

Peer-review report of

Verkuyten, M. (2024). The neglected role of social comparisons in acculturation: Considering the integration paradox. *advances.in/psychology*, 2, e759126.
<https://doi.org/10.56296/aip00032>

Round 1

Dear Authors,

Thank you for submitting your thought-provoking theoretical paper to our special issue, "Acculturation Reimagined." We were privileged to receive reviews from two distinguished and long-standing experts in the fields of intergroup relations and acculturation psychology.

Reviewer 1 suggests expanding several parts of your argumentation, reviewing of previous literature, and providing more references. They also recommend creating a clearer division of levels of analyses, including spillovers and interactions. For example, under what circumstances do immigrants employ individual vs. collective, intra- and intergroup, upward, downward, and lateral social comparison strategies? How do these strategies influence their various acculturation outcomes?

Additionally, both reviewers advise integrating perspectives from social categorization theory. The second reviewer provides detailed suggestions in this regard and, like Reviewer 1, asks you to identify more precisely the conditions under which certain comparison dimensions become salient or not. We concur with the second reviewer that developing a theoretical model would greatly enhance the paper's impact. We encourage you to delineate the antecedents, outcomes, and moderators of social comparison processes in acculturation, specifying whether these relationships are currently empirically supported or could form hypotheses for future research. Including a figure illustrating your conceptual model would effectively emphasize these points.

The second reviewer also recommends further explicating how social comparison measurements could be incorporated into studies of acculturation preferences. A table offering suggestions and possible routes of implementation would be valuable. Finally, we agree that integrating research from a relative gratification approach would enrich the review.

In addition to the points raised by the reviewers, we have the following comments for your consideration.

One perspective that may be relevant to consider and incorporate is the "immigrant dual frame of reference" perspective. Orupabo, J., Drange, I., & Abrahamsen, B. (2020). Multiple frames of success: how second-generation immigrants experience educational support and belonging in higher education. *Higher education*, 79(5), 921-937.

You mention that context, specifically diversity ideologies, moderates comparison targets. For instance, you state that in an assimilative environment, comparisons with majority-group members may be less likely. However, this probably depends significantly on the extent to which minority-group members themselves endorse certain ideologies. Adding this nuance would strengthen your argument.

As you may be aware, one of the core aspects of dominant acculturation theory has been predicting adaptation via acculturation strategies and orientations. However, recent developments, some of which you cite, suggest that we need to explore other processes to explain adaptation. We encourage you to address this controversy in the sections where you set the stage for your review because social comparison by explaining adaptation outcomes is a likely contender to existing perspectives.

In the conclusion, you introduce the role of social comparisons in majority-group acculturation. We believe this part could be expanded and moved to the "Implications for acculturation theory and research" section.

One of the main objectives of the special issue we are editing is to push acculturation research beyond the standard bi-dimensional models, and your paper makes every effort to do that. However, we would be happy if you could devote a paragraph or two where you articulate precisely the contribution this paper is making to acculturation research.

Minor comments:

Regarding the interesting quotes at the beginning, it would be informative to include the generation to which the individuals belong, if that information is available.

Please capitalize headings according to APA7 guidelines.

Please provide a reference for the "rank-order paradigm."

Please provide a reference or references to support the claim that "the specificity principle and these models challenge the many acculturation studies that focus on acculturation differences rather than psychological and behavioral changes..."

The integration paradox is placed under the immigrant paradox. What is the difference or the distinction between these two forms of paradox? This could be explicated more to make sure readers get the point.

Many of the examples given to showcase the integration paradox are linked to education. Can you consider a title for the paper that highlights education or some other dimension to make it more specific, especially as the paper is concerned with the specificity principle? Alternatively, if you believe the processes in the paper applies beyond education, please add content that clarifies and supports this to the main text.

There are places in the manuscript where statements such as "less acculturated individuals" are used. Such statements seem linked to the uni-dimensional model of acculturation. Meanwhile, the thrust of the paper is directed to bi-dimensional models of acculturation.

Could you please give examples of "established immigrant-origin groups"; "smaller immigrant groups"; "recent immigrants" etc. to facilitate readers' comprehension and not just references?

On page 12, do you mean "separated co-ethnics"?

Thank you again for submitting this important piece to our special issue. We believe that the foundation of the paper is already strong, but further changes, primarily in (a) refining and expanding the framework and (b) developing a conceptual model with testable predictions, will help fully realize the potential and impact of the present work. We therefore invite you to submit a revised version within one month (i.e., by November 5).

Best regards,

Jonas R. Kunst & David L. Sam

Reviewer 1:

The central premise that acculturation is fundamentally a comparative process is both compelling and significant. It highlights a crucial, yet often overlooked, aspect of acculturation. I agree that this has important consequences for theorising, measurement and that this focus can help to explain particular findings in the literature that may appear inconsistent at first sight. I only have a few smaller points and one more major suggestion for the author and will list these thoughts as they arose while reading the paper.

The primary focus of the paper is on social comparisons; however, there exists an equally important consideration regarding categorization, particularly in relation to and drawing from the principles of self-categorization theory. For example, the paper mentions that higher-educated immigrants feel relatively deprived compared to their equally educated peers within the majority group, which leads to a psychological distancing from the host society (p.6). This phenomenon arises not just from nationality-based comparisons but also from a re-categorization based on education level. The sense of injustice emerges from a complex interaction between these categorizations: the perception of being denied certain benefits as a well-educated individual due to one's migrant background. The paper would benefit from a more systematic analysis of when certain categorization dimensions become salient and serve as basis for comparison, and when they do not. For instance, education may not always be a relevant dimension for migrants when comparing themselves to members of the host society, and a clearer articulation of this point would enhance understanding.

My more major point is that the paper makes a significant contribution, but it could have a greater impact by advancing towards the development of (a) a specific theoretical model, and (b) testable hypotheses. While this may seