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## Original Research

# Taking It to Heart: Preliminary Investigation on the Cardiovascular Effects of Racial/Ethnic Microaggressions in Latinx

James J. García, PhD<sup>1\*</sup>; Dylan G. Serpas, BS [Student]<sup>2</sup>; Yaritza Torres, BS [Student]<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, California State University, Fullerton, 800 N. State College Blvd, Fullerton, CA 92831, USA

\*Corresponding author

James J. García, PhD

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA; Phone: 909-448-4147; Fax: 909-448-1627;

E-mail: [JGarcia4@laverne.edu](mailto:JGarcia4@laverne.edu)

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

Microaggressions — as a cumulative psychosocial stressor — may be a unique mechanism in the development of cardiovascular diseases, *via* transient changes in cardiovascular reactivity (CVR), for Latinx.

### Method

Experimental study with Latinx college students (n=33) randomly assigned to either a microinsult, microinvalidation, or control condition. Independent variables for MANOVA/MANCOVAs were the study conditions and dependent variables were blood pressure (BP) and impedance cardiography (ICG) indicators.

### Results

At baseline, two one-way MANOVAs showed no differences by condition for BP or ICG indicators. For the manipulation, results indicated no significant differences by condition for BP or ICG indices. During recovery, results demonstrated no significant differences by condition in BP or ICG indicators. Lastly, baseline experiences of microaggressions were not significantly associated with BP and ICG at recovery.

### Conclusion

The experimental manipulation produced no significant difference in CVR by condition. Inferiority and second-class citizen microaggressions were not significantly associated with CVR at recovery. Findings do not negate the existence or cardiovascular impact of microaggressions; rather, these effects appear to be subtle. Implications for Latinx cardiovascular health are discussed.

### Keywords

Blood pressure (BP); Impedance cardiography; Cardiovascular reactivity; Latinx; Racial/ethnic microaggressions; Cardiovascular health disparities.

## INTRODUCTION

Recent estimates from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) indicate heart diseases are the leading cause of death in the United States (U.S.).<sup>1</sup> Comparatively, Latinx demonstrate lower cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) prevalence, incidence, and mortality compared to non-Hispanic Whites or non-Hispanic Blacks,<sup>2</sup> a finding attributed to the so-called Hispanic health par-

adox<sup>3</sup>; however, this does not mean Latinx people are immune from developing or dying as a result of CVDs. In Latinx communities, CVDs are the second cause of death.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the US-based Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos (HCHS/SOL) estimate a 2-5% prevalence of CVDs, with variation by Latinx group.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars propose an examination of psychosocial factors in the development of CVDs among Latinx.<sup>6</sup> Together, CVDs rank as the second leading cause of death for

Latinx, indicating a need to examine the role of psychosocial factors in CVD risk.

Though much is known about blatant discrimination and CVD, there is limited evidence on subtle discrimination and CVDs. Indeed, racial/ethnic discrimination is conceptualized as a psychosocial stressor salient for communities of color.<sup>7</sup> The advent of the HCHS/SOL provides evidence of blatant experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination as a psychosocial factor in the development of CVDs for Latinx. For example, data from the HCHS/SOL indicate variation in ethnic discrimination, with Mexican, Puerto-Rican, and other/multiple origin Latinx reporting higher experiences compared to Cuban-origin Latinx.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, greater ethnic discrimination was strongly associated with greater metabolic syndrome prevalence for some Latinx groups as well as increased risk for comorbid diabetes and depression in the HCHS/SOL.<sup>9,10</sup> From the experimental literature, data indicate exposure to blatant racial/ethnic discrimination in the lab produces increased cardiovascular reactivity (CVR).<sup>11,12</sup> This CVR hypothesis focuses on transient changes in blood pressure (BP) or indicators of electrical functioning of the heart assessed *via* impedance cardiography (ICG) during race-based social interactions. Consistent with this hypothesis, blatant experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination produced exaggerated (i.e., significantly greater than baseline) systolic blood pressure responses in Latinx in a discrimination lab paradigm.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Latinx college students who interacted with a prejudiced non-Hispanic White confederate demonstrated significant increases in several BP and ICG indicators during the anticipation and interaction phase.<sup>14</sup> However, there is limited data on the link between subtle discrimination and CVDs in Latinx.

Contemporary race-based prejudice and discrimination has taken on a gradual, subtle, and insidious nature, a phenomenon termed racial/ethnic microaggressions.<sup>15</sup> These brief, subtle, and ambiguous social interactions communicate hostility towards, and devaluing of, a stigmatized person or group; these are further categorized into microassaults, microinvalidations, or microinsults.<sup>16</sup> Qualitative literature indicates there are specific microaggressions salient to Latinx, including microinsults based on accent and microinvalidations related to being assumed as foreign-born or not “American enough.”<sup>17</sup> Quantitative evidence demonstrate associations between physical health and racial/ethnic microaggressions<sup>18,19</sup>; however, limited experimental research on the CVR of racial/ethnic microaggressions exist. For example, an unpublished dissertation found no differences in BP or ICG indicators for experimentally manipulated racial/ethnic microaggressions.<sup>20</sup> Despite that microaggression themes salient to Latinx are well-documented, very few studies empirically test racial/ethnic microaggressions as acting *via* a potential CVR pathway, which may play a role in the development of CVDs for these communities.

Given blatant discrimination findings, racial/ethnic microaggressions or subtle discrimination may act *via* an acute CVR pathway, thereby evoking greater reactivity in Latinx. However, there is only one unpublished study to-date with null findings, indicating a need to test this assertion as CVR reliably predicts the development of disease.<sup>12,21</sup> Hence, this is an exploratory study fo-

cused on testing the CVR of Latinx using experimentally manipulated microaggression conditions.

## METHOD

### Sample

Latinx college students (n=33) were recruited from a private Hispanic serving institution in Southern California. Participants were instructed to not exercise, drink caffeinated beverages, and to properly hydrate prior to the experiment.

### Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: microinsult (n=11), microinvalidation (n=11), or control (n=11). All subjects underwent a 10-minute vanilla baseline,<sup>22</sup> a 2-minute manipulation (i.e., interacting with a non-hispanic White-appearing study confederate in one of the manipulation conditions), and a 10-minute recovery period. The study was advertised as a social interactions study, where participants were informed they would be interacting with another participant (i.e., confederate) while hooked up to physiological equipment. All participants were debriefed after the study, provided with the study aims, asked whether they caught on to the microaggression statement from the study confederate using a manipulation check, and were given mental and physical health resources.

Study manipulations were conceptualized according to previous literature.<sup>17,20</sup> In the microinvalidation condition, Latinx participants interacted with the study confederate who asked participants “*Hey, what’s your major?*” and then “*Where are you from?*” allowing participants to respond, followed by “*No, where are you really from?*” For the microinsult condition, participants had an interaction with the study confederate consisting of “*Hey, what’s your major?*” followed by “*You speak English really well.*” Lastly, the control condition had participants engage in a neutral social interaction with the study confederate, including “*Hey, what’s your major?*” and “*What day is it today?*”

### Measures

Blood pressure was assessed at specific time intervals using the GE Healthcare DINAMAP™ ProCare 400 BP Monitor.<sup>23</sup> An occlusion cuff was placed above the bend of the non-dominant arm by trained research assistants. Blood pressure measurements yielded the following four indicators: systolic blood pressure (SBP), diastolic blood pressure (DBP), heart rate (HR), and mean arterial pressure (MAP). Average BP for each condition was calculated. Reactivity change scores for the manipulation condition were calculated ( $\Delta$ reactivity; manipulation minus baseline values). Participants were asked to sit with an upright posture, uncrossed legs, and with their blood pressure cuffed forearm and elbow positioned on the table.

Electrical functioning of the heart (i.e., ICG) was continuously assessed at specific time intervals using the Mindware Mo-

bile® device.<sup>24</sup> A standardized electrode configuration was used by trained research assistants, in line with manufacturer recommended practices.<sup>24</sup> This device transmits a low voltage current throughout the thoracic cavity, yielding the following six indicators: left ventricle ejection time (LVET), stroke volume (SV), cardiac output (CO), thoracic impedance (Zo), pre-ejection period (PEP), and change in impedance overtime (dZ/dt). Average ICG indicators for each condition were calculated. Reactivity change scores were calculated for the manipulation condition ( $\Delta$ reactivity; manipulation minus baseline values). Participants followed the same sitting procedures used for BP readings.

The racial/ethnic microaggressions scale (REMS) was used at baseline to assess for prior experiences of microaggressions.<sup>25</sup> The current study focused on the REMS inferiority and second-class citizen subscales, given these are salient microaggression experiences for Latinx.<sup>17</sup> Adequate reliability estimates for REMS scores for the inferiority and second-class citizen subscale were demonstrated.

Consistent with prior research, each condition was used as an independent variable in two separate multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and four different MANCOVAs (controlling for baseline CVR), with BP and ICG indicators analyzed separately.<sup>20</sup> The two REMS subscale scores were entered as predictors of recovery CVR using ten separate linear regression analyses with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 26 (SPSS®).<sup>26</sup> Given multiple analyses, the *p*-value was adjusted to *p*=0.005 (i.e., 0.05/10) in order to account for multiple comparisons.

## RESULTS

Participants were 18 to 33-year-old, majority U.S.-born, predominantly Mexican-origin Latinx college students from a private Hispanic serving institution in Southern California. Findings from the REMS indicated participants reported experiencing at least one racial/ethnic microaggression within the last six-months. There were no missing data for BP indicators or the REMS scores, resulting in an N=33 for these analyses. However, there were missing data for ICG indicators for nine participants across study conditions, n=9 (control), n=8 (microinsult), and n=7 (microinvalidation), resulting in a total N=24 for ICG analyses. Given the exploratory and pilot nature of this study, missing data for ICG indicators were not imputed. See Table 1 for further demographic information.

Results from two separate omnibus One-way MANOVAs showed no baseline differences by condition for BP, including SBP, DBP, HR, and MAP,  $F(8, 54)=1.17, p=0.33$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.73$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.15$  or ICG, including LVET, SV, CO, Zo, PEP, and dZ/dt,  $F(14, 30)=0.56, p=0.87$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.63$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.21$ . Thus, no baseline differences in CVR by condition emerged.

Controlling for baseline BP and ICG indicators, results from two separate omnibus One-way MANCOVAs demonstrated no significant differences by condition during the manipulation for BP, including SBP, DBP, HR, and MAP,  $F(8, 46)=0.83, p=0.59$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.77$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.13$  or ICG, including LVET, SV, CO,

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

	Control	Microinsults	Microinvalidation	
<b>Participants</b>	<b>n=11</b>	<b>n=11</b>	<b>n=11</b>	<b>N=33</b>
Age, M(SD)	20.45 (4.25)	19.73 (2.05)	20.45 (3.27)	20.21
<b>Sex, N(%)</b>				
Male	3 (27.3)	2 (18.2)	2 (18.2)	7 (21.2)
Female	8 (72.7)	9 (81.8)	9 (81.8)	26 (78.8)
<b>Hispanic Origin, N(%)</b>				
Central American				6 (18.2)
Cuban				1 (3.0)
Mexican				24 (72.7)
South American				1 (3.0)
Other				1 (3.0)
<b>Class Standing, N(%)</b>				
Freshman				13 (39.4)
Sophomore				4 (12.1)
Junior				8 (24.2)
Senior				8 (24.2)
<b>First Generation, N(%)</b>				
No				9 (27.3)
Yes				24 (72.7)
<b>Speak Another Language, N(%)</b>				
No				13 (39.4)
Yes				20 (60.6)
REMS Second Class ( $\alpha=0.77$ )	0.052 (0.10)	0.06 (0.13)	0.16 (0.26)	
REMS Inferiority ( $\alpha=0.70$ )	0.25 (0.24)	0.14 (0.15)	0.24 (0.22)	

Note. REMS=Racial Ethnic Microaggressions Scale.

Zo, PEP, and dZ/dt,  $F(14, 16)=0.87, p=0.60$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.32$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.43$  (Table 2).

Controlling for baseline BP and ICG indices, results from two separate omnibus One-way MANCOVAs demonstrated no significant differences in BP by condition at recovery, including SBP, DBP, HR, and MAP,  $F(8, 46)=0.88, p=0.54$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.75$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.13$  or ICG, including LVET, SV, CO, Zo, PEP, and dZ/dt,  $F(12, 14)=1.10, p=0.43$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda=0.27$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.49$  (Table 3).

To examine REMS predicting CVR at recovery, ten separate linear regression analyses were conducted with REMS subscales as independent predictors of recovery BP and ICG indicators. Given multiple analyses, the *p*-value for these analyses was adjusted to 0.005 (i.e., *p*=0.05/10). Based on this adjustment, results indicated baseline REMS subscale scores did not significantly predict BP or ICG indicators at recovery (Table 4).

**Table 2.** MANCOVA for BP and ICG Indicators by Experimental Condition During the Study Manipulation

	Experimental Condition			p	Partial $\eta^2$
	Microinvalidation	Microinsult	Control		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
<b>BP Indicators</b>					
$\Delta$ SBP, mmHg	11.77(7.33)	8.42(3.21)	8.14(4.62)	0.190	0.120
$\Delta$ DBP, mmHg	7.83(5.61)	3.90(4.18)	4.62(2.42)	0.118	0.151
$\Delta$ MAP, mmHg	9.12(5.97)	5.74(2.97)	5.93(2.23)	0.147	0.137
$\Delta$ HR, beats/min	7.02(13.42)	4.79(4.33)	0.61(5.57)	0.323	0.083
<b>ICG Indicators</b>					
$\Delta$ LVET, m sec	-13.18(23.81)	-7.53(22.49)	2.51(22.76)	0.739	0.042
$\Delta$ SV, mL/m <sup>2</sup>	-34.28(93.82)	11.39(34.29)	-15.58(33.67)	0.179	0.218
$\Delta$ CO, L/min	87.21(229.29)	1.78(2.73)	-15.20(74.15)	0.508	0.092
$\Delta$ Zo, Ohms	-0.04(0.10)	1.62(4.31)	-0.20(0.25)	0.708	0.048
$\Delta$ PEP, m sec	-8.49(8.50)	4.88(13.15)	-2.36(15.28)	0.745	0.041
$\Delta$ dZ/dt	-0.042(0.07)	0.70(1.20)	-0.05(0.06)	0.799	0.032

Note. N=33.  $\Delta$ =Reactivity change. Means reported as  $\Delta$  scores, i.e., average manipulation means – baseline means. BP=Blood Pressure. ICG=Impedance Cardiography. BP indices included Systolic blood pressure (SBP), Diastolic blood pressure (DBP), Mean arterial pressure (MAP), and Heart rate (HR). ICG indices included Left ventricle ejection time (LVET), Stroke volume (SV), Cardiac output (CO), Thoracic impedance (Zo), Pre-ejection period (PEP), and Change in impedance over time (dZ/dt). Covariates included in the model were BP and ICG measured at baseline. Effect sizes and p-values provided are related to multivariate omnibus tests. Given no significant differences were found, follow-up univariate main effects are not reported.

**Table 3.** MANCOVA for BP and ICG Indicators by Experimental Condition at Recovery

	Experimental Condition			p	Partial $\eta^2$
	Microinvalidation	Microinsult	Control		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)		
<b>BP Indicators</b>					
SBP, mmHg	108.28(15.06)	101.96(9.38)	114.86(10.88)	0.138	0.141
DBP, mmHg	62.73(10.00)	59.72(8.29)	64.91(7.16)	0.566	0.043
MAP, mmHg	79.90(11.92)	75.25(8.56)	83.86(6.44)	0.259	0.099
HR, beats/min	78.70(4.51)	70.93(8.37)	78.14(13.39)	0.403	0.068
<b>ICG Indicators</b>					
LVET, m sec	284.60(34.47)	270.76(20.03)	291.19(45.98)	0.056	0.381
SV, mL/m <sup>2</sup>	163.07(102.04)	260.79(162.03)	421.79(269.87)	0.122	0.296
CO, L/min	13.50(8.05)	40.75(60.58)	24.59(10.45)	0.616	0.078
Zo, Ohms	5.34(4.81)	8.70(5.04)	5.85(3.65)	0.143	0.277
PEP, m sec	92.64(16.44)	92.97(10.47)	83.84(12.84)	0.679	0.063
dZ/dt	0.41(.39)	4.39(9.72)	0.55(0.55)	0.464	0.120

Note. N=24. BP=Blood Pressure. ICG=Impedance Cardiography. BP indices included Systolic blood pressure (SBP), Diastolic blood pressure (DBP), Mean arterial pressure (MAP), and Heart rate (HR). ICG indices included Left ventricle ejection time (LVET), Stroke volume (SV), Cardiac output (CO), Thoracic impedance (Zo), Pre-ejection period (PEP), and Change in impedance over time (dZ/dt). Covariates included in the model were BP and ICG measured at baseline. Effect sizes and p-values provided are related to multivariate omnibus tests. Given no significant differences were found, follow-up univariate main effects are not reported.

**Table 4.** Summary of Simple Regression Analyses REMS Subscales Predicting CVR Indicators at Recovery

Criterion	REMS Subscale			
	Second Class		Inferiority	
	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI
SBP, mmHg	0.079	-20.60-31.98	0.361	1.13-40.86
DBP, mmHg	0.108	-12.35-22.71	0.277	-2.91-24.46
MAP, mmHg	0.091	-14.85-24.69	0.351	0.37-30.40
HR, beats/min	0.017	-19.36-21.23	0.045	-14.37-18.40
LVET, m sec	-0.545	-344.44- -69.52	-0.337	-123.77-11.42
SV, mL/m <sup>2</sup>	-0.192	-1514.57-601.23	-0.081	-624.26-433.86
CO, L/min	-0.114	-214.65-130.07	0.067	-74.03-99.05
Zo, Ohms	0.092	-20.56-31.48	-0.106	-14.31-8.78
PEP, m sec	-0.225	-121.63-38.24	-0.144	-47.90-24.19
dZdt	-0.118	-33.26-19.47	0.057	-11.42-14.70

Note. N=3. REMS=Racial Ethnic Microaggressions Scale; CVR=Cardiovascular Reactivity; SBP=Systolic Blood Pressure; DBP=Diastolic Blood Pressure; MAP=Mean Arterial Pressure; HR=Heart Rate; LVET=Left Ventricle Ejection Time; SV=Stroke Volume; CO=Cardiac Output; Zo=Thoracic Impedance; PEP=Pre-Ejection Period; dZ/dt=Change in impedance overtime. An adjusted p-value of .005 (i.e., p=0.05/10) account for chance, given multiple analyses.

## DISCUSSION

Findings indicate exposure to one experimentally manipulated racial/ethnic microaggression does not evoke significant CVR among Latinx college students. Moreover, baseline experiences of racial/ethnic microaggressions did not significantly predict BP and ICG indicators at recovery for Latinx. Together, these findings do not negate the existence or impact of racial/ethnic microaggressions as proposed by some<sup>27</sup>; rather, the effects of racial/ethnic microaggressions appear to be subtle (consistent with the conceptualization of such ambiguous interpersonal slights) and relate to the experiential (rather than empirical) realities faced by Latinx living in a prejudiced society.<sup>28</sup>

Current null findings are consistent with an unpublished dissertation that found no exaggerated CVR in the experimentally manipulated microaggression groups for Latinx.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, microaggressions not predicting recovery CVR is inconsistent with an unpublished dissertation that found a positive association between inferiority microaggressions and SBP in Latinx.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, none of the regression analyses significantly predict BP and ICG at recovery after adjusting for multiple comparisons. Perhaps subtle discrimination does not function primarily through a CVR pathway, but rather *via* the cortisol reactivity pathway of the Hypothalamic Pituitary Adrenal axis<sup>29,30</sup>; this warrant further study and replication.

Compared to a blatant discrimination experiment, the current study did not evoke significant CVR. This is in contrast with Sawyer and colleagues, who found significantly lower PEP but higher HR in Latinx women during an interaction with a known prejudiced confederate.<sup>14</sup> It may be possible that current study results did not significantly evoke CVR due to the subtle and ambiguous nature of racial/ethnic microaggressions, whereas the

study by Sawyer and colleagues contained an anticipatory effect, whereby participants were expecting to interact with someone who was known to be blatantly prejudiced. Additionally, one microaggressive social interaction may not be enough to produce the exaggerated cardiovascular responses typically seen with blatant racial/ethnic discrimination paradigms.<sup>13</sup> Conceivably, the cumulative and chronic nature of microaggressions may impact BP and ICG indicators across time and settings, indicating a need to examine this using longitudinal designs by assessing experiences outside the lab in the real world (e.g., ecological momentary assessment) and using ambulatory devices to capture cardiac functioning to accurately portray the CVR effects of racial/microaggressions; these speculations should be further tested and explored.

In relation to the broader psychophysiology literature, the biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat (BPS-CT) posits there are specific patterns of CVR that emerge when faced with challenge and threat situations, including race-based stressor tasks<sup>11</sup>; this model is the primary framework used in CVR studies. However, this analysis has received criticism in the challenge-threat literature.<sup>31</sup> Despite this larger debate, some propose an enhanced BPS-CT model to use with Latinx people that incorporates Latinx sociocultural values<sup>32</sup>; this may be a fruitful area of research focused on risk and resilience for Latinx in CVR studies.

This study is not without methodological and statistical limitations. First, this is a modest sample, with 33 college-aged students from a private university; future studies should use community samples of different ages and socioeconomic statuses, as these characteristics may influence the detection of racial/ethnic microaggressions. Second, the Latinx groups were collapsed to represent one monolithic group given the small Latinx group sizes, thereby representing ethnic gloss,<sup>33</sup> which neglects the unique historical and contextual factors influencing CVD risk for each Latinx group<sup>34</sup>; future CVR studies should disaggregate the Latinx pan-ethnic group. More importantly, it cannot be ruled out that the administration of the REMS at baseline may have primed participants on this study's aims, which likely contributed to null findings as participants might have known what the study entailed. Interestingly, during the debriefing period, all participants were provided with a summary sheet with the study aims and most participants indicated they were not able to detect the microaggression manipulation from the study confederate. Perhaps the confederate statements did not rise to the level of being detected as microaggressions by participants or there may be other reasons (beyond those assessed herein) contributing to participants not identifying the statements as microaggressions; these two lines of inquiry warrant further research. Post-hoc power analyses were conducted using G\*Power to identify the required sample size needed to detect significant effects during the experimental manipulation period.<sup>34</sup> For BP indicators, given a multivariate effect of partial  $\eta^2=0.13$  ( $\alpha=0.05$ ;  $1-\beta=0.80$ ), a total sample size of 897 would be needed to detect significant effects. Given a multivariate effect of partial  $\eta^2=0.43$  for ICG indicators ( $\alpha=0.05$ ;  $1-\beta=0.80$ ) a total sample size of 90 would be needed to detect significant effects. It is conceivable that the large number of participants needed to detect BP effects is consistent with the subtle impact of racial/ethnic microaggressions

on hemodynamic responses. However, the sample size required for ICG indicators suggests this method may be useful to capture the cardiovascular impact of experimentally manipulated racial/ethnic microaggressions; however, this warrants further replication. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that substantial ICG data were missing (due to containing significant artifacts) and these data were not imputed, given the exploratory nature of this study.

## CONCLUSION

Findings suggest there are no significant cardiovascular impacts of racial/ethnic microaggressions for Latinx college students. However, given the cumulative and chronic nature of microaggressions, future studies should empirically test this CVR pathway for racial/ethnic microaggressions to inform cardiovascular health research for Latinx communities in the U.S.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Study concept and design: García. Data collection: García, Serpas & Torres. Analysis and interpretation of data: García, Serpas & Torres. Drafting and revision of the manuscript: García, Serpas, & Torres. Obtained funding: García.

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## CONSENT

All study procedures were approved prior to data collection by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of La Verne and participants provided informed consent.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## Book Review

# Little Black Book on Love and Relationships

C. Suzanne Clark, PhD\*

Licensed Professional Counselor at Village Psychological Services, LLC, Georgia, USA

\*Corresponding author

C. Suzanne Clark, PhD

Psychologist, Licensed Professional Counselor at Village Psychological Services, LLC, Georgia, USA; E-mail: [suzaunna7@gmail.com](mailto:suzaunna7@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Relationships are hard. At times, we don't know what to do when our relationship fails; sometimes we don't even know why they fail. The only blueprint we have is the one we grew up with; watching our parents; grandparents, older siblings, or even friends manage their relationships and try to follow their lead. We imitate their mannerisms, behaviors, and attitudes trying to avoid the parts that feel bad and focusing on the parts that feel right. Even then, when things go wrong in our relationship, we question whether we will ever understand it well enough to get it right.

Relationships are confusing and rewarding at the same time. And you must develop resilience to be successful in your own. It seemed so much easier to engage in relationship connections when we were kids. When we argued, no one cared who was right or who was wrong. At the end of the day, all that mattered was the friendship. What happened? What changed? Life! Happened; you changed. It's easy to be friends with someone you don't live with every day. A smile from a friend who doesn't know your secrets is refreshing. Let's face it. When Life! Happens, we get upset when other people know what we are going through. On the contrary, friends don't know anything until you tell them.

An interesting irony, however, is that relationships are supposed to be a lot like friendship; with the added value of commitment that is much more up-close- and- personal than a social buddy. The major difference between friendship and being in a relationship is the latter requires commitment, where a lot of time is spent together under very personal circumstances. Interpersonal bonds are formed that go beyond the casual moments of friendship. Relationships require extensive personal transparency; friendships do not.

Relationships will challenge your determination to be resilient; because on your journey to being successful, you will be

forced into an uncomfortable spotlight where all of our insecurities are exposed, and another person is asking us to trust them with our vulnerability. In relationships, it becomes mandatory that we understand each other or fail at being committed to each other. Relationships have a way of showing us parts of ourselves that we were unaware existed, like emotional and psychological triggers from childhood; and put on full display, parts of ourselves we did not want to be exposed. Relationships are about being transparent when it's scary and humble when you're angry; and so much more.

A little black book is generally known for its helpful contents. It is famous for containing easy access information for seeking help getting through some interesting moments. This version of a little black book however, is a resource for recalling important details of what it means to effectively utilize the energy of love and become actively engaged in a relationship whether it involves your spouse, significant other, parents, your pet, a friend or co-worker, a relative in the military, or even your children. The goal is to provide summaries, references and quality interactive points for understanding love and maintaining healthy loving relationships.

All of us want to be in a good relationship. We want to be actively involved in a relationship that is rewarding, nurturing, loving, long-standing and prosperous. Whether your commitment is with a pet or another person, relationships are a necessary part of human life. No one is an island. We need each other. Because there are many different types of relationships with its own unique style of interacting, it is important to recognize and value the specific ways of relating that is inherent in each type of relationship.

Several different types of relationships are discussed in this book and each one has its own unique quality of cohesion and set of dynamics. Although it is impossible to include everything concerning relationships, this book attempts to highlight important details of several types of relationships. Much is discussed in

this book that may generate more questions that can be answered in this one book. More information is coming in future publications.

Some of the difficult relationship issues highlighted in this book involve moments of reflections such as bringing home the new baby and the struggle against the misunderstood psychological stressors that often follows. The symptoms of postpartum depression (PPD), after giving birth are real and so intense; they can make a new mom question her genuine love for her child. There isn't enough cuteness in that little bundle to prevent those hormonal symptoms from creating irritating personal feelings, unexplained reactions and confusing frustrations towards the infant and life in general.

In the relationship trials of life, sometimes commitment is not enough. How does one manage, much less get past the painful reality of an unfaithful partner or spouse? Or deal with a relationship steeped in chronic triggers that creates cracks in the foundations of security and punches a gigantic hole in the sacredness of mutual trust? How do you maintain footing when the delicate fibers that holds families together gets snapped by toxic blended relationships, obsessively controlling adults or an out-of-control adolescent? Relationships with children, if not well-understood, can result in adults unwittingly destroying innocence and stifling the natural wonderment of our most vulnerable souls.

Co-worker relationships offer unique opportunities to bond with new people establish life-long relationships and strengthen support systems. However, the old phrase that "one should not taste the honey, where you make your money" can unfold into an

employment nightmare. Attitudes, personality conflicts and petty offenses, if left unresolved, can create toxic workplace environments. Your relationship with your God speaks volumes about you, especially when you interact with other people of other faiths that are different from your own. How do you navigate through the religious differences and still feel connected to one Universal God?

Holding on to unique life moments shared with furry, four-footed friends can also form relationship bonds that lasts a lifetime; at the same time, this type of relationship offers us a glimpse into the connections we rarely pay attention to. It is one of the few genuine connections in which we feel safe being vulnerable. There is our military family; our country's defense warriors who can teach all of us a thing or two about staying together while managing the ultimate long-term relationship; and mentoring relationships, the type that often gets overlooked because there is an assumption that mentors are naturally good at creating supportive networks for those in need. They too, have their breaking points.

There is much more to relationships than can be written in one book and this one publication cannot cover every type of relationship. Therefore, this book is designed to be a go-to resource that provides pointers on how to engage and navigate effectively through several different types of relationships. Your success depends on many different factors; but the information is designed to give you a type of blueprint on what successful loving interactions and relationships look like. This little black book will attempt to not only answer tough questions concerning relationships, but also provide some answers for what it means to be successful in love and relationships.

## Case Study

# Autobiographical Case Study on Teaching, Learning Language, and Culture

Justin Saldana, PhD\*

Education and Teacher Development Department, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA

\*Corresponding author

Justin Saldana, PhD

Associate Professor, Education and Teacher Development Department, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA; Tel. 909-448-4656; Mobile. 760-310-2693; E-mail: [jsaldana@laverne.edu](mailto:jsaldana@laverne.edu)

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### ABSTRACT

This autobiographical narrative focuses on my life experiences learning two languages as well as the cultures. It acts as an archive from which I elicit evidence in exploring issues and themes related to learning language and culture, particularly those issues and themes relating to the complex dynamics of context. It explores factors influencing learning language/culture, such as subjective constructions and interpretations of teachers and learners, cultural, social, geographical, political, and local community aspects.

### Keywords

Learning language; Teaching; Conceptual background; Methodological background; Autobiography.

### INTRODUCTION

Using relevant literature, and an autobiographical narrative, this paper examines and deconstructs instances in my life, which provide a platform for the development of new knowledge, both as a teacher and as a student, related to the learning and teaching of language and culture.

The narrative is framed by a socially constructivist epistemology, which advocates that people inevitably construct and give meaning to reality based on interpretations and connections that are influenced by deep contextual forces specific to their unique existence. This unique existence exists within the parameters, and paradigms, of some context through, and with, the use of some form of communication.

Constructivist epistemology reveals that context can be used as a tool to explore the connections and meanings participants assign to their existence and their constructions of language and culture. One implication for teachers is that this new knowledge pertaining to context can be incorporated in the development of language/culture curriculum and programs.

Thus, I examine and revisit three instances in my life in an effort to derive understanding and provide insight into the complex constitution of context, its complex dynamic, and its relation to the process of learning and teaching language and culture. Finally, through reflection on the examined literature and a discussion on the content of the autobiographical narrative, I examine the link between the complexities of context and the acquisition of language and culture.

Section one introduces the conceptual and methodological background to the autobiographical narrative that contributes to this thesis.

Section two consists of the biographical narrative primarily focusing on my life experiences learning a language and the culture of the new language. This part of the thesis acts as an archive from which I elicit evidence in exploring issues and themes related to learning language and culture, particularly those issues and themes relating to the complex dynamics of context. The narrative also explores factors influencing learning language/culture, such as subjective constructions and interpretations of teachers and learners, cultural, social, geographical, political, and local community aspects.

## Data Collection Method

The data is qualitative and derived from my life experiences and literature I have consulted. Throughout this paper, I cite relevant research that supports experiential studies within the autobiography, the critical examination of issues emerging and identified within the autobiography, and an analysis related to the acquisition of language and culture.

The data consist of a review of literature, exploration of educational policy, and practices relevant to my life experiences, anecdotal records, life experience, selected syllabi, and school texts relevant to my experiences, curriculum frameworks, and empirical aspects. The use of narrative is important in documenting these experiences. Nobody other than me has had the same experiences, and these unique life experiences are my warrant to make personalized new knowledge, public. Therefore, this research is subjective and socio centric, since my personal experiences were developed alongside those of others in a multitude of environments in varying contexts. Barone<sup>1</sup> states that, “our autobiographies as learners in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood frame our approach to teaching at the start of our careers, and they frequently exert an influence that lasts a lifetime”.

## SECTION ONE

### Conceptual and Methodological Background

The methodology of autobiographical narrative raises potential concerns related to personal interpretation of events and the influence of preconceptions/prejudices in determining my subjective construction of meaning and understanding. In anticipation of these potential concerns, I examine my interpretation of events and experiences using a hermeneutic approach. I also consider reflexivity to enhance my level of awareness of how my values and experiences have shaped the research/content of the autobiography.

The autobiographical case study is experiential and empirical, where I draw on my own experience and try to support my memory and personal interpretations with references to relevant literature and historical records.

Constructivist-based research is a qualitative form of inquiry within an interpretivist paradigm, where there is an interdependent and interactive relationship between the subject and researcher and it is essentially subjectivist. Constructivist inquiry seeks to understand the entire context, both at the macro and micro environmental level, to offer understanding of the meaning behind the actions of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Constructivism, as a philosophy of learning, is based on the premise that all our understandings of the world are in essence our constructions. A teaching philosophy that considers this engages the learners into becoming active participants in their own learning, which includes deriving meaning from their experiences, as well as the shared ones in a classroom. Learners do not trans-

fer knowledge from the external world into their memories; rather they create interpretations of the world based upon their experiences and their interactions in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Idros et al<sup>4</sup> state that the fundamental argument underpinning constructivism is “that meaningful learning is affected by the integration of knowledge gained from new experiences into existing schemas”. According to Pickard et al<sup>2</sup> constructivist-based pedagogy stresses the learner’s active participation in constructing knowledge and emphasizes, “the shift from a simple single reality to the complex multiple realities of the individual”. This notion is magnified through the experience of being an immigrant and a (second+) language learner. Just as constructivism takes account of deriving meaning from experience, social constructivism takes account of context, social interactions and culture in our understanding. Social constructivism suggests that knowledge and social reality are created through daily interactions between people particularly through discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Constructivists advocate that learners use existing knowledge to create and develop new knowledge. Therefore, students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge. Social constructivist and constructivist teachers recognize that learners are active and invent or construct knowledge as they are engaged in learning situations individually and collectively, in order to make sense of their world and their existence. Social constructivism in particular emphasizes the significance of social context and culture in the development of understanding and the creation of new knowledge.

Language teachers (and learners) do not find themselves within one paradigm or approach, but rather respond to a set of standards, irrespective of their knowledge/awareness of how researchers and theorists argue over the point. It is conceivable that the typical language teacher would find it difficult to easily recognize or identify the basic tenets of each or all of the philosophies and paradigms mentioned above. As a teacher of language, I was only aware of my effectiveness insofar as my students’ engagement with, and learning of, such language (and culture). As a learner of language, I was busily engaged with it, and in it, to be able to peg myself onto any one paradigm or approach. As a learner of language, I did not have the knowledge and understanding of such content to try to figure out my language teachers’ theoretical or pedagogical approach. Neither was I aware of the circumstances that made up the setting for my experience of learning a language to the extent that I could fully understand and assess such experience: in other words, I did not have the awareness of context.

### Context

There exist multiple contexts within contexts that play a role in our constructions of reality, in the actions that we take or do not take, in the way we make or do not make perceptions, in our interpretations of events, and in the way we use and apply language(s). Context is not linear or one-dimensional. Context means the conditions of environment in which something exists or in which events happen. Context is a social construction with subjective meanings to those existing in it. Context is complex because all participants

within it can make connections and have shared meanings. However, all participants may also have very subjective interpretations of reality that are impacted by a number of factors that are very specific to each individual. Some of these factors may be static, like the race of the participant, and some may be dynamic, like the daily mood of the participant. These unique contextual forces influence perceptions and construction of reality. Since each individual has unique contextual forces impacted on them, and subjectively interprets things relative to those forces, there cannot be one set notion of context. Thus, context is a complex and ever-evolving construction of existence and events.

