

COMMENTARY | SPECIAL ISSUE: ACCULTURATION REIMAGINED

Comments on the papers in the Special Issue “Acculturation reimagined: Setting the stage for the next era of inquiry”

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The six articles in the “Acculturation Reimagined” special issue are reviewed and commented on, and some gaps in the literature are noted. Some future directions for acculturation research are proposed. First, is the importance of examining all psychological acculturation phenomena in a broader context of group phenomena, including the features of the cultures that come into contact, the nature of their contact relationship, and the resultant changes in both cultures. Second, all cultures in contact need to be included in acculturation research, so that there is no longer any claim for a “missing side” of acculturation. Third, we need to distinguish between acculturation processes and outcomes. This is particularly important when discussing the concept of integration. As a process, it involves changes in daily behaviour, a strategy of double engagement in both the heritage culture and larger society, and coping with challenges and stresses encountered in the acculturation arena. As an outcome, it involves living successfully, achieving psychological wellbeing, competencies in daily living, and positive intercultural relations with members of all groups. Fourth, future research should consider that the ‘flow’ among acculturation phenomena is bi-directional, with psychological acculturation being able to ‘feedback’ to the group level-phenomena. Fifth, since acculturation phenomena occur over time, the issue of when each feature comes into play needs to be examined with longitudinal studies. Sixth, we need to look more to the social sciences and humanities for our research methods, and less to a focus on statistical methods derived from the natural sciences. Finally, the most important question for policy and practice is: what can account for the individual adaptation outcomes? We know that the experience of discrimination, both historically and at present, is a strong predictor of poor psychological, sociocultural and intercultural adaptation. What other factors play an important role? And how can this knowledge improve the lives of all people experiencing intercultural contact and acculturation?

Keywords: acculturation, adaptation, commentary, integration, immigration

1. INTRODUCTION

The papers in this special issue all propose some new ways to extend research on acculturation beyond existing formulations and empirical findings. They are generally rooted in the concepts and frameworks that have been assembled in the various handbooks on acculturation (e.g., Sam & Berry, 2006/2016; Schwartz & Unger, 2017). They mostly follow the well-established frameworks that flow from initial intercultural contact to cultural and psychological change, to eventual psychological, sociocultural and intercultural adaptations (Berry, 1992, 2003, 2017a, 2017b; Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2003; Navas et al., 2005; Safdar et al., 2013). And, all of the papers reference the two-dimensional framework for conceptualising acculturation strategies (Berry, 1980a, 1980b, 1997) that is based on the ways ethnocultural individuals and groups engage with their heritage cultures and with that of the larger national society. Beyond these similarities, each paper makes some specific points using original empirical studies that demonstrate them.

2. COMMENTS ON THE SIX PAPERS

In the paper by Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025), the authors focus on the ‘Integration Hypothesis’ proposed by Berry (1997). Based on an inspection of the then- available evidence, Berry proposed that “Acculturation strategies have been shown to have substantial relationships with positive adaptation: integration is usually the most successful; marginalisation is the least; and assimilation and separation strategies are intermediate” (Berry, 1997, p. 24).

Using different terminology, the authors present one aspect of this hypothesis: “The integration hypothesis (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006) suggests that migrants and ethnic minority group members must navigate the extent of their engagement with both the mainstream culture and their heritage culture. Optimal adaptation outcomes, such as psychological health and socio-cultural competence, are

thought to be associated with engaging with both the heritage and mainstream cultures (the integration strategy), rather than solely the heritage culture (separation strategy), the mainstream culture (assimilation strategy), or neither (marginalisation strategy)” as noted by Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025, p. 2).

The first problem with this characterisation of the integration hypothesis is that they seem to believe that only ‘migrants and ethnic minority group members’ acculturate, and that there is a single monolithic ‘mainstream’. However, in my view, everyone living in a plural society is a member of an ethnocultural group: all have cultures; and all acculturate. There is no longer an intercultural arena that is simply binary.

