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Acculturative Stress, Social Interaction Anxiety, and Perception of Teasing among University Students

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Abstract

The present study has been carried out using the theoretical framework of Berry's Model of Acculturation developed by John W. Berry (1997). This study was planned to explore the effects of acculturative stress on social interaction anxiety as well as the moderating role of perception of teasing among students of other provinces. To carry out this study, a correlational research design was adopted. The data was collected using purposive sampling technique. A sample of 346 university residents from different provinces, aged between 17-27 years ($M = 22.31$, $SD = 1.38$) were selected for this study. Acculturative stress was measured using Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), social interaction anxiety was measured using Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS), and perception of teasing was measured using Perception of Teasing Scale (POTS). SPSS version 24 and Process by Hayes (Hayes, 2022) were used for analysis. The results of correlation analysis show that there is a positive association between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. Results of regression analysis reveal that social interaction anxiety significantly predicts acculturative stress among students of other provinces. Results of moderation analysis indicate that perception of teasing acts as moderator between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety.

Keywords: acculturative stress, perception of teasing, social interaction anxiety

Introduction

Pakistan is a culturally diverse country with several subculture groups such as Punjabi, Pathan, Balochi, Sindhi, Kashmiri, and Muhajirs. In their daily lives, these communities have standards and values. These standards

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influence group lives. Students at universities come from many provinces and have diverse cultural beliefs. Students from many ethnic groups promote their social, cultural, and political beliefs on campus. These cultural differences generate criteria for inclusion and exclusion for students in the mainstream of their lives (Akram & Farooq, [2019](#)). According to Berry ([1985](#)), ethnicity traditionally signifies certain cultural qualities retained by specific group members. A group's individuality stems from the cultural characteristics/practices possessed by its members. Social groupings are given responsibility for cultural differences. These organizations safeguard, practice, and preserve cultural qualities (Berry, [1985](#)).

Because of the quick technological advancement and mobility, people have started migrating from one place to another owing to a number of factors like economic, social, political, military, education, and so forth. Education is one industry that is now witnessing fast expansion (Church, [1982](#)). Punjab's higher educational establishments have created a viable educational environment. Students come from all over Pakistan, crossing national boundaries. It is a rewarding and interesting experience for students to be in an ethnically and socially diverse setting during their academic career (Mazrui, [1999](#)).

This convergence of academia has provided the chance to obtain knowledge by traveling to a different place for education, or knowledge that cannot be found locally. As a result of the different cultural environments, it is a tough practice for certain persons to adjust to other cultures when they go from one cultural background to another. It is challenging due to ethnic characteristics such as cultural heritage, faith, linguistics, and race. Everyone comes from a different cultural background and has certain biases or problems with people from various ethnic origins. As a result, people of different ethnic origins encounter different methods of reasoning, different communication styles, and behave in ways that contradict their own culture. This cultural variety may both improve and detract from one's abilities (Santrock, [2006](#)).

A student can achieve either instability or acculturative stress while interacting with many social networks, each with its own sociological and psychological functioning. These situations act as stresses for an individual. Physical, social, cultural, functional, and biological stresses might all be present. Physical stresses include unfamiliar surroundings, climatic changes, security issues, and lodging. Social stresses include difficulties

communicating with new people, homesickness, loneliness, and trouble relating to the hosts (Sandhu & Asrabadi, [1994](#)). The study assessed how acculturation brings a change in one's life in the domain of communication, while interacting with other people.

Acculturation is defined as the process through which individuals or groups learn and adapt themselves to the new cultural beliefs, values, and behaviors of another culture, while retaining their own culture (Berry & Sam, [2010](#)). Acculturation takes place when people from different cultures meet and interact with each other.

According to Berry ([2006](#)), there are four major types of acculturation strategies; assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation is the process whereby the individual adopts the cultural beliefs and values of the dominant culture and rejects his own cultural beliefs and values. Integration occurs when an individual adopts two cultures, the dominant one and his own, and becomes bicultural. Separation is the process of adopting one's own cultural beliefs and values while rejecting those of the dominant culture. Marginalization takes place when the individual rejects both the cultures.

Yıldız and Karakaya ([2025](#)) investigated the bullying experiences of Syrian teenagers in Turkey in relation to their acculturation. The results showed that participants encountered a variety of unfavorable peer interactions, such as prejudice, social exclusion, ridicule, and humiliation because of their Syrian identification. During the acculturation process, these experiences became major stressors and were linked to emotional problems, disengagement, and low self-esteem. The study also emphasized how crucial supporting connections with family, friends, and instructors are for promoting cultural adjustment. Overall, the findings suggest that acculturation-related challenges can influence adolescents' experiences of negative social interactions, including mocking and bullying, providing relevant evidence for examining the relationship between acculturative stress and perception of teasing among students.

Acculturative stressors can negatively impact psychological health and be linked to psychological distress, depression, negative emotions, and stress (Soufi Amlashi et al., [2024](#)). It can also cause problems in adjustment to culture and society, and mental health issues, especially for international students who are settling into a new social and cultural setting. Social interaction anxiety can be exacerbated by cultural adaptation issues which may present themselves as problems in social interaction, and in adjustment

to social environments not similar to one's own. Acculturative stress can also shape one's interpretations and reactions to adverse social encounters, such as teasing. Thus, a study of the relationship between acculturative stress on social interaction anxiety and perception of teasing may help better understand the psychological issues faced by university students (Soufi Amlashi et al., [2024](#)).

Acculturation stress can contribute to social interaction anxiety, as individuals who are struggling to adapt to a new culture may feel uncertain about how to interact with others (Leong & Kalibatseva, [2011](#)). This can lead to avoidance of social situations or a reliance on familiar cultural norms, which may make it difficult to establish new relationships or fully engage with the host culture (Gonzalez & Borders, [2010](#)).

One of the research projects conducted on international students in China by Chen ([2025](#)) established that perceived social support moderated the associations between acculturative stress and emotional, social, and academic adjustment. The strength of the connection between acculturative stress and adjustment was conditional on the psychological and social resources available to the person rather than being constant. This connection is even more emphasized by the study of Ersoy and Akçaoğlu ([2025](#)) where acculturative stress appeared to be an independent variable significantly predicting generalized anxiety among international students after controlling the other variables included in the study. Interestingly, however, this same study showed that acculturation-related social support from a number of different sources was not found to have the expected buffering effect on the acculturative stress–anxiety pathway, indicating that not all variables hypothesized to affect the acculturative stress–anxiety pathway operates similarly across student populations.

While there may be similar rates of exposure to teasing across demographical subgroups, Schmidt and Martin ([2019](#)) found that adverse mental health effects of appearance-related teasing were stronger for women than men, highlighting that teasing-related appraisals may have different moderating and predictive power within gender subgroups. Taken together, this recent literature provides a theoretical foundation for taking a context-sensitive perspective in the present study. Furthermore, it indicates that the relationship between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety must be understood in light of the various types of social interaction anxieties experienced by student populations in migration. This is further

dependent on the cultural context, as well as the social resources available to the migrants.

Lee et al. (2025) investigated the acculturative stress experiences of Asian international students in Canada, as well as the relationship between social anxiety and acculturative stress. The findings showed that social anxiety was a strong predictor of acculturative stress and that social anxiety and acculturative stress had a substantial correlation. The significance of resilience in reducing acculturative stress was also highlighted by the study. The findings show a strong correlation between social interaction issues and the stress associated with acclimating to a new cultural setting. This is a relationship that is especially significant to the present study, which focuses on acculturative stress and anxiety in social situations for university students (Lee et al., 2025).

Research suggests that there is a connection between acculturation stress, and anxiety in social interactions. People experiencing acculturation stress are more likely to suffer from social interaction anxiety due to their inability to interact socially with other people because they lack the required social skills and information (Fang & Schinke, 2010). Research suggests that acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety are interconnected. The results from a study done by Yun et al. (2020) showed that acculturative stress has a positive relationship with social interaction anxiety in international students. In a similar vein, research showed that Korean immigrants encountering acculturative stress demonstrated an increased likelihood of expressing symptoms associated with social anxiety.

Several studies have explored the relationship between acculturative stress and the perception of teasing. A study by Arbona and colleagues (2010) found that Latino youth who experienced higher levels of acculturative stress were more likely to perceive teasing from their peers. One of the consequences of acculturation stress is the perception of teasing or bullying. Studies have shown that individuals experiencing acculturative stress are more prone to interpreting teasing or bullying as a hazard to their overall well-being (Sam, 2010). This perception of teasing can be attributed to the cultural differences and misunderstandings that can arise during the acculturation process. The research was conducted involving Chinese immigrant adolescents in the United States, revealing a positive correlation between acculturation stress and their perception of being teased or bullied by peers. Similarly, the research identified that acculturation stress

significantly predicted the perception of discrimination and bullying among Korean immigrants in the United States (Sam & Berry, [2010](#)).

Another study performed by Murtaza et al. ([2020](#)) explored the phenomenon of acculturation in relation to the Hazara ethnic minority community of Pakistan. The researchers found that the Hazara community had a strong sense of cultural identity and valued their traditional cultural practices. However, the community was also found to be open to adopting some aspects of Pakistani culture, particularly in terms of language and dress.

Another study, conducted by Hussain and colleagues ([2019](#)), examined the acculturative stress experienced by Punjabi immigrants living in Karachi, Pakistan. The researchers found that the immigrants experienced significant acculturation stress, which was related to factors such as discrimination, social isolation, and the challenge of adapting to new cultures. The study also found that the immigrants who had a stronger sense of ethnic identity and maintained their cultural traditions were better able to cope with acculturative stress.

Zhang and Wang ([2026](#)) examined the idea of acculturative stress for twenty-five Chinese undergraduate and graduate students in a multicultural English-medium classroom. Using semi-structured interviews and theme analysis, the study identified foreign language stress, stress expression, and environmental ambiguity as the main causes of acculturative stress. The findings showed that stress expression was associated with anxiety linked to social evaluation, including fear of making mistakes, misinterpreting others, losing face, and receiving unfavorable evaluations from classmates and teachers from other nations. Social evaluation concerns were expressed to have significant impact on avoidance of classroom participation and communication, particularly among the students. Hence, the study offers proof of an association among acculturative stress and social-evaluative anxiety in the context of social interaction (Zhang & Wang, [2026](#)).

Malota and Mucsi ([2025](#)) investigated the connection between sociocultural adaptation and acculturative stress in 426 international students studying in Hungary from 56 different countries. The results demonstrated that acculturative stress had a significant and detrimental impact on sociocultural adaptation, meaning that students who were under more stress were less likely to exhibit behaviors that were appropriate for their culture. Significantly, anxiety and awkwardness, when meeting locals, discomfort when being stared at, and worries about interactions with

members of the host culture were examples of interpersonal acculturative stress. Students who experienced greater acculturative stress also reported difficulties in expressing ideas appropriately, collaborating with peers, interpreting others' responses, and developing personal and community relationships. These findings suggest that stressful and anxiety-provoking social interactions may interfere with individuals' ability to adjust effectively to a new cultural environment, providing support for examining social interaction anxiety as an important aspect of acculturative stress.

Endo conducted a study on perception of a teasing event depends on the social skill level of the individual. It studied that a teasing incident was reported to cause greater distress when the individual perceived it as distressing, compared with when it was perceived or interpreted as not distressing. So, the individual's perception of the teasing incident was strongly correlated with distress (Endo, [2007](#)). The results provide evidence for viewing teasing perception as a cognitive-appraisal mediator, not just a predictor: this represents the way a stressor is processed through the cognitive filter of the person's interpretation. This reasoning based on appraisal is consistent with more recent clinical data. Varela et al. ([2025](#)) showed that memories of teasing were correlated with adult social interaction anxiety, and social anxiety partially mediated the relationship between teasing experiences and emotional distress more broadly. This literature collectively suggests that perceived teasing may be brought together with acculturative stress to either strengthen or weaken the relation betwixt acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety, depending on the ambiguity of social exchanges, and the way it is it is interpreted, and not simply as an independent stressor.

It can be concluded from the above findings that people living in Pakistan have to face some difficulties when they try to adapt themselves to the new cultural surroundings. It is necessary to accept the distinct cultural identities and practices of immigrants as well as ethnic minorities. In addition, it is vital to build up a more tolerant society.

Rationale

In a culturally diverse nation like Pakistan, where students from different provinces often migrate to urban areas for educational opportunities, this study aims to investigate the psychological challenges associated with acculturation, including acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety, among students from various provinces. Additionally,

it explores the moderating role of perception of teasing in these experiences. Since teasing is an inherently ambiguous social behavior that can be interpreted as either playful or hostile (Kowalski, [2000](#)), the perception held by the students about being teased was predicted to either intensify or cushion the association between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. Previous studies have mostly concentrated on particular ethnic or immigrant groups in Pakistan, but this research intends to get a holistic idea of psychosocial adaptation among all Pakistani students from various provinces who have migrated for education. It also addresses a significant research gap by highlighting the need for indigenous tools tailored to the Pakistani context, ultimately offering valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and support services to better assist these students in their adaptation processes.

Objectives

1. 1.To investigate the relationship between acculturative stress, social interaction anxiety, and perception of teasing among students of other provinces residing in Lahore.
2. 2.To investigate the moderating role of perception of teasing in acculturative stress, and social interaction anxiety among students of other provinces residing in Lahore.

Hypotheses

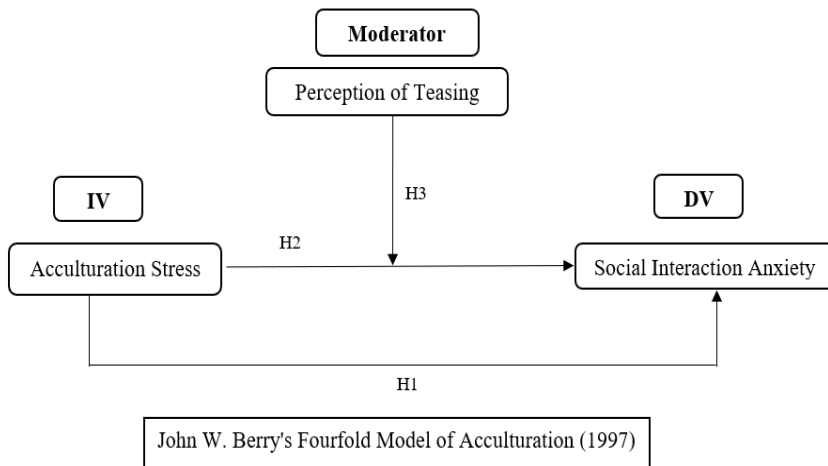
The Hypothesized model is given in Figure 1, which shows all the hypotheses between variables.

H1: There would be a positive relationship between acculturative stress, and social interaction anxiety.

H2: Acculturative stress would be a predictor of social interaction anxiety.

H3: Perception of teasing would moderate the relation between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety.

Figure 1
Hypothesized Model



Method

Research Design

Correlational research design was used in this study. The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between acculturative stress, social anxiety, and perception of being teased among students from different provinces.

Sample

Purposive sampling technique was used for the conduct of the study. The sample comprised of 346 hostilities of universities belonging to different provinces and living in Lahore. Subjects were drawn from different hostels in Lahore. From demographic details of the participants, it was observed that total number of females was 194 (56%) while males were 152 (44%).

Inclusion - Exclusion Criterion

The study sample consisted 346 subjects who were recruited from the different hostels in the Lahore city. The sample age ranged between 19-27 years ($M = 22.11$; $SD = 2.11$). All subjects were students of BS Hons., M.Sc., and M.Phil. degrees. The mother tongue of the subjects for the selection criteria was any language apart from Urdu.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables of the Sample (N= 346)*

Variables	F	%
Gender		
Male	152	43.9
Female	194	66.1
Education		
BS (Hons)	241	69.7
M.Sc.	36	10.4
MS/MPhil	69	19.9
Institute		
Government	179	51.7
Private	167	48.3
Province		
Punjab	201	58.1
Sindh	28	8.1
KPK	63	18.2
Baluchistan	18	5.2
GB	36	10.4
Socioeconomic Status		
Low	33	9.5
Middle	235	67.9
High	78	22.5

Assessment Measure***Acculturation Stress Scale for International Students***

The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) is an instrument designed by Sandhu and Asradabi in [1994](#). It is made up of 36 questions using the five-point Likert scale where Strongly Disagree = 1 while Strongly Agree = 5. The scores obtained from this instrument ranged from 36 to 180, whereby low scores were 36 to 72 and high scores were greater than 145, showing higher stress levels. Cronbach Alpha had an internal consistency value of 0.89. The ASSIS consists of 7 subscales,

including perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, change/culture shock stress, and guilt (Sandhu & Asrabadi, [1994](#)).

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)

The SIAS is an instrument used to assess social interaction anxiety. It comprises 20 questions that measure the degree of apprehension and fear concerning social interactions. With the use of a one-dimensional 5-point Likert scale (0 = not at all characteristic or true of me to 4 = extremely characteristic or true of me), the SIAS measures general social interaction anxiety in terms of social anxiety (Mattick & Clark, [1998](#)). Higher scores on the scale indicate high social interaction anxiety. It is important to note that there are 3 reverse items (items 5, 9, and 11) on the SIAS. The SIAS produces scores that range between 0 and 80, whereby higher scores indicate higher levels of anxiety. Internal reliability is measured using Cronbach Alpha, which ranges from .88 to .93.

Perception of Teasing Scale

Thompson designed this scale in [1995](#). This scale consists of two subscales which are Competency-related teasing (Items 7-11) and Weight-Related teasing (Items 1-6). These two subscales are summed up separately and assigned individual scores. The scoring range of Competency-Related Teasing subscale was 5-25, whereas the scoring range of Weight-Related teasing was 6-30. The higher score reflects a greater number of people who had been victims of bullying/teasing. It is made up of five Likert scales that vary from never to very often.

Procedure

The study has been approved by the Research Committee of Faculty of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University, and Advance Research Committee of Lahore Garrison University. For data collection, permissions were taken from the authors of scales and different heads of departments. Data was collected through the printed form of survey questionnaire. Permissions were taken from different universities and hostels for data collection. The data was collected from different private and government universities who had elite students in hostels. The participants were screened prior to data collection. The purpose of the research project was clearly communicated to each participant in each place. It was made clear to the participants that they could drop out of the experiment at any time. It was made clear to the participants that the data would be anonymous and

confidential. Participants were asked to sign the permission form that was attached to the survey before answering the questions. Time frame of 20 to 40 minutes was given to the participants to answer the questionnaires. After the collection of data, the survey was scored on the basis of scoring instructions provided by the authors of the scales.

Results

The data analysis procedure involved different steps. In order to find out the relationship between acculturation stressor, social interaction anxiety, and perception of teasing, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was carried out. The results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 2

Correlation Analysis for Acculturative Stress, Social Interaction Anxiety, and Perception of Teasing (N = 346)

Variables	1	2	3
1.AS	—	.21**	.41**
2.POTW	—	—	.41**
3.SIA	—	—	—

Note. N=no of responses= 346; **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. (2-tailed); *correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. (1-tailed); AS= Acculturative Stress; SIA=Social Interaction Anxiety; POTW=Perception of Teasing Weight

Correlation test (bivariate) / Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between acculturative stress, social interaction anxiety and perceived teasing among hostilities at universities of Lahore. Upon examining the correlations, several significant associations were observed. Starting with AS, it showed positive correlations with POTW, SIA. Firstly, there was a positive correlation between AS and POTW, suggesting that those who encounter more acculturative stress are also those who assign more significance to teasing incidents. Furthermore, POTW showed positive correlations with SIA, implying that individuals who perceive teasing weight to be high also tend to perceive teasing competence as high and report higher levels of social interaction anxiety. A significant positive correlation between SIA and AS was established. This meant that people who had high social interaction anxiety also experienced more acculturative stress and more teasing weight.

According to Hypothesis II, Acculturative Stress would predict Social Interaction Anxiety. Linear Regression Analysis was used to test the predictors of acculturative stress.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis examining Acculturative Stress as a Predictor of Social Interaction Anxiety (N = 346)

Predictor	B	S.E	β	95%	CI	p
				LL	UL	
Constant	-.15.2	5.92				.011
AS	.457	.056	.402	18.2	48.8	.000
F	66.0					
R ²	.16					

Note. β = Unstandardized Coefficient; CI= Confidence Interval, S.E=Std. Error; B =standardized Coefficient; R²= coefficient of determination; AS= Acculturative Stress; SIA=Social Interaction Anxiety

Linear regression analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between Acculturative Stress (AS) and Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA) in a total of 346 individuals, as shown in Table 4. This implies that when Acculturative Stress increases by one unit, there would be an increase of 0.457 units in Social Interaction Anxiety. The coefficients were statistically significant since the p-value was less than .001. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(1, 344) = 66.0, p < .001$), implying that the variables together significantly accounted for some of the variance in Social Interaction Anxiety. The R-Squared (R²) of 0.16 implied that 16% of variance in Social Interaction Anxiety was explained by Acculturative Stress. In summary, the findings show that Acculturative Stress is a significant predictor of Social Interaction Anxiety.

Moderation analysis was executed to examine the impact of perception of weight based on acculturation stressor, and social interaction anxiety, showed in Table 5.

Table 5

Moderation Analysis Examining the Interaction Effect of Perception of Teasing (Weight based) On Acculturative stress and Social Interaction Anxiety (N = 346)

Effect	Estimate	SE	95%	CI	p
			LL	UL	
AAS	.381	.053	.276	.486	.000
POTW	.780	.103	.577	.984	.000
AAS x POTW	-.014	.007	-.028	-.000	.046
Low POTW	.471	.071	.333	.610	.000
Medium POTW	.381	.053	.276	.486	.000
High POTW	.290	.069	.154	.427	.000
R ²	.282				
F	44.72				

Note. R²= coefficient of determination; CI= Confidence Interval: AAS= Acculturative Stress Scale, POTW=Perception of teasing weight based

The moderation analysis was conducted through Hayes Process Macro to examine the effect of perception of teasing related to weight on acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. The findings of the moderation analysis aimed at exploring the interaction effect of Perception of Teasing (Weight-based) (POTW) on the relationship between Acculturative Stress (AAS) and Social Interaction Anxiety (SIA). Several important outcomes were observed.

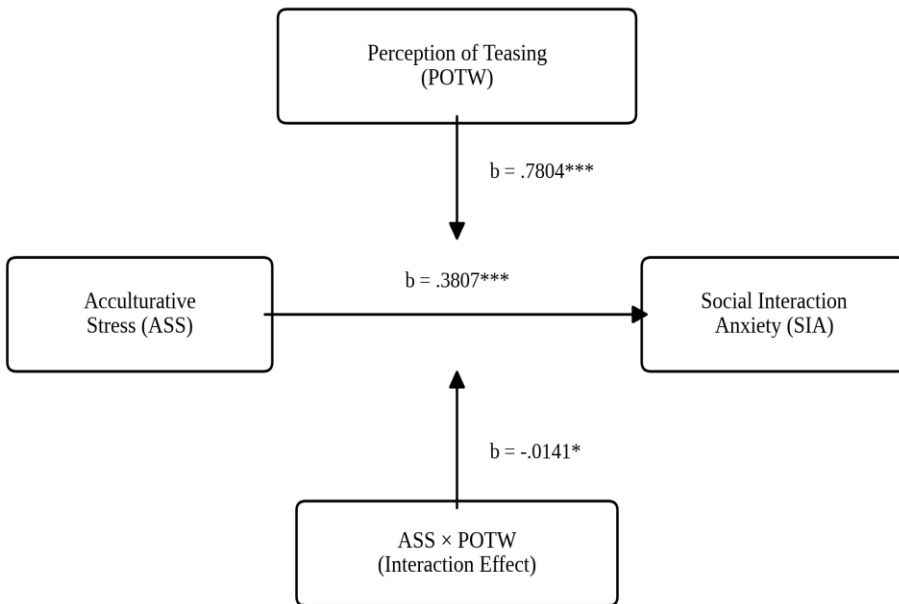
Firstly, Acculturative Stress (AAS) demonstrated a significant positive effect (Estimate = .381, SE = .053, 95% CI [.276, .486], $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of Acculturative Stress were associated with increased Social Interaction Anxiety. Similarly, Perception of Teasing (Weight-based) (POTW) exhibited a substantial positive effect (Estimate = 0.7804, SE = 0.1034, 95% CI [0.5771, 0.9837], $p < .001$), signifying that perceiving teasing related to weight was associated with elevated Social Interaction Anxiety.

The interaction term (AAS x POTW) was also significant (Estimate = -.014, SE = .007, 95% CI [-.028, -.000], $p = .046$). This interaction suggests that the relationship between Acculturative Stress and Social Interaction

Anxiety is moderated by the level of Perception of Teasing (Weight-based). Specifically, as individuals' Perception of Teasing (Weight-based) increased, the positive association between Acculturative Stress and Social Interaction Anxiety weakened, implying a nuanced interplay between these variables. Figure 1 is showing the Mod Graph examining the interaction effect of perception of teasing (weight based) on acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety.

Figure 1

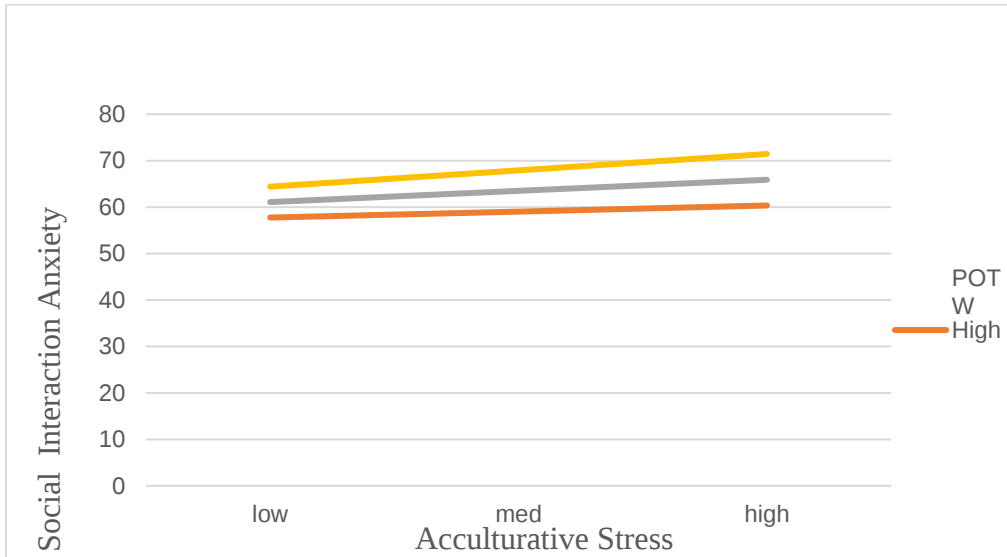
Path Diagram of the Tested Moderation Model



Note. ASS = Acculturative Stress; POTW = Perception of Teasing (Weight-Based); SIA = Social Interaction Anxiety. Direct effect $b = .3807$, moderator effect $b = .7804$, interaction effect $b = -.0141$, $R^2 = .2824$, $F = 44.72$. $*p < .05$. $***p < .001$.

Figure 2

Moderation Graph Examining the Interaction Effect of Perception of Teasing (Weight based) On Acculturative stress and Social Interaction Anxiety

**Discussion**

Pakistan is a culturally diverse country with several sub cultural groups such as Punjabi, Pathan, Balochi, Sindhi, Kashmiri, and Muhajirs. In their daily lives, these communities have varying standards and values. These standards influence group lives. Students at universities come from many provinces and have diverse cultural beliefs. Students from many ethnic groups promote their social, cultural, and political beliefs on campus. This research was targeted towards the adaptation process of various ethnic groups learning in higher educational institutions of Punjab, Pakistan. The main objective of the research was to assess how acculturation stress, anxiety in social interactions is interconnected with the perception of teasing. The research on acculturation stress is important because it can help us better understand the challenges faced by individuals who move to new cultures and face the consequences of acculturation stress. Through the identification of elements that contribute to acculturation stress, we can develop strategies that alleviate its impact. This can promote the mental and

physical well-being of the individuals and help them adjust to and become part of the society they are living in (Akram & Farooq, [2019](#)).

The central hypothesis of this study posits that there exists a positive correlation between acculturation stress, social interaction anxiety, and the perception of teasing. To explore the relationships among these variables, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was utilized with data analyzed using SPSS Version 23. The results demonstrated a positive correlation among acculturation stress, social interaction anxiety, and the perception of teasing. In this context, empirical findings are available that reported a similar association between acculturation stress and social interaction anxiety. Individuals who experience acculturation stress are more likely to experience social interaction anxiety because they may feel that they do not have the social skills or knowledge necessary to interact with others in the new culture (Fang & Schinke, [2010](#)). Numerous investigations have delved into the correlation between acculturation stress and the interpretation of teasing. Arbona and fellow researchers ([2010](#)) discovered that among Latino adolescents, heightened acculturation stress corresponded to an increased tendency to perceive teasing from their peers. Similarly, a study by Tummala and Claudius ([2013](#)) found that South Asian immigrants who experienced acculturation stress were more likely to perceive teasing related to their accent or cultural practices.

In line with Hypothesis 1, Chen ([2025](#)) also concluded that in a large international sample of students, acculturative stress had a significant negative impact on emotional and social adjustment, further confirming the positive relationship between acculturative stress and problems with social functioning found in the present study.

Concurrently, this positive association should not be taken for granted as being general or permanent, or of a fixed magnitude. In a systematic review of twenty peer-reviewed studies on acculturative stress and mental health among international students, Akram et al. ([2019](#)) reported contradictory findings in the reviewed literature; some of the studies did not report the expected relationship between acculturative stress and psychological outcomes. This indicates that the nature of the acculturative stress–social interaction anxiety correlation obtained in the present sample could be context-dependent for the students who were moving within Pakistan, and may not be indicative of a consistent relationship.

The second hypothesis stated that acculturation stressor would be a predictor of social interaction anxiety. In the similar context, Smith and

Khawaja ([2011](#)), in their longitudinal study with international students, found that higher levels of acculturation stress were associated with increased social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. It has been investigated that the communication experiences of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their findings revealed that acculturation stressors, such as misunderstandings due to language barriers and unfamiliar communication norms, were associated with increased communication apprehension. These stressors can hinder effective communication and contribute to heightened anxiety. The research was conducted as a cross-cultural study among Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on psychological wellbeing, acculturative stress, and support, and found that acculturation stressors were positively correlated with fear of negative evaluation. The stressors associated with adapting to a new culture can create a heightened sense of vulnerability and self-consciousness, contributing to increased fear of negative evaluation. The existing literature supports the hypothesis that acculturation stressors serve as predictors of these psychological outcomes. This highlights the importance of providing appropriate support and interventions for individuals navigating the challenges of adapting to a new culture (Li & Li, [2017](#)).