Dilley<sup>6</sup> suggests that contextualizing is a form of social action where people, through the construing of contexts, make interpretations and meanings for themselves. Wals et al<sup>7</sup> suggest that teachers try to understand the world of the learner so they can have this understanding as a base for learning. Robertson<sup>8</sup> also suggests that understanding the context in which knowledge is individually and socially constructed and mediated informs our understandings of current practices.

Hattam<sup>9</sup> suggests that practitioners connect learner's real lives to the official curriculum by establishing a link between the learner's existential context and their learning/understanding:

Knowing the students as learners is essential, but students are learners in and out of school. The aim of researching your students' life worlds as a source for planning curriculum and pedagogy... and the redesigning of curriculum and pedagogy that demands high intellectual challenge from students in ways that engage young people's life worlds and the concerns of their communities.

Therefore, throughout the case study I will situate incidents, events and experience within a context of relevance and meaning.

## CASE STUDY |

In this narrative, I examine contextual factors that illustrate language/culture learning in different settings/circumstances. Thus, our understanding of context in learning a language also provides background into the learning of the culture associated with the language, and this has a great impact on the learning of such language. Personal experience is a major part of this study, and as a participant in the research, hermeneutical implications abound, since I have constructed specific meanings from my lived experiences that are subjective and prejudiced. Therefore, I will explain the perspective from which I draw conclusions.

Bachor<sup>10</sup> states, "the researcher must unfold his/her perspective and clarify how evidence has been interpreted so that the reader can determine if the case study as published has integrity." Davis<sup>11</sup> claims that case study is "an analysis of a real world problem of which he or she has experience or been able to observe." This is my intention in describing events related to the learning of language and culture.

Walker<sup>12</sup> states that the study of particular incidents and events, as well as the selective collections of information on biography, personality, intentions, and values, allow the case study worker to capture and portray those elements of a situation that give it meaning. Therefore, I gather my data from personal meanings and understandings that are revealed through the autobiographical account of my experiences.

## Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics largely informs my autobiography. Gadamer<sup>13</sup> suggests that all individual interpretation is affected by historical consciousness and traditions that have an impact on objectivity.<sup>13,14</sup> My awareness of the impact of personal history and interpretation of events during my life has assisted me in situating prejudice and context in a perspective that give validity to my autobiography. The autobiographical narrative does not serve the purpose of documenting an objective history but rather positions myself and the reader alongside events that have affected my life's perspective. Thus, the reader will engage with my reflection and interpretation of events within the specific context of my qualitative inquiry framed within my own historically located tradition to better understand the complexity of learning a new language and the culture associated with it in different contexts.

## Autobiographical Narratives

The key features of autobiographical research involve personal reflections and reflective thinking that is meaningful to the researcher about such experiences. Clandinin et al<sup>15</sup> state that autobiographies are a narrative study of experience. Dazzin<sup>16</sup> describes autobiographies as "inscribing and creating life." Roth<sup>17</sup> tells us that autobiographies "tell us about a culture as well as about lives at the same time." Taylor et al<sup>18</sup> state:

When autobiographical research is conducted from a critical social perspective, it can enable teachers to develop critical reflective awareness of the culture of their profession, especially the shortcomings that restrain the quality of their educative relationships with their students.

Autobiographical narratives are constructed through life experiences. Taylor et al<sup>18</sup> state:

This form of research focuses on the researcher's own life history, involves writing in the narrative first person, and can give unique insights into the social and cultural forces shaping his/her own practice.

Roth<sup>17</sup> argue, "That since our autobiographies and our scholarly activities are deeply integrated we can therefore draw on our autobiographies to elucidate our knowledge".

The strategy of using an autobiographical narrative is the appropriate strategy to use for my unique story to be told. No one has had the exact experience I have lived. The methodology I have chosen makes it possible to make my unique experiences public

knowledge and contribute new knowledge to the field of language learning and teaching.

## SECTION TWO

The guiding question that allows me to develop this section is “why do I teach the way I do?” The answer involves formal and informal learning. I went through a formal process of development, where I learned strategies, theories, and activities through my experience and education. Outside of these formal structures, I was already a learner who incorporated new knowledge/information with a healthy amount of skepticism and critical analysis: I was keenly aware of issues of subordination. Furthermore, I also acquired specific characteristics in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood that made me a somewhat successful learner. These characteristics have also helped frame my teaching and still influence me.

### Learning My First Language

I was born in Mexico in 1963, in a colonia habitacional (substandard housing in the periphery of cities). The Mexican educational system was undergoing major reforms that begun under President Adolfo Lopez Mateos in 1959. One important aspect of such reforms involved the issue of compulsory education for grades one through six, as well as free textbooks for those grades. The goals set in the nationwide eleven-year plan for the expansion of primary education were achieved in two-years. Between 1962 and 1963, the construction of new school buildings proceeded at a rate estimated at one classroom every two hours.<sup>19</sup>

This rate of expansion created educational opportunities for many children. However, there also were issues related to the shortage and training of teachers. Under these circumstances, teachers in urban areas were better trained, had more experience, and the program and curricular offerings involved more choice for students. Schools in rural areas and in colonias habitacionales often had teacher shortages and less choice in curricular offerings.

When I turned 5-years-old I started school in first grade, as there was no preschool or kindergarten. Being the 4th out of eight children, and having my older siblings attend school before I did, I already had a basic level of literacy when I started formal schooling. My siblings taught me how to read, write and do math, using their government schoolbooks when I was 3-4-years-old. This had been the intent of the free textbooks, and that of standardizing the federal primary curriculum.

The government promoted literacy through the existing mass media. Mexico’s first commercial television station was established on August 31, 1950 in Mexico City. It started transmitting the next day. However, television viewing required electricity, and the country’s electrical grid was not operational in rural and colonias habitacionales until the 1970’s. I did not watch television regularly until I was 10-years-old. However, the radio was always on in our household. Mexico’s first radio station started broadcasting from the northern city of Monterrey on October 9, 1921. Due to the nature of the portability of battery-operated transistor radios,

this was the most prominent mass media in Mexico for a very long time. There were enough radio stations that offered a good variety of programming related to current news/events, different musical genres, and radio novelas (radio dramas) and cuentos infantiles (children’s stories).

Growing up in Baja California, Mexican, USA, I was exposed to four different native ethnic groups and their languages, as well as to at least two other prominent ethnic groups’ languages who settled in the area arriving from other parts of Mexico. I was also exposed to a large settlement of Americans living in Baja California, as well as to many English-speaking tourists visiting the area.

Therefore, my exposure to the available media and to the diversity of languages found in my community provided me with the context that promoted an expectation of respect and tolerance for such diversity, as well as an expectation that I too could achieve at least a minimum level of competence in some other language other than my primary language.

### Learning English

My first experience learning English was as an eleven-year-old entering Secundaria (middle school). The public school I attended offered English and French (as a foreign) language classes. In the early 1970’s, there was a lack of a well-articulated framework for the teaching of foreign languages in the Mexican national curriculum. The format for the course offerings was one period of the school day devoted to the teaching of English as a foreign language. There was a lack of integration of language and content learning. The foreign language teaching curriculum consisted of ineffective activities, like grammar-translation exercises, lectures, and made up dialogues. However, the teaching and learning of a foreign language at school was looked at as a positive and rewarding experience. The expectation of getting a good grade was high, although a high-grade was not the same as achieving a high-level of language competence. Therefore, the level of fluency achieved after two-years of middle school English as a foreign language was a low two on a 5-point scale.

My second experience learning English was when the family moved to the United States. As I entered the school system in California in sixth grade, the expectation was that I function in English, and the cultural expression was to be “American”. In the early 1970’s (and up to November, 2017, when Proposition 58 passed) the stated goal of Bilingual and English Language Development Programs in California was to transition English learners into English as soon as possible. As a consequence of the politicization of education in general, and specifically of Bilingual Education in California, the language submersion programs (sink or swim) were popular in the school district I attended as a sixth grader.

In a submersion model, I was put in an all-English speaking classroom and was expected to keep up with the curriculum taught in English. I had a strong cognitive and language foundation

in my primary language due to my schooling experience in Mexico: the competence in my primary language provided the basis for competence in the second language. This is known as the common underlying proficiency (CUP) from Cummins et al.<sup>20</sup> There were also consequences to my first language, as the district did not offer a first language maintenance program.

Although the cognitive and language foundation in my primary language was set, it took some time to learn academic English. According to language acquisition theory, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) (everyday language skills) takes between 3-5-years to acquire, and cognitive academic language proficiency skills (CALPS) (academic language skills) takes between 5-7-years to reach competence.<sup>20</sup> During the period I was learning English, my own primary language was atrophying, as there was no language maintenance program in place: the school did not do anything with the skill set I already had competence in. In addition, I missed much of the grade-level curriculum, since I was in an all English-speaking classroom and did not understand or speak English.

Within the context of Southern California's conservative and anti-immigrant politics, there was pressure to learn, and communicate in, English and be/act "American". As difficult as learning a new language under such pressured circumstances was, the language aspect was the easier of the two challenges. The expression of culture was difficult under difficult circumstances. Vygotsky<sup>21</sup> proposed that a child's cognitive schema for operating in the world is culturally bound. Therefore, the effects of trying to learn in an environment where the culture of the classroom differs from the culture of the home are challenging.

Young Latino children exposed to Spanish in the home face the challenge of accommodating their existing schema or constructing new schemas once they enter formal schooling in the United States. When the educational focus is on transitioning culturally and linguistically diverse students to a mainstream culture rather than building on what they already know, students are forced to change to meet the needs of the classroom. Some students are able to change and adapt; other students fail, with no fault of their own. Duquette<sup>22</sup> concluded that children need to be understood and to express themselves (in the same positive light experienced by other children) in their own first language, home context and culture. Their minority background brings out the limitations not of the children but of the professionals who are asked to respond to those needs and cannot or do not.

In their study of the possible effects of language on cognitive development, Hakuta et al<sup>23</sup> recognized the importance of acknowledging students' cultural, linguistic, and cognitive development and addressing them in schools. These effects of language and cognition account for most of the variance in cognitive growth. Therefore, it is important for all children to have a positive schooling experience, including English Language Learners.

A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute<sup>24</sup> looked at discrimination of immigrant children and children of immigrant

parents during the last 15-years, and the psychological and educational consequences. Studies show that immigrant children most often perceive discrimination in the school setting. In elementary school, they also experience discrimination from teachers. By adolescence, immigrant students report that they have been graded unfairly, discouraged from joining advanced level classes, and disciplined for things they did not do.

Experiencing discrimination can provoke stress responses similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Counteracting the effects of discrimination is challenging, but a growing body of research points to a number of factors that may help protect or buffer children from the negative effects of experiencing discrimination: A strong, positive ethnic identity; a supportive family environment, and the coping responses employed by children themselves.<sup>24</sup> Children who hold a positive view of their ethnicity and cultural heritage are protected from the negative effects of discrimination from both teachers and peers.

Coming from a supportive family environment and endowed with a strong sense of ethnic and cultural heritage and pride was a lifesaver. I did encounter discrimination from teachers and peers. This was an overwhelming challenge that I dealt with by ignoring it. As a middle school and high school age student, I did not have the skill set to know how to deal with it effectively and efficiently. I perceived other challenges that were more manageable and I focused on them. One of these challenges was schoolwork. I knew that I was struggling to keep up with the curriculum. During my high school years, I spent much of the time catching up on content I had missed when I was learning English.

It was no accident that when my parents brought us to the United States I had a strong sense of ethnic identity. The national Mexican curriculum had an emphasis on the development of a strong sense of nationalism to coalesce political, ideological, socio-demographic and socio-economic ideas, groups, and institutions. The central element focused on "Lealtad a la Patria", loyalty to the motherland and its institutions.<sup>25</sup>

There was a strong expectation at home that college was an achievable goal. There was also complete trust on the school system to make this possible. My parents had their point of view back in their country of origin, and this is how it was done in Mexico, so they trusted the school system to do it. Therefore, when a counselor informed me of the foreign language requirement for college admissions in ninth grade, I took 3-years of French. My counselor told me my primary language, Spanish, "did not count".

### **Learning French**

My first experience learning French was in a California high school. The school I attended offered three foreign language classes, including French. In the late 1970's, there was a lack of a well-articulated framework for the teaching of foreign languages in California. The Foreign Language Framework for California Public Schools had just been published in 1972 under the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.<sup>26</sup>

In high school, one period of the school day was devoted to the teaching of a foreign language. There was no integration of language and content learning. The foreign language-teaching curriculum consisted of ineffective activities, like translation exercises, made up dialogues and other busy work. The expectation of getting a good grade was high, although a high-grade was not the same as achieving a high-level of language fluency and competence. The learning of a foreign language at school was looked at as the fulfillment of one more requirement towards graduation and towards admission into higher education. Therefore, the level of fluency achieved after three-years of high school French as a foreign language was a low two on a 5-point scale.

Thirty two-years later, my French language skills all but atrophied. As a 49-year-old professor on sabbatical, I purposefully set myself up in the situation where I would be immersed in the language and in the culture. I lived in Paris for two months, and enrolled myself in private language classes. In the mornings, I went to classes, and in the afternoons, I attended political and cultural events, lectures, and sports events.

The focus of the language classes was on oral language development: oral communication. There was no integration of language and content learning, as the main purpose was to work on social language, BICS. The strategies used were contextual and relevant to the experience sought. The class had six to eight students; all of us were there to get our language skills enhanced and developed. The class included outings to different locations, where we used the language just acquired within the context of a museum, restaurant, etc. Thus, the context reinforced the purpose of language learning.

Having spent time in Paris before, and knowing I would return home at the end of a certain period of time, gave me the assurance of belonging (not belonging in Paris, but in my hometown back in the United States). Having this reassurance, I was able to appreciate the experience in Paris and be in the moment every step of the way. My French language immersion experience did not have the psychosocial challenges that my English language submersion experience had. Generally, an immigrant undergoes psychosocial challenges upon arriving in a new place. There are uncertainties for the immigrant about their sense of belonging. This level of concern increases if the receiving society does not appear to be accepting. The immigrant also has mixed feelings about arriving at a new place having left behind a way of life in which he/she was competent to negotiate socially.

### **Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language**

Upon graduating from college, I took a job teaching Spanish in high school. I had not received a teaching credential yet but had many experiences teaching English Language Learners. I had received some of the most current/relevant teaching training from a federally funded program for Migrant children.

I set out to become a mediating agent in my students' educational experience having learned about Vygotsky and his theory

of mediating. Vygotsky's theory stipulates that the development of the child's higher mental processes depend on the presence of mediating agents in the child's interaction with the environment.<sup>27</sup> Initially, Vygotsky was talking about symbolic tools, or mediators appropriated by children in the context of particular socio-cultural activities, including formal education. Eventually, this evolved into two types of mediation: mediation through another human being and mediation in the form of organized learning activity.

Richardson<sup>28</sup> made note of the fact that teachers' thinking is defined by context and experience: teachers have a lot of experience prior to entering the teaching profession. My pedagogy as a teacher was grounded in my experience as a language learner: my lived experience of learning a new language and new culture. Spanish was my primary language. I had native competence as well as a high-level of literacy in it. I had enough sense to be the human being in the classroom mediating concepts in language and language acquisition, as well as the cultural aspects of language. Therefore, the practical experience I had developed, in addition to the learned pedagogy, provided me with enough understanding about learning and teaching. I became competent at organizing formal learning activities and at managing the learning environment: the learned pedagogy guided my teaching. Clandinin et al<sup>29</sup> suggest that teachers acquire practical knowledge through an interaction between their own personal narratives and particular situations.

Generally, the students I taught were taking Spanish as a foreign language, in the same manner I had taken English as a foreign language in Mexico. I was able to draw from my experience the challenge of trying to learn a foreign language devoid of relevance, context and motivation. Therefore, my curriculum, teaching strategies, and overall epistemic outlook enabled me to make sure my students found relevance and meaning in the study of the Spanish language and culture: my experiences, formal and informal, informed my teaching.

### **Teaching English Language Development**

Most of the mechanistic (planning, teaching, assessing, etc) aspects of teaching Spanish as a foreign language to native English speakers were the same (or similar) to teaching English as a second language to Migrant (students whose parents work in the agricultural fields) children. However, when working with Migrant English Learners (ELs) there was the added challenge of mediating not just language but the culture as well. I was sure there were psychosocial implications that would play a role in the achievement of my students. Although I had a similar background as my students, I could not rely solely on my own immigrant experience to develop ways to be an effective teacher.

As I examined the literature to develop a foundational understanding of my students' experience, I was able to identify some of the same phenomena in my own. Suarez-Orozco et al<sup>30</sup> state that 85% of immigrant children and adolescents have been separated from one or both parents for an extended period of time. Disruption of family traditions and dynamics sometimes put children at risk for depression and other mental health problems.

Some immigrants experience hardships as part of their immigration experience (e.g., rape, human trafficking, physical abuse, deprivation of food and water, harsh transportation conditions) even as they escape trauma associated with conditions in their native countries (e.g., war, persecution, natural disasters) that were the reasons for leaving. Buhin<sup>31</sup> states that refugees are at higher risk for having survived ongoing torture in their homelands, putting them at high-risk for serious mental health problems such as PTSD and depression. Even when immigrants arrive in the United States hardships, stress and trauma continue. Most feel a sense of urgency about learning English and experience great levels of stress in being unable to use it fluently.

Berry<sup>32</sup> describes the process of adapting to the host culture as acculturation. This process involves stressors associated with adapting to a new culture, such as language barriers, new customs/traditions and discrimination. The attitudes of the host and the host culture play significant roles in the dynamic interactional process.

Different immigrant groups experience varying levels of discrimination and many types, like job discrimination, bullying, and hate crimes. Many immigrants have no previous experience with being “minority” group members until they arrive to their host country. Accumulation of discriminatory events results in avoidance of interactions with mainstream organizations such as schools, libraries, etc. Children lack the cognitive and social resources to understand and cope with discrimination (and sometimes the ability to label it as such). In addition, immigrant parents might not have the background, ability or experience to teach their children how to handle discrimination.

Another phenomenon of acculturation is the Immigrant Paradox. Suárez-Orozco et al<sup>33</sup> discuss the Immigrant Paradox as newcomer immigrant children being both optimistic about their future and engaged in learning. However, over time, this engagement becomes precarious and vulnerable to change. Fuligni<sup>34</sup> states that the initial academic advantage for nearly all immigrant groups declines the longer they are in the United States. Other declines include aspirations, and physical and psychological health.

## CONCLUSION

Watson-Gegeo<sup>35</sup> discuss important developments that have opened the way for a new paradigm shift in second language acquisition (SLA) scholarship. This development has opened the way for a new synthesis involving a reconsideration of mind, language, epistemology, and learning, based on the recognition that cognition originates in social interaction and cultural and sociopolitical processes shape it. This paradigm shift observes that cultural and sociopolitical processes are central, rather than incidental, to cognitive development theory.

García<sup>36</sup> presents an international intellectual movement that brought together the disciplines of psychology, semiotics, education, sociology, and anthropology into a sociocultural theory. This theory for education proposes that individual learning and

social interaction are inextricably connected. Sociocultural theory draws from work by Russian theorists L.S. Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin,<sup>21</sup> and theoreticians and philosophers of education like James W, Dewey J, Pierce CS, Piaget J.<sup>37</sup> The attempt was to find a unified way of understanding issues of language, cognition, culture, human development, and teaching and learning.

Sociocultural theorists argue that the psychology of the individual learner is deeply shaped by social interaction. Sociocultural theorists further state that knowledge is created in the interaction between teacher and student; that higher order mental processes are produced by shared activity and dialogue, and that our social lives, which are the major products of culture and language, are the major ingredients for cognition. This theoretical approach is helpful for educators who work with culturally diverse students because it conceives of learning as an interaction between individual learners and an embedding context.

This lens serves to sum up this case study. Language, culture, cognition, and human development in general, is a complex array of characteristics to be incorporated into the SLA teaching and learning process. Under the best circumstances, this is challenging. The cultural relocation that takes place for immigrants coming into the United States brings up another challenge, that of assimilation.

The two major approaches for the assimilation of immigrant children into U.S. society for the past century have been classic assimilation and pluralism. The assimilationists aim to eliminate ethnic boundaries as quickly as possible, while the pluralist aim to accommodate them.<sup>38</sup> These two views represent a melting pot with a single representative identity and a pluralistic cultural democracy.<sup>39</sup> Under the worst circumstances, both views leave school age immigrant children vulnerable to the political whim that rules their school system.

Thinking and reflecting on the experiences described above, and examining the research related to those experiences and their contexts, allowed me to understand and explain (at least to myself) many instances of meaning-making, as a teacher and as a student, where I made accurate connections as well as inaccurate ones. I realize that inaccurate connections were mostly based on a lack of understanding the cultural norms associated with the language I was learning. In addition, the language itself is at times, inadequate in the message(s) it conveys.

Thinking and reflecting is part of the teaching-learning process for teachers and it is done every day if one strives to be an effective one. When I taught high school Spanish and English Language Development to Migrant students, I understood the challenge to be the language. However, further reflection led me to understand that I was also mediating culture and cultural understanding. I became aware that my cultural mediation was more effective when I was doing it for my English-speaking students studying Spanish as a foreign language.

In high school and college, I became fully competent

and literate in English. However, there were gaps in my knowledge and understanding of some cultural traditions, traits, attitudes and behaviors. I did not come to the United States until I was 11-years-old. One example was teaching nursery rhymes to English Learners. I understood every word in every nursery rhyme, but I did not have the “cultural background” to derive culturally relevant meaning from them. This did not make me less effective when working with English Learners. On the contrary, I had the understanding and experience from having been myself an English language learner. I knew what I needed to do to mediate the cultural gap for my students. This knowledge and experience grounded my interest in becoming the best teacher I could be and the professor I became.

With the benefit of hindsight and experience, I have come to observe that learning theories and socialization theories have a confluence and relevance to what happens in the classroom. Teachers are a product of that confluence and, inadvertently, may perpetuate an imperfect and unfair system. As an English learner and as an immigrant, I had experienced the system’s inadequacy and education/miseducation of English learners and immigrant students. Working within the system there is pressure to comply, to conform, and to perpetuate it. When I became part of the system by becoming a teacher and professor, I did not base my epistemic approach solely on my own experience. I did not base my epistemic approach on the feedback received from the system either. I became a critical consumer of appropriate and relevant research. It is dangerous to depend on the feedback received from the system, as you become part of it.

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## Editorial

# Globalization, Identity and World-minded Values

Aghop Der-Karabetian, PhD\*

Psychology Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA

\*Corresponding author

Aghop Der-Karabetian, PhD

Editor in Chief (Social Behavior Research and Practice), Professor Emeritus, Psychology Department, College of Arts and Sciences, University of La Verne, 1950 Third Street, La Verne, CA 91750, USA; E-mail: [ader-karabetian@laverne.edu](mailto:ader-karabetian@laverne.edu)

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The “Global Village” is upon us, if anybody is still in doubt!

The recent pandemic of the novel corona virus (Covid-19) drives home this realization quite powerfully. The nation-state-centric view of the world originated by the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 after the Thirty-year war no longer accurately and adequately describes the workings of an increasingly interdependent and interconnected global system.<sup>1-4</sup>

According to Boulding<sup>5</sup> globalization is a total system composed of physical, biological, social, economic, political and communication system. Lifton<sup>6</sup> envisioned it as a technologically imposed and fostered unity of humankind, and Mackay<sup>7</sup> saw it as the growing worldwide interconnections between societies.

The globalizing forces of the interdependence of nations, countries and states have been around for some time.<sup>8,9</sup> Just to name a few: (a) The global spread of scientific-intellectual culture; (b) The emergence of English as an international language of commerce and communication; (c) An increasingly sophisticated worldwide communication networks like social media; (d) Increasing means and opportunities for travel for business and leisure across national boundaries; (e) The establishment of highly integrated global system of finance and exchange; (f) Growing trend in resource interdependence such as oil and rare elements; (g) and, a growing number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations addressing global issues such as poverty, climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>10-17</sup>

The possible positive and negative impact of globalization around the world continues to be a topic of scholarly and popular discourse.<sup>18-22</sup> Regardless of the controversies and depth of analysis surrounding the globalization phenomenon its poten-

tial psychosocial impact is inevitable. One of the key manifest associations of globalization relates to the enhanced sense of belonging to the larger global community, and the accompanying shift in value orientation that shapes the way people view the world and treat each other as individuals and as groups.

In a seminal work titled, “*The Psychology of Global Citizenship: A Review of Theory and Research*” Reysen et al<sup>23</sup> layout how globalization is reflected in an enlarged sense of belonging to an inclusive global community, and its links to pro-social values such as diversity, empathy, altruism and environmental sustainability. In a similar vein, McFarland et al<sup>24</sup> review and expand on the research and theory of the notion of global-human identity. They identify its negative links to anti-social views and behaviors such as ethnocentrism, social dominance and self-centeredness, and positive links to pro-social values of universalism, care, and justice. Also, they addressed how child reading and educational practices can foster and nurture global-human identity and accompanying values. Additionally, the authors present and review different empirical measures and instruments to promote further research and theory development.

There is growing empirical evidence to suggest that global-human identity does not have to be polarized with national identity. They could be co-extensive in the sphere of ones social identity.<sup>25-29</sup>

A notion that encompasses both the sense of global belonging and pro-social values is the concept of world-mindedness. It is conceptualized as a value orientation that allows someone to go beyond local, regional and national concerns to perceive the world as a total interdependent system as well as feel a sense of affiliation with the whole of humanity.<sup>30-32</sup>

Early empirical studies dealing with the concept of world-mindedness have been reported by Fisher<sup>33</sup> and Statten<sup>34</sup>. Mead<sup>35</sup> and Bogardus<sup>36</sup> have explored the sociological significance in international-mindedness and world-mindedness, respectively. Ideas consistent with the notion of world-mindedness may be seen in Whitehead's<sup>37</sup> process philosophy and his concept of the relatedness of all entities in the universe. Similarly, Cobb et al<sup>38</sup> indicate in process theology the notion of God as the unifying experience of all things that could incorporate world-mindedness as one manifestation of the experiencing of God. de Chardin's<sup>39</sup> notion of the "noosphere" that reflects the planetary consciousness emerging from the interpenetration of culture further reinforces the concept of world-mindedness. World-mindedness as a value orientation is also consistent with the conceptual underpinnings and fundamental values of peace, economic welfare, social justice and ecological balance espoused by the World Order Models Project.<sup>40</sup>

Continuing study of the relationships between globalization, identity and world-minded values and behaviors, using interdisciplinary, global and cross-cultural methods and perspectives, provides fertile ground for the development and advancement of knowledge that may do some good.

