research/practice capacity on the part of leadership’ (pp. 209–13).

Phase three was developed to provide an opportunity for critical reflection based on examination of evidence from multiple perspectives. The individuals involved used this strategy to inform as well as enhance further action. In order to facilitate this, a core group of the 16 participants who were found to be the most serious on account of personal reports, contributions to discussions, dedication to the project goals, and consistency in attendance were invited to a day-long consultative research session in March 2007. Three trained action researchers (white females) facilitated the session, recorded, taped, transcribed, and analyzed information for dominant views and suggested solutions. The women participants were coached to see themselves as both research subjects and researchers, and thus able to engage in first-, second-, and third-person inquiries. Reliance on first-hand experience is a valuable action research method, and ‘own voice’ is an important part of first-person action research (Grant, 2007).

In addition, the women listened to a presentation of a case study of successful integration of refugees and immigrants in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota. Pelican Rapids, a small town of 1800 residents in Minnesota has been able to successfully integrate about 700 refugees and immigrants since the 1990s through well-orchestrated programs of inclusion, cultural adjustments, celebration of diversity, and active involvement in their communities (Stowman, 2007). Mexican immigrants comprised the initial influx into Pelican Rapids and continue to make up the majority of the immigrant population in the area. However, a second phase of immigrants and refugees began arriving when a local church started an outreach program for refugee families. As more refugees and immigrants settled in the area, residents recognized the need for intercultural activities. The focus was not as much on the Mexican immigrants, as they were already settled, but instead on this second wave of people arriving from Africa and Eastern Europe (personal interview with Shelly Stowman, 14 February 2007).

The Pelican Rapids case study was presented with illustrative photographs, interviews of the key actors, and analytic project reports to show how integration was undertaken there. This case study, which included not only photographs but also descriptions of creative and artistic activities undertaken in Pelican Rapids, spurred enthusiastic contributions from the women on a wide range of issues. The use of photographs and artistic creations is common practice in action research (Lykes, 2006).

Following the workshop and group discussion, the three researchers engaged selected women in deep-listening interviews, an action research method that Senge and Scharmer (2006) recommend for discovering and nurturing change initiatives. This was used here to ascertain the women's deeper concerns and personal issues regarding successful acculturation. Deep listening allowed the co-learners and researchers to reflect upon their experiences and discuss steps to develop positive future relationships with individuals, groups, and communities – a hallmark of action inquiry research.

Results

General results

The results from the three phases of the project show that the women enthusiastically embraced their roles as subjects and researchers, in spite of their unfamiliarity with action research. In phase one, they reported facing dialectical tensions and having serious acculturation challenges. With regard to the areas of tension, they identified autonomy-connectedness, past-present cultural influences, reality-idealism, certainty-uncertainty, independence-dependence, and openness-closedness (Pearson et al., in press).

With regard to the most challenging areas of their acculturation experience,

they identified: mental health and depression, financial and business concerns, the US educational system, loss of Africanness and living the American dream, and racism and leadership issues. These five challenges of adjustment were incorporated in the community-oriented training curriculum, and presented in a five-part group-learning workshop series, which was implemented as the second phase of this project.

The lessons from the group learning-workshop were shared communally, with the women acting satisfactorily as subjects and researchers. They not only learned easy and cheap ways to address their health issues, but also developed personal relationships with their group members and the resource persons. They learned practical lessons from each of the five presentations.

In phase three, then, the Pelican Rapids case study provided valuable information for stimulating conversation. Action inquiry methods facilitated contributions aimed at addressing the proposed research questions. The deep listening interviews that followed the case study presentation also yielded rich insights into the women's adjustment patterns and their expectations of their host communities.

Answers to research questions

With regard to the first research question on experiential decelerators to successful acculturation and what can be done about these, the women were clear on the hurdles to integration and the means for overcoming them. During the focus groups and the series of five workshops, the women liberally expressed their views on their pressing acculturation barriers. Among the most serious barriers were the physical difficulties in settling down in a new country. These included transportation, language, and education which individually and interactionally posed barriers and precluded them from becoming fully involved in their communities.

Having been encouraged to see themselves as co-researchers, they were vociferous in offering solutions to these constraints. This is one of the desirable advantages of action research, which allows deep listening interviewing, probing for different scenarios, and asking respondents to imagine themselves as problem solvers. These women reported that eliminating these barriers would make it easier to work towards biculturation and integration in their new environment, a perception supported by acculturation models. The opportunity for choice and negotiation, described as pertinent to successful biculturation (DeAnda, 1984; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) is lost, or at best diminished in the face of these barriers.

The lack of transportation facilities limited the women's opportunities to take advantage of further education and training, which in turn decelerated acculturation by fueling isolation. One woman explained that many, like her, miss

opportunities for further education because they cannot go to school. As a result, they become more isolated. Another corroborating participant explained, 'You can't get involved in things if you don't have a car. Everything depends on transportation.' The Fargo-Moorhead area, which is the research site, does not have a developed public transport system.

Lack of transportation and missing out on education and training opportunities aggravate the difficulties in learning English, which some women reported as the most critical constraint, without which other adjustments are not possible. In one woman's words, 'language is the key to moving my life ahead, language is number one, and education comes next'. Another participant recognized that many refugee and immigrant women are held back because they 'can't speak American English well'. Others explained that not knowing the language sometimes led to tension with neighbors, particularly between the neighbors' children and theirs. One participant explained that, 'when kids learned the language, they made good friends'.

Education is a great leveler in American society, and many of the women recognize its importance in successful biculturation. They reported that poor language skills, inadequate transportation, and inaccessible educational facilities put a damper on their ambition for acclimatization. Generally, education is seen as necessary for securing desirable employment and making enough money to survive and hopefully, thrive. When asked what could be done about the constraints they faced, most of the women were positive and optimistic about their chances for improving their conditions, but emphasized the importance of concentrating on these three particular barriers of transportation, language skills, and education.

Their proffered solutions to the problems included joining religious or other social groups, which often offered carpools and rides to their members; having mentors, relatives, or friends who can teach them the use of the underdeveloped public transportation system in Fargo-Moorhead; and developing a positive, warm, and outgoing frame of mind. The women felt local programs, such as ESL (English as a second language), were an acceptable starting point for learning the language, but could be improved in efficiency and supplemented by university courses, and more interaction with native English-speakers. The majority of the women said a major solution to overcoming barriers would be for refugee resettlement programs to allow them more time for adjustment, and provide better opportunities for education, interaction, and orientation. The resettlement program by the government lasts only one year.

With regard to the second research question on their aspirations for successful acculturation, the women painted a picture of inclusion and a sense of control in their lives. Their common aspirations involved adjusting successfully enough to operate like fully-integrated members of their societies while still retaining important aspects of their African culture. Not surprisingly, there was

considerable difficulty in clearly spelling out how much to adjust and how much to retain. Many participants recognized the need for mutual respect and support services. They would like better appreciation of their African values and culture, and more support from social service agencies.

These women seemed to recognize the need to strike a balance between American and African culture. They aver that successful adjustment and integration would help them overcome much of the current stresses they experience, and they recognized the need to get involved, to associate closely with the different cultural groups, and to create relationships in order to support their own transition. In addition to these adjustments at the individual level, they recognized the roles of organizations as anchors and facilitators of acculturation.

Although these women were optimistic, some of them saw limited opportunities for full integration. When asked what opportunities they saw in the Fargo-Moorhead community to become involved and to share their culture with others, many of these women responded that they knew of virtually none. One respondent wrote, 'Frankly, not too many for some people. The few that are there are so limited.' Another said, 'Honestly, there is nothing.' Such critical comments were probed further and unpacked during the deep listening interviews at the end. No doubt, adjustment is a long-term adaptive process, not a technical short-term event.

Many participants narrated their experiences with area churches, which were a site of support and provided opportunities for involvement. Others recognized the opportunities that after-school programs provided for their children. However, further discussion revealed that school programs were often limited and only available in certain areas. The women also noted that some programs and services isolated them and their families. A common complaint was that some of the school programs for refugees and immigrant children were segregationist instead of integrationist. One woman said some organizations 'put refugees in the corner' separate from the others. Another woman reported about how refugee children were not invited into existing American Girl Scout troops, but rather had to form their own troop consisting entirely of refugee children.

Conclusions and implications

The use of action research was appropriate and yielded practical results that were instructive for both newcomers and their receiving communities. The women participants felt a sense of power in being taught to see themselves as co-researchers who could suggest and implement solutions. The results of this research are leading to the creation of a network community of resettlement agencies and city administration with responsibility for continued discussion of integration strategies for refugees and immigrants.

However, action research is not without setbacks. The initial enthusiasm that attends subjects feeling so powerful because they are researchers soon wears away as they realize that some of their problems are complex and defy simple solutions. Some of the women in this study had overly high expectations which cannot be matched with the available resources. Acculturation is a complex and long-lasting process that involves newcomers and the welcoming societies in convoluted social interactions which ultimately yield one of the possible outcomes of successful adjustment or maladjustment, as the case may be.

The final picture that emerges from this study shows that in spite of differing points of view, many refugees and immigrants have experiences that are not wholly supportive of their goals for successful adjustment in their new societies. But in spite of their difficulties with transportation, education, job training, and acceptance in their new communities, these refugees and immigrants aspire for selective acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), integration (Berry, 1986), successful acculturation (DeAnda, 1984), and biculturalism (Buriel, 1993). Integration, as a slow process that tasks both newcomers and receiving communities, involves adjustments in values for all concerned, and is a good area for the use of action research methods. Action research can over-promise and under-deliver, especially in those situations where the participants wrongly repose too much confidence in the capacity of the consultants and researchers to operate like omnipotent problem solvers, *deus ex machina*.

One of the most promising features of action research is the adaptation of various approaches to match specific phases of evolving data collection and implementation actions. In this project, we found it instructive to begin with participatory methods and later add community action research before concluding with action inquiry that also included video presentation and deep listening. Action research allows researchers and co-researchers to make changes as the processes of data collection and action implementation evolve over time and the social context changes, sometimes in unforeseen ways. This speaks to the dynamic process of action research which may involve iterations of activities in a recursive manner, with the researcher spiraling 'back and forth between reflection about a problem, data collection, and action' (Creswell, 2005, p. 561).

This dynamic process of research is well suited to the study of immigration and acculturation, which is attracting great new interest from social researchers and policy-makers. However, much of the research in this area is limited by the use of mostly traditional research methods with their over-emphasis on social scientific objectivity. Action research lends itself to a holistic examination of more varied conceptualizations of immigration and acculturation by allowing us to hear the voices of the newcomers more directly as co-researchers, in first, second, and third person narratives. The full range of action research approaches that can include critical theory, ethnodrama, photovoice, and innovative creative methods are appropriate for in-depth and expansive exploration of how new comers

adjust to extant conditions through intricate processes of selective adaptation and rejection, which constitute acculturation. Thus a proper employment of action research in this important area of immigration and adaptation studies can significantly leverage acculturation.

As we get ready for the next phase of this longitudinal action research project, we are concerned about the danger of being perceived by the women as the solutions to all their problems of adjustment and acceptance in their new communities. Equally concerning is our increasing involvement and engagement with the women, thereby blurring the lines of demarcation between subject and researcher, which is common in action research. These fears notwithstanding, the action research experience has been fruitful to both the researchers and the women participants, not only in the visible outcome of working together as co-searchers for solutions, but even in the intangible and immeasurable output that includes the inestimable value of interaction and engagement in the research processes. These activities provide not only data for analyses, but also research results and actions that exemplify mutual acceptance of black women of African origin by white American researchers, and vice versa.

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