The second key point they miss is that the integration hypothesis is a relative one: that is, the evaluation of it requires not a singular focus on the double engagement with both cultures (integration, as they correctly state), but also on a comparison with the adaptations that are associated with the other three strategies. Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025) interpret the integration hypothesis as a statistical interaction between heritage and ‘mainstream’ cultural orientations. While this approach may capture one possible operationalization, it does not reflect the original comparative logic of the hypothesis. As originally proposed, the integration hypothesis was not about whether the combination of two orientations predicts outcomes above zero, but whether the strategy of simultaneous and active engagement is associated with better adaptation than alternative strategies such as assimilation, separation, or marginalisation. What the hypothesis calls for is a contrastive evaluation of integration against alternative strategies—not simply testing whether an interaction term is significant. Although statistical interactions may provide partial insight, they do not directly address the core premise: Is integration more adaptive than the other three strategies? That question is more faithfully addressed through analyses that compare

full strategies as contrast categories—whether via typological splits, latent profiles, or direct assessments of strategy preferences—rather than relying solely on continuous interaction terms.

Sometimes interaction terms can be statistically informative, and indeed some individual studies have used them meaningfully. However, they are inherently limited in their ability to represent the substantive meaning of integration as a lived strategy. A statistical interaction tests whether the relationship between one predictor and the outcome changes depending on another predictor’s level; it does not assess whether people who are integrated adapt better than those who are not.

Moreover, interaction effects are known to be fragile and highly dependent on modeling decisions—including centering, scaling, and distributional assumptions—and they are often underpowered in the context of meta-analysis, where heterogeneity across studies further undermines reliability (e.g., Ganzach, 1997; McClelland & Judd, 1993; Murphy & Russell, 2017; Rimpler et al., 2025; Sommet et al., 2023). In contrast, approaches that explicitly distinguish acculturation strategies—such as latent profile analysis or fourfold categorical models—offer a direct and interpretable framework to examine differences in adaptation between defined contrasts. These methods preserve both the conceptual integrity and the comparative logic of the hypothesis.

After the integration hypothesis was first proposed (Berry, 1997), across a wide range of methodologies and contexts, findings consistently support it, starting with the meta-analysis of Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013). Whether using midpoint splits (Dona & Berry, 1994), difference scores (Schmitz & Schmitz, 2022), latent profile models (Jang et al., 2017), multi-strategy assessments (Abu-Rayya et al., 2023; Grigoryev et al., 2023), or qualitative interviews (Zandi et al., 2025), the same general pattern emerges: individuals identified as following the

integration strategy typically report better adaptation than those using other strategies. However, this claim has been challenged by Bierwiazzonek and Kunst (2021); the present paper by Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025) is a continuation of this line of thinking about, and questioning, the integration hypothesis.

While some individual studies using regression-based interaction terms have also found supportive results (e.g., Celeste et al., 2014; Gonzales et al., 2018; Weisman de Mamani et al., 2017), this specific operationalization fails to show the pattern in their meta-analytic synthesis. Given the conceptual mismatch, methodological limitations, and lack of statistical power that often accompany interactions in such contexts, this discrepancy should not be seen as a refutation of the integration hypothesis, but as a limitation of a narrow operational lens. Vu and Bierwiazzonek’s study, in that sense, evaluates one statistical parameter—not the theoretical construct in its full breadth. A more pluralistic and triangulated methodological approach (Grigoryev et al., 2025) that is grounded in the original comparative intent of the hypothesis would offer a sounder test.

In my view, the better approach is to use a variety of methods, including profile analyses comparing the adaptations across the use of the four strategies. Some analyses have been carried out across many studies (e.g., Schmitz & Schmitz, 2022). Other single studies have also shown the relative adaptation outcomes in various societies (Berry & Hou, 2016; Berry et al., 2006; Jang et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2021). Other approaches, such as assessing preferences for the four strategies directly, for instance as with ‘vignettes’, or with four distinct scales (see Berry, 2017b) often show support for the integration hypothesis.

The second paper, by Stuart et al. (2025) deals with the process of acculturation when it takes place through telemedia. They highlight the large increase of internet usage in the acculturation process by forced migrants (refugees

and asylum seekers), international students and diasporic communities. This change has transformed how acculturating peoples engage with both their new society (giving access to important information about where they now live) and more importantly, with their heritage cultures and societies.

In recent work, Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) have proposed the concept of *remote acculturation*, where individuals who have not experienced ‘direct contact’ (a requirement that was originally proposed by Redfield et al., 1936) come to adopt some cultural and psychological characteristics of another culture (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). However, this adoption of cultural and behavioural traits over large distances is not new and has been examined by anthropologists and others using the concept of *cultural diffusion* (see Berry, 1980b, for a discussion of this phenomenon as one example of social and cultural change). However, the recent rise of telecommunications and its ready availability, has much hastened (speeded up) and increased (in frequency) the use of heritage culture (own group) and intercultural contact (with the culture of the society of settlement as well as with those beyond the society of settlement). This phenomenon has been particularly impactful and helpful for forced migrants and international students, who face time pressures to work out how to live in their new sociocultural settings (camps and campuses).