The "Global Village" is upon us. Let us work to understand the workings of the "Village" more, and make it a better place to thrive.<sup>41,42</sup>

I call upon scholars, researchers and their students in the social, behavioral and pedagogical sciences around the world to engage in collaborative scholarship examining such a vital area of inquiry. Moreover, I would like to invite my colleagues and their students around the globe to share their opinions as well as research on the open-access- cyber-pages of this journal.

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## Short Communication

# What is Criminal Profiling Anno 2020: A Short Communication

Charlotte Kappel, PhD\*

Forensic Psychology, Plantagevej 16, 7700 Thisted, Denmark

\*Corresponding author

Charlotte Kappel, PhD

Forensic Psychology, Plantagevej 16, 7700 Thisted, Denmark; E-mail: [charlotte@ckappel.dk](mailto:charlotte@ckappel.dk)

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### ABSTRACT

Criminal profiling has been through many different periods during the time the field has existed, but none of which has resulted in a scientific validation of the field and thereby shown how it could be effectively used in the capable hands of law enforcement. Part of the problem is that there is no proper collaboration between law enforcement and the academic world from which the scientific validation could arise. This brief communication will give an overview of the main approaches used today, as well as explain the overall building blocks of a proposed Trinity-approach. The Trinity-approach consists of a geographical profile, which should lay the foundation of any profile. The reason for the geographical profile to be the foundation is that this type of profiling has shown reliable results compared to other types of profiling. The next step should be a profile of the victim and finally followed by the profile of the offender. The profile of the victim, as well as that of offender should come from a database containing extensive scientific studies within the field of criminal profiling. The strength of the Trinity-approach is a build-in scientific foundation, based on scientific studies that have undergone proper scientific review. The hope is to generate interest and debate, and call upon collaboration between law enforcement and academics to develop a scientific basis for the effectiveness of profiling as well as evaluate the reliability and validity of the Trinity-approach.

### Keywords

Trinity-approach; Criminal profiling; Database profiling; Profiling; Geographical profiling; Offender profiling; Victimology.

### INTRODUCTION

Criminal profiling is a strange and unclear phenomenon and even after many years of utilization and intense research it is still not very clear what criminal profiling really is. It has been accused of being anything but a science and more a matter of creative arts than a useful method for criminal investigation<sup>1,2</sup> and possibly no better than a bartender's ability at predicting or identifying offenders.<sup>3</sup> The field has experienced many different periods and influences, and has been portrait as something between the gut feeling of moody and genius personalities and the intricate puzzles solved by old and wise women. These have not been very useful to show the true potential of profiling or how it could be used in the capable hands of police anywhere. There are several possible reasons for this. Part of the problem might be the lack of uniformity in methods, data and terminology,<sup>4-8</sup> as well as ab-

sence of proper scientific assessment of how effective criminal profiling is.<sup>4-6,9,10</sup> This communication will briefly identify the main approaches to criminal profiling today, but the main intent is to describe the Trinity-approach to criminal profiling. However, it is not meant to provide a detailed manual on how an efficient profile should come about, nor is the intent to lay out a well-established model. The hope is to generate interest and debate, and call upon a future collaboration between law enforcement and academics to work towards developing a scientific assessment of the efficiency and assessment of the Trinity-approach in criminal profiling.

According to Fox and Farrington (2018) there are two overall main approaches today. One approach is a process created on a case-by-case basis by a profiler who has considerable training, experience, and practice in the field, with no clear process, methodology or systematic approach for integration across cases.<sup>11,12</sup>

The other main approach involves profiling by using objective and replicable measures, such as Canter's investigative psychology<sup>13,14</sup> or case linkage analysis,<sup>15,16</sup> or evidence-based profiling.<sup>17,18</sup> The purpose of this article is to propose the Trinity-approach for criminal profiling.

## DISCUSSION

The intent here is not to describe in detail the specific steps of the Trinity-approach. Rather it is meant to be a starting point from which the Trinity-approach can be explored and shaped by collaboration between law enforcement and academics. The purpose is mainly to advocate for criminal profiling to contain certain elements, as well as steps in particular order to come up with efficient and reliable profiling process. The individual stepping stones of the Trinity-approach already have their own validation in place. The systematic integration of the steps is what is needed.

The Trinity-approach makes use of geographical profiling in step one, and the use of a database of scientific studies in steps two and three. Geographical profiling is an investigative methodology that analyses the location of the crime scene to determine the most probable area of the offender's base or residence founded on concepts such as journey to crime, dead zones, population density, building density, street grids and maintenance of the local area. The aim is to aid the police narrow down the number of areas in which the suspects is most likely to reside and thereby streamlining their investigation process to be faster and more efficient.<sup>19,20</sup> The geographical profile should be the first step towards a full profile, as the area for the offenders base or resident can be predicted to a high degree as established by many previous studies.<sup>18,20-34</sup>

The next step includes the establishment of the profile of the victim. Both the profile of the victim and the profile of the offender in the Trinity-approach should come from a database. During this process, the focus is on the victim of the crime: Who is the victim? What makes this victim a typical victim of this type of crime and what makes this victim an atypical victim of this type of crime? This line of inquiry involves the victim's demographic, background, lifestyle, as well as many other aspects of the victim's life. Basically, anything relating to the victim's situation and attributes. The last step in the Trinity-approach is the offender profile. In the past the offender profile has been the main part of a criminal profile and sometimes even the only part of the profile. The offender profile does not have a high reliability though,<sup>1-3</sup> which probably has been one of the main reasons for the shady reputation of criminal profiling in the past. Offender profiling is a tool used by law enforcement, psychologists and others to help identify the major personality, behavioral, and demographic characteristics of an offender based upon an analysis of the crime scene behaviors.<sup>6,35,36</sup> However, predicting what demographics tend to be the most likely culprits of a certain behavior is difficult at best and impossible at worst. Human behavior is at least partly triggered by motivations and intentions, and motivation can be very difficult to establish.<sup>37</sup> To complicate things even more, motivations, as well as intentions may sometimes change quite quickly depending on different times, places and situations.<sup>38,39</sup> In other words, the

shady reputation of criminal profiling in the past was probably at least partly due to a low success rate in relation to offender profiling. However, it was more than just low success rates, as part of the problem is that there are no really proper scientific methods applied to assess the success rate of offender profiling.<sup>4-6,9,10</sup> If a uniform, systematic and scientific approach of criminal profiling is utilized and assessed by collaboration of law enforcement and academics then a new era for criminal profiling may begin.

The profile of the victim, as well as the offender should be pulled from a database. The database should contain numerous inputs from scientific studies generated around the world. The topics should include victimology, offenders, linking, talking with different types of offenders, etc. Basically, any topic connected to the investigative process can be included.

When creating the database which should be the foundation of the profile of both the victim and the offender, there are different factors to be aware of. Many elements of a profile could be influenced by culture, policy, location, and time among other things. Information in the studies used in the database should be evaluated for their consistency and divergence in the findings. In most scientific disciplines there are many studies of a single element or factor, and not all of them yield consistent results. Studies that show consistent results regarding a specific element can be grouped and noted for ease of access, reference and organization. Also, worth mentioning here is how various facets of human behavior are at least partly culture bound. Some aspects of a profile may be less straightforward than others. Today's world is a melting pot more than ever before. It is likely that scientific research from other countries and cultures may be useful. However, it is likely that some information will be less useful compared to other information in one setting, whereas in another setting it may not. For example, time and location both are of great importance to an investigation team. As such, it could negatively influence the success rate of a criminal profile created in Denmark in 2020, if the profile included the use of a scientific study about homicide from Spain in 1938. Whereas, if the profile included a scientific study about spatial human behavior and building density also from Spain from 1938 it might not negatively influence the success rate.

It all depends on the methods of the study and how the information is weighed. Databases could be shared across nation, but studies with consistent findings should be determined and grouped together at the national level as relevant and appropriate. However, having a good solid national database supplemented with scientific research from other countries may be helpful if the national law enforcement has a well-developed procedure for writing information in the criminal records, from which a useful scientific study must take its point of departure.

## CONCLUSION

Criminal profiling is popular today in entertainment media, but it should be popular for entirely different reasons. Today it is a clever way of capturing an audience for a television (TV) show or a movie, but it should be popular for its reliability and effectiveness,

because it could help law enforcement in their process of investigating and solving crimes. Here the Trinity-approach is described only in loose terms, as the details should be established by collaboration between academics and law enforcement. Law enforcement are the ones who will be using the approach and therefore the final details should be established along the way and the success rate the proposed approach achieves.

A profile will never be any better than the material it is based on. Scientific articles and papers are crucial. However, that does not mean that different perspectives cannot be of use. Different sources could be included in the database, weighed and evaluated for their effectiveness and contribution to establishing the validity and reliability of the Trinity-approach. Culture and context play crucial roles. It is hoped that. This communication will facilitate and encourage collaboration between law enforcement and academics to move towards a valid approach to criminal profiling, as well as to ensure a properly rigorous process of assessing the effectiveness of the process.

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