

EDITORIAL | SPECIAL ISSUE: ACCULTURATION REIMAGINED

Acculturation reimagined—Charting new directions in a pluralistic world

David L. Sam^{1*} & Jonas R. Kunst^{2*}

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¹Department of Psychosocial Science, University of Bergen; ²Department of Communication and Culture, BI Norwegian Business School. *Please address correspondence to David L. Sam, David.Sam@uib.no, Christies gate 12, 5015 Bergen, Norway, or Jonas R. Kunst, jonas.r.kunst@bi.no, BI Norwegian Business School, Nydalsveien 37, N-0484 Oslo, Norway. This article is published under the Creative Commons BY 4.0 license. Users are allowed to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator.

This special issue, *Acculturation Reimagined*, argues for a paradigm shift in acculturation science to address 21st-century globalization, digital connectivity, and shifting cultural landscapes. Moving beyond static models, the contributions challenge foundational tenets through rigorous methodological critiques and innovative theoretical frameworks. Key discussions include a re-examination of the integration hypothesis, where recent meta-analyses reveal that past findings may stem from flawed bivariate methods rather than true interaction effects. The issue also highlights the “integration paradox,” showing how discrimination can undermine the well-being of the most structurally integrated immigrants. Expanding the field’s scope, authors introduce concepts of digitally mediated acculturation and advocate for indigenizing research to honor Indigenous epistemologies. A significant focus is placed on temporal dynamics, distinguishing true developmental perspectives—such as acculturation tempo—from simple longitudinal measurement. Empirical work further illustrates the complexity of adaptation, revealing that emotional fit with a majority culture can paradoxically lead to disengagement in discriminatory contexts. Collectively, these papers chart a future for acculturation research that is multivariate, context-sensitive, temporally dynamic, and inclusive of diverse lived experiences.

Keywords: acculturation, developmental, discrimination, indigenous, integration

1. INTRODUCTION

Why Reimagine Acculturation? In a world defined by unprecedented migration, digital connectivity, and shifting cultural landscapes, the study of acculturation is at a critical inflection point. This sentiment has been echoed across the field, with scholars discussing the potential need for a paradigm shift (Sam & Ward, 2021) and a fundamental re-examination of our core tenets (Sam, 2024), especially in light of critiques of the field's causal claims (Bierwiazzonek & Kunst, 2021; Kunst, 2021). The applied implications for millions of people demand sound theories that cover the full and rapidly evolving spectrum of intercultural experiences.

Once narrowly defined as the psychological and behavioral changes resulting from continuous firsthand contact between individuals of different cultural backgrounds (see Redfield et al., 1936), acculturation has evolved into a multifaceted construct and now reflects the complexities of globalization, migration, identity politics, and intercultural relations (see Schwartz, 2026). This special issue, *Acculturation Reimagined*, brings together a diverse and intellectually rich set of contributions that challenge, refine, and extend foundational concepts in acculturation science. Collectively, this special issue offers a roadmap for the next era of inquiry, one that is more inclusive, context-sensitive, methodologically rigorous, and attuned to the lived experiences of all cultural groups.

The call for papers that initiated this special issue invited scholars to critically engage with acculturation not merely as a psychological process, but as a dynamic, context-embedded phenomenon. We encouraged submissions that challenged the assumptions underlying traditional models, explored underrepresented populations and settings, and offered innovative perspectives to the study of acculturation that can meet the challenges of the 21st century. The response was both enthusiastic and generative, resulting in a collection that spans

theoretical innovation, empirical rigor, and cultural diversity. This special issue features six innovative papers: Jasini et al. (2025); Verkuyten (2024); Titzmann & Jugert (2024); Ward et al. (2025); Stuart et al. (2025); and Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025), including a commentary by Berry (2025), whose foundational work continues to shape the field, and responses by Bierwiazzonek (2025) and Jugert and Titzmann (2025). Together, these contributions explore new directions, challenge established paradigms, and propose fresh frameworks for understanding acculturation in the 21st century.