While the authors highlight the role of telemedia in shaping cultural orientations, they do not sufficiently distinguish this from classical concepts such as media-based socialization. Acculturation traditionally involves active, reciprocal interactions, whereas media-based influences can be indirect, symbolic, and unidirectional. Without delineating these boundaries, it becomes difficult to theorize how remote exposure leads to durable psychological or behavioral adaptation.

The paper also omits key social learning

processes such as imitation, reinforcement, role modeling, and sanctioning. Even mediated contact can trigger these mechanisms, through social identification, online community norms, or social feedback loops. Ignoring these processes risks flattening the phenomenon of acculturation into a media consumption effect, rather than a dynamic system of culturally scaffolded learning and meaning making.

The third paper, by Ward et al. (2025) on indigenizing acculturation research, identifies the close links between research in the fields of acculturation and intercultural relations. This link is not new, given the original use of the two-dimensional acculturation strategies framework in the development of the concept and scale of *multicultural ideology* (Berry et al., 1977; Stogianni et al., 2023). They are both based on peoples’ preferences on the issues of cultural maintenance and intercultural contact.

The concept of *indigenous* has been used in two different ways in psychology (Allwood & Berry, 2006; Kim & Berry, 1993). One refers to the psychology of a people in a particular society, such as in the Philippines (Pe-Pua, 2006), India (Sinha, 1997) and Taiwan (Yang, 2000). This has been a growing movement as some societies seek to see themselves in their own terms, rather than from a WASP (Western Academic Scientific Psychology) perspective.

The other refers to the psychology of Indigenous Peoples, those identified in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). While the declaration does not include a specific definition of who or what are Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Fact-sheet on Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2021) mentions those who are practicing unique traditions, who retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. They have self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and are accepted by the community as their

member. They also have historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies, and strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources, with distinct social, economic or political systems, and languages, cultures and beliefs. These characteristics lie at the root of the broader notion of Indigenous cultural identity (Berry, 1999), where they come together to support a comprehensive and wholistic world view.

The paper by Ward et al. (2025) challenges the dominance of research with Indigenous Peoples by non-Indigenous researchers. This dominance is particularly problematic when Indigenous Peoples are seen as just another ethnocultural group who are members of the larger society, and who are seen as just another component of the national multicultural mosaic. The special position of Indigenous Peoples in this mosaic (often due to the existence of ‘treaties’ between them and the colonising power) is often neglected, and results in their special rights and goals being ignored or even dismissed by the larger society, and often by non-Indigenous researchers.

Of particular relevance to the work of intercultural and cross-cultural psychology are the following articles in the UN Declaration: “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons; ...the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples in this Declaration will enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and indigenous peoples, based on principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and good faith; ...; and Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples, 2007, Articles 13-15).

Psychological research with Indigenous Peoples has been central to much early work in cross-cultural psychology, usually employing field methods adopted from anthropology (Lonner & Berry, 1986; Munroe & Munroe, 1997; Rivers, 1901), although there has been a reduction in the use of such approaches in recent years (Berry, 2022). This decline has meant that much of the information on the cultural context of human behaviour has not been available, which is required for the valid interpretation of similarities and differences in comparative studies of behaviour. This lack is also a problem for the field of intercultural psychology (studies in acculturation and intercultural relations) where ethnocultural groups are frequently relegated to the status of ‘minorities,’ who are not credited with having cultural characteristics worth describing or explaining.

Much of early psychological work was carried out in conjunction with anthropologists (e.g., Rivers, 1901) and subsequent work by others was informed by collaboration with anthropologists (e.g., Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry et al., 1986, 1987; Berry & Bennett, 1992; Wassmann & Dasen, 1994). In my view, it would be great to see such collaboration again become common in our fields.

The fourth paper by Verkuyten (2024) proposes that the concept of social comparison, as used in social psychology, should become more used in acculturation research in explaining the *integration paradox*. The author describes the integration paradox as “a phenomenon ... which describes the situation of the structurally more integrated and highly educated immigrants turning psychologically away from the host society, instead of becoming more oriented toward it” (Verkuyten, 2024, p. 3). He cites evidence that many features of the acculturation process, such as the perception of discrimination, the choice of acculturation strategies, and eventual adaptations are influenced by social comparisons made by immigrants.