This predictive relationship is also supported by Ersoy and Akçaoğlu ([2025](#)), who revealed that acculturative stress was an independently and significantly predictive factor of generalized anxiety among international students even after controlling perceived stress and social support, validating acculturative stress as an important factor in predicting anxiety-related outcomes. Ersoy and Akçaoğlu ([2025](#)) also conducted a similar study and found that, contrary to the expectations, social support from various sources did not have a significant effect on the acculturation process for students. They found that not every variable they theorized to affect the acculturation stress–anxiety pathway was observed to have that effect across samples. This supports the predictive statement of Hypothesis 2, and implies that acculturative stress was a key predictor in this study, but not necessarily in all populations of relocating students.

The third hypothesis stated that perception of weight-based teasing would moderate the relationship between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. Results showed that the perception of weight-based teasing would moderate the relationship between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. A similar study by Rodriguez and Chen in [2020](#)

examined the moderating role of weight-based teasing in the relationship between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety among immigrant adolescents. Their findings suggest that the perception of teasing related to weight significantly moderates the relationship, with those perceiving more weight-based teasing experiencing a stronger link between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety (Rodriguez & Chen, 2020). Another research focuses on Latino immigrants and explores how weight-based teasing influences the relationship between acculturative stress and social interaction anxiety. The results demonstrate that weight-based teasing significantly moderates the relationship, with higher levels of teasing exacerbating the impact of acculturative stress on social interaction anxiety (Martinez & Diaz, 2019).

Supporting this, Varela et al. (2025) found that social interaction anxiety partially mediated the link between memories of teasing and adult emotional distress, suggesting that teasing memory perception and processing have downstream effects on social interaction anxiety outcomes. Consistently, Chen (2025) concluded that acculturative stress was consistently associated with social and emotional adjustment among international students in the study, while protective appraisal-related resources (e.g., perceived social support) were associated with a buffering effect on the relationship between acculturative stress and social and emotional adjustment, a pattern similar to that found in the present study with perceived teasing.

Similar to these two studies, Schmidt and Martin (2019) reported that a negative mental health impact due to appearance-related teasing was significant for females but not males in their sample, despite the percentages of teasing experiences being similar between the two groups. This means that the moderating or predictive effects of teasing-related perceptions are not equally strong for each of these subgroups, and thus the moderating effect of perception of teasing (weight-based) found in the present study should not be universalized without qualification.

Limitation and Suggestions

This study has methodological limitations and suggests areas for improvement. The need for culturally aligned tools to measure acculturative stress is highlighted, but limited resources hinder scale development. The cross-sectional design limits generalizability, underscoring the importance of longitudinal research. To enhance representation, future studies should involve diverse samples. Further extensive research on factors influencing self-disclosure is recommended, ideally with larger and more representative samples and longitudinal designs. Additionally, addressing acculturative

stress, social interaction anxiety, and perception of teasing challenges requires developing and evaluating interventions to reduce distress and promote well-being in the studied population.

Implications

The findings from this research have broad implications in education, health, and workplace settings. Understanding the factors contributing to acculturative stress, social interaction anxiety, and perception of teasing can inform effective interventions and therapies, allowing mental health professionals to tailor treatment approaches and improve overall well-being. Additionally, it can help educators create inclusive and supportive learning environments, promote workplace diversity and inclusion, and enhance employee well-being and productivity. This research fosters greater understanding and appreciation of the challenges faced by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, contributing to empathy, reducing stereotypes, and improving intercultural interactions in society. Moreover, it aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Reduced Inequality (SDG 10), and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), supporting well-being, equitable education, reduced inequality, and inclusive societies.

Conclusion

The present study has explored the relationship between acculturative stress, social interaction anxiety, and perception of teasing among the university students from different provinces who were residing in Lahore. The results confirmed that acculturative stress had a significant positive relationship with social interaction anxiety, that acculturative stress was a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety and that perception of teasing (weight-related) had a significant moderating effect on this relationship. The findings have been extended to the domestic context of migration within the country, interprovincial migration in Pakistan, by Berry's (1997) model of acculturative pressures which suggests that these pressures are not just experienced by students on international or across border migration but also in intra-country migration for educational purposes in Pakistan. How ambiguous social exchanges are cognitively appraised rather than acculturative stress alone appears to influence students' social interaction anxiety, further suggesting the moderating role

of perception of teasing. The study highlights the importance of culturally attuned and indigenous psychological resources and university-based support networks that tackle the objective causes of acculturative stress as well as the individual's internal perceptions and feelings of what constitutes teasing, to promote the psychosocial adjustment of the students from various provincial backgrounds.

Author Contribution

Aqsa Abdul Ghaffar: formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. **Shamshad Bashir:** supervision, methodology. **Najma Iqbal Malik:** supervision, methodology, formal analysis. **Syed Mesum Ali:** data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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