2. INTEGRATION HYPOTHESIS, ITS COMPLEXITIES AND THE PARADOXES

The paper by Vu and Bierwiazzonek (2025) critically revisits the assessment of the integration hypothesis. This hypothesis, a cornerstone of acculturation theory, posits that individuals who are doubly engaged with their heritage culture and the society of settlement profit from the best form of adaptation. The authors' meta-analytic approach demonstrates that past meta-analyses of the integration hypothesis used flawed bivariate methods that produced inflated results. It shows that common approaches, like using summative, multiplicative, or Euclidean Distance scores, fail to properly test for a statistical interaction because they do not control for the main effects of heritage and mainstream cultural orientations. By re-analyzing two datasets, the authors show that these bivariate proxies explain around 2% of the variance in adaptation, whereas a state-of-the-art multivariate test reveals the true interaction effect to be negligible (less than 0.1% variance explained). They conclude that the effects previously attributed to "integration" were actually the effects of the individual cultural orientations (primarily mainstream-culture orientation), meaning the bivariate methods mistook main effects for an interaction.

This methodological critique clashes directly with the commentary by Berry (2025), who

argues that Vu and Bierwiazzonek fundamentally misinterpret his hypothesis. Berry contends that the integration hypothesis was never about a simple statistical interaction term but is a comparative question: Is the strategy of integration associated with better adaptation than the alternative strategies of assimilation, separation, or marginalization?

In a rejoinder, Bierwiazzonek (2025) argues that Berry's criticisms misrepresent the nature and limitations of meta-analytical evidence. She emphasizes that Berry overlooks findings showing that the apparent benefits of integration are primarily driven by mainstream culture orientation, and that the variability in these effects stems from heritage culture orientation rather than differences between national contexts.

Moving somewhat away from the methodological issues of the integration hypothesis, Verkuyten (2025) introduces the integration paradox, where he demonstrates how well-educated and structurally integrated immigrants may experience psychological disengagement from the host society due to perceived relative deprivation. Drawing on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), the paper highlights how discrimination and unmet expectations can undermine adaptation—factors too often neglected in acculturation research. Berry's commentary adds nuance by distinguishing integration as a strategy versus an outcome and by noting national context differences (e.g., Canada vs. France) that may align with the integration paradox. Together, these contributions call for more context-sensitive frameworks that capture the dynamic interplay between structural conditions, individual perceptions, and the multifaceted nature of integration.

3. EXPANDING THE ACCULTURATION ARENA: DIGITAL SPACES AND INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY

Stuart et al. (2025) explore the transformative yet under-investigated role of tele-media in acculturation, especially among refugees,

international students, and diasporic communities. Their work introduces the concept of digitally mediated acculturation and extends Ferguson and Bornstein's (2012) notion of remote acculturation. Berry's (2025) commentary situates this within the broader anthropological tradition of cultural diffusion (see Whiten et al., 2016), while also calling for clearer distinctions between mediated socialization and active intercultural engagement. The commentary invites future research to examine the psychological mechanisms, such as imitation and social feedback.

Just as technology challenges the geographical boundaries of acculturation, the work of Ward et al. (2025) challenges its conceptual and political boundaries. The authors advocate for indigenizing acculturation research, both in terms of methodology and subject matter. Indeed, the very paper is written in an unorthodox way. Using a synthesis of Western and indigenous methodologies and perspectives, they highlight the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in mainstream acculturation frameworks such as those referring to the concept of "multiculturalism" and call for research that respects Indigenous epistemologies, rights, and cultural identities. Berry's commentary supports this call, emphasizing the historical contributions of Indigenous psychology and the need for renewed collaboration between psychologists and anthropologists. The paper challenges researchers to move beyond viewing Indigenous Peoples as mere ethnocultural minorities and to recognize their unique socio-political status.

4. TEMPORAL DYNAMICS AND THE PARADOX OF EMOTIONAL FIT

Titzmann and Jugert (2024) argue for a developmental lens in acculturation research, critiquing the field's static tendencies and advocating for longitudinal designs. Berry (2025) acknowledges the historical influence of developmental psychology (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and calls for greater recognition of earlier contributions. The

paper and commentary together emphasize the importance of temporal sequencing, life stages, and contextual transitions in understanding acculturative change. The need for longitudinal studies in developmental approaches cannot be overemphasized.

In their rejoinder, Jugert and Titzmann (2025) push back on Berry's commentary, arguing that merely acknowledging these values or relying on longitudinal designs does not realize the full potential of a developmental approach. They clarify that one of the "gravest misconceptions" in the field is assuming that measuring individuals over multiple time points is equivalent to adopting a developmental perspective. Instead, they advocate for a genuinely developmental perspective on acculturation. For example, they propose utilizing the concept of acculturation tempo, inspired by developmental approaches to puberty, to shed light on interindividual differences in the duration of typical stages like "culture shock." This perspective requires distinguishing between a narrow view of development (universal, progressive stages) and an expanded view that accounts for differential trajectories across the lifespan.

Answering this call for a more dynamic perspective, the longitudinal study by Jasini and colleagues (2025) offers a compelling example of what such research can uncover. They present a longitudinal study of emotional acculturation, focusing on an implicit process by which minority youth adopt majority emotion norms. Their findings reveal a paradox: while emotional fit predicts increased contact with majority peers over time, it also correlates with lower school engagement and higher non-compliance in contexts of perceived discrimination. The authors propose an explanation for this paradox: emotionally acculturated students may be more likely to compare themselves to their majority peers, making the experience of discrimination feel "particularly hurtful" and leading to psychological disengagement from school. This study thus bridges a

critical gap by linking implicit acculturation processes to sociocultural adjustment, highlighting how social context can turn a potential benefit into a liability. It bridges the gap between implicit acculturation and adjustment, highlighting the context-dependent liabilities of emotional fit.

5. A COLLECTIVE VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Collectively, the papers in this special issue chart a clear path forward, moving away from universalist models toward dynamic, context-sensitive frameworks attuned to lived experiences. They reveal that foundational concepts like integration are not straightforward; instead, they are fraught with paradoxes that depend on social comparison and perceived discrimination (Verkuyten, 2024; Jasini et al., 2025). Furthermore, they expand the very arena of acculturation, showing it unfolds not just in physical communities but through digitally mediated platforms (Stuart et al., 2025) and must be reconceptualized to honor the unique sociopolitical status of Indigenous Peoples (Ward et al., 2025).

The directions outlined in these contributions converge on several critical shifts for the field. First is the need to investigate understudied mechanisms and domains, from the implicit adjustments of emotional acculturation (Jasini et al., 2025) to the transformative role of digital media in shaping intercultural contact (Stuart et al., 2025). Second, there is a powerful call to adopt more dynamic and temporally sensitive research designs. The argument for a developmental lens and the necessity of longitudinal studies to capture change over time is a central theme (Berry, 2025; Jugert & Titzmann, 2025; Titzmann & Jugert, 2024). Finally, the papers advocate for expanding methodological horizons, which includes both adopting more statistically rigorous multivariate approaches to avoid the inflated findings of the past (Bierwiazzonek, 2025; Vu & Bierwiazzonek, 2025) and indigenizing the field by embracing research that respects and centers Indigenous epistemologies

(Ward et al., 2025).

This special issue affirms that acculturation is not a one-size-fits-all process. It is dynamic, multi-dimensional, and deeply embedded in sociopolitical, cultural, and psychological contexts. As we move forward, the challenge is not merely to refine our models but to reimagine the very foundations of acculturation science—toward a more inclusive, humane, and empirically grounded understanding of intercultural life.

6. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing interests.

7. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

D.L.S. and J.R.K. jointly wrote the editorial.

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