He further proposes that, “a key reason for the integration paradox is that higher educated immigrants feel relatively deprived compared to similarly educated majority group members and as a result distance themselves psychologically from the host society” (Verkuyten, 2024, p. 4). There is a known link between perceived discrimination and various forms of wellbeing, with discrimination usually associated with poorer adaptation (e.g., Paradies, 2006). There is also a known link between discrimination and one's preferred acculturation strategy (e.g., Berry et al., 2006).

However, there is a second paradox in these relationships. In research conducted in Canada and France, Berry and Sabatier (2010) found that low discrimination was associated with a preference for the integration strategy, and with better adaptation in Canada; but in France, it was not. The interpretation offered was that since the integration strategy involves maintaining and expressing one's cultural heritage and identity, and this is not generally supported in France, higher discrimination in France became an impediment to well being there. One conclusion from these studies is that acculturating individuals will make comparisons with policies and the perceived expectations in the national societies, and choose how best to acculturate in that particular context.

A further paradox (or possibly a confusion), which is not mentioned by Verkuyten (2024), is that there are the two differing meanings of the term ‘integration’. In the social and cultural senses, integration refers to the *adaptations* that are made when living in an acculturation arena. However, the term is also commonly used to refer to the acculturation *strategy* of being engaged with both one's heritage culture and that of the larger society. This distinction is important when discussing such a core feature of acculturation.

The fifth paper by Titzmann and Jugert (2024) seeks to highlight the similarities between

acculturation and developmental perspectives, since both involve changes over time. They criticise much acculturation research as being ‘static’, lacking in longitudinal studies. However, they seem to miss how extensively developmental psychology has already informed the field. Theories by Erikson (identity formation), Vygotsky (internalization of cultural tools), and Bronfenbrenner (ecological systems) have been conceptually and methodologically influential for decades. Numerous studies on identity trajectories, transitional phases, and contextual influences already operationalize these developmental concepts - albeit under different nomenclature. Overlooking this historical lineage risks misrepresenting the field's theoretical richness.

The authors also miss citing the one previous exploration of this link between acculturation and development perspectives (Oppedal & Toppelberg, 2016). And they miss referencing an early longitudinal empirical study by Ho (1995), who assessed the acculturation of adolescent Chinese girls from Hong Kong over a few years following arrival in New Zealand.

The authors recommend that acculturation research draw from developmental research by using some core concepts such as life stages, phase transitions, and the importance of contexts. However, my reading of the acculturation literature shows that these concepts have been attended to. For example, some stages of acculturation have been proposed by Cushner and colleagues (1986), such as the initial ‘honeymoon’, the ‘delayed psychological entry’, and ‘homesickness’ phases. Phase transitions such as puberty and adolescence following intercultural influences have been reviewed by Dasen (2000), and the importance of understanding the contexts of acculturation has been highlighted by Berry (2006). These earlier contributions seem to have been missed by these authors. Future research should attend more to the intersection between developmental and acculturation phenomena, using longitudinal

research designs. Only in this way will the reasons for changes over time be able to be identified.

The sixth paper, by Jasini et al. (2025) makes the distinction between explicit acculturation (adopting attitudes and behaviours towards the two cultures); and implicit acculturation (possibly unconscious changes in individuals' cognitions, motivations, personality, and emotions). They note that most research has examined how explicit acculturation is related to personal adaptation; however, the link between implicit acculturation and adaptation has largely been absent. This paper examines emotional acculturation as an example of implicit acculturation, based on the assumption that such emotional acculturation will improve the adaptation life outcomes: “emotional fit with culture may enable minorities to view social situations through the lenses of the majority culture members but may also give them a sense of belonging or of being part of the culture, which in turn may lead to adaptive behaviors in contexts emphasizing the majority culture values.” (Jasini et al., 2025, p. 3). Since most acculturation is domain-specific, they chose to examine emotional acculturation in one domain (the school context) across variations in the students' perception of school climate (especially of discrimination).

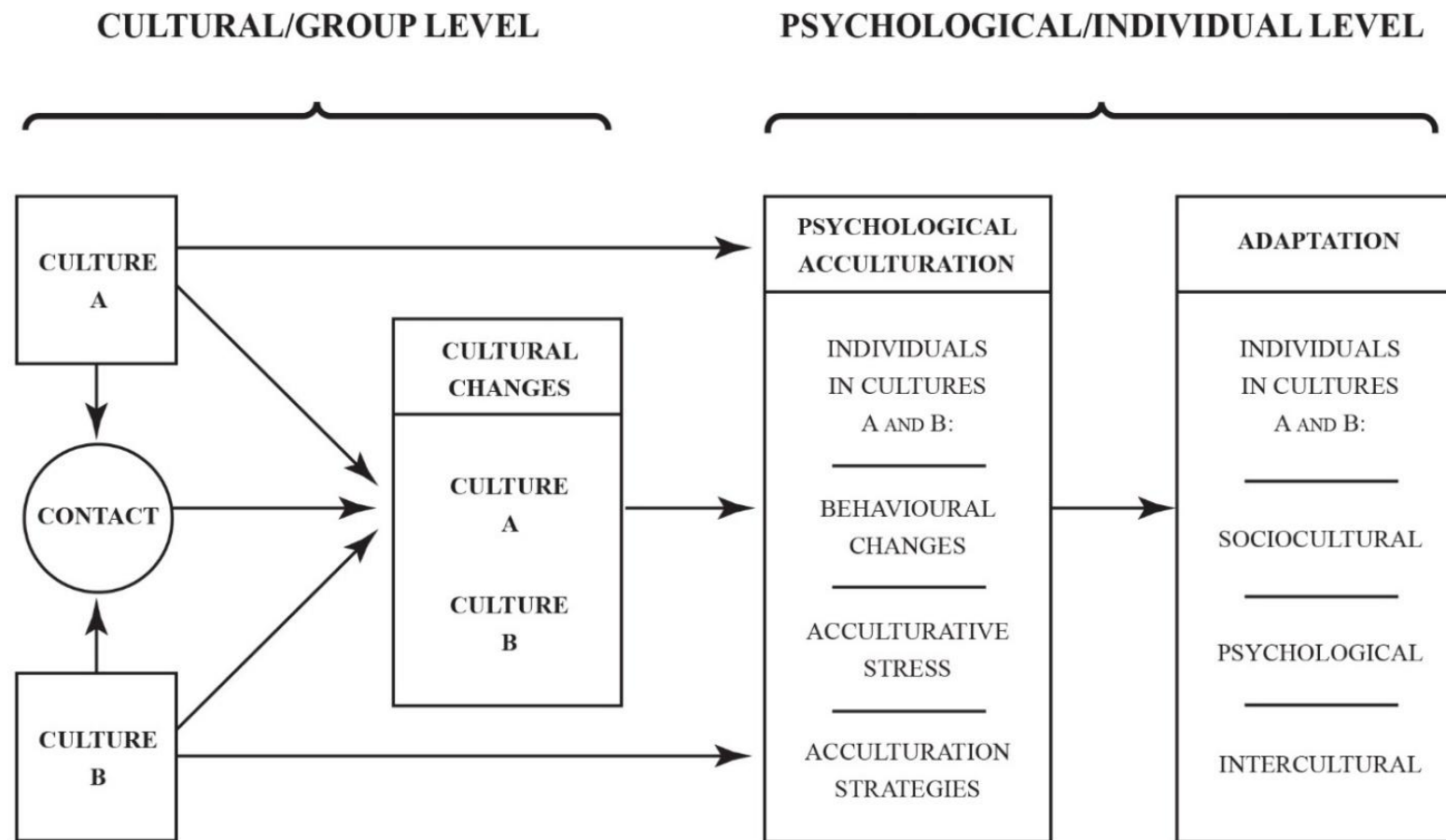
The authors carried out a two-year longitudinal study with minority students in secondary schools in Belgium. They hypothesised (and found) that minorities' emotional fit positively predicted their contact with the majority in the following year. They also predicted (but did not find) that discrimination predicted students' emotional fit. They also found that minorities' emotional acculturation over time negatively predicted their school engagement over time, when they simultaneously perceived discrimination. Given this variability in outcomes, they concluded that: “emotional acculturation may have liabilities, in addition to benefits” (Jasini et al., p. 1).

This longitudinal study is an excellent example of the kind of research that is being advocated in the paper by Titzmann and Jugert (2024). Taking this longitudinal perspective allows for the examination of plausible hypotheses about the course of acculturation over time. It also can show some important variations in outcomes, some of which are empirically validated, while others are not. The authors suggest that future research should examine “under what circumstances, and why, implicit acculturation turns a potential benefit into a liability” (p. 1).

3. ACCULTURATION RESEARCH: THE ROAD AHEAD

These comments started with the observation that the papers in this special issue are all grounded, to some extent, in the earlier concepts and frameworks that have guided acculturation research over the past five decades. One such framework (Berry, 2003) may serve as a continuing guide for the way ahead for acculturation research.

This framework shows the main acculturation phenomena, and links among them that need to be examined in acculturation research (see Figure 1). First, it establishes the importance of examining all psychological acculturation phenomena (shown on the right) in a broader context of group phenomena (the important features of the cultures that come into contact, the nature of their contact relationship, and the resultant changes in both cultures, on the left). Without such contextual information (Berry, 2006), it is not possible to even attempt to explain results from studies of psychological acculturation. Group-level phenomena need to be studied using ethnographic community-level research to learn what cultural features are brought to the contact arena, which of these are different enough to be contested, whether the contact is voluntary or forced, and

Figure 1*Framework for Understanding Acculturation Phenomena (Berry, 2003)*

what changes in the cultures provide a basis for individual psychological acculturative changes. As argued by Berry (2006) contexts for all behavioural phenomena need to be researched equally well as are the psychological phenomena (Berry, 2006, 2022). To understand how the larger society has been transformed requires more recent assessments of them to be documented as the actual context for psychological acculturation. Going forward, I believe that studies of all these group-level phenomena need to be re-introduced into the research carried out on psychological acculturation research.

Second, all cultures in contact need to be included in acculturation research, so that there is no longer any claim for a “missing side” of acculturation (Kunst et al., 2021; Zagefka et al., 2022). My point of view is that since all groups in a plural society (large or small, dominant or not) acculturate, much psychological research has already attended to both sides. Part of the claim that there is such a lack has stemmed from the change made in the acculturation strategies framework by some researchers who have changed from examining the issue of social *contact* with the other culture to the issue of *adopting* the other culture (Liebkind, 2001). Future research should be clear about which issue is being addressed: preference for social contact, or the desire for cultural adoption.

Third, on the individual psychological side, we need to distinguish between acculturation processes (in the middle) and outcomes (on the right). This is particularly important when discussing the concept of *integration*. As a process, it involves changes in daily behaviour, a strategy of double engagement in both the heritage culture and larger society, and coping with challenges and stresses encountered in the acculturation arena. As an outcome, it involves living successfully with psychological wellbeing, competencies in daily living, and positive intercultural relations with members

of all groups. To some extent this distinction has been lost in some acculturation research because the ‘integration hypothesis’ proposed that integration as a process (as a strategy) is associated with successful integration (as an outcome). Future research should make it clear how the concept of integration is defined and used in a particular study.

Fourth, future research should consider that the ‘flow’ in the framework is bi-directional, with psychological acculturation being able to ‘feedback’ to the group level-phenomena. For example, can a lack of successful intercultural adaptation of individuals influence the character of contact between groups (such as avoidance), or alter the intercultural policies and practices of the two groups? Can poor mental health among non-dominant people lead to their greater oppression or incarceration by the dominant group? Can low levels of economic success lead to changes in national employment equity policies?

Fifth, since there is a relationship among all these components, involving a ‘flow’ over time; the issue of when each feature comes into play needs to be examined. Ideally this should be with longitudinal studies. First contact may already have provided some ‘pre-contact’ through earlier colonisation or by current virtual engagement. Then ‘phases’ following contact need to be examined, using age-related developmental changes or time since contact, as variables.

Sixth, we need to move acculturation research away from the common problem in psychology of the over-statisticalisation of the field. When we address the mathematics of a research question more than we do the meaning of the phenomena, we fall into the trap of excessive mimicking of the natural sciences, rather than following the humanities and social sciences with which we also share our scholarly roots.

Finally, the most important question for policy and practice is: what can account for the

individual adaptation outcomes? We know that the experience of discrimination, both historically and at present, is a strong predictor of poor psychological, sociocultural and intercultural adaptation. Do national interethnic policies and practices (multiculturalism, assimilation, segregation and exclusion) used by the larger society play a role? And do the strategies used by acculturating individuals matter (i.e., the integration hypothesis) for their adaptation? Solving these remaining questions is critical for a politically and practically relevant next generation of acculturation research.

4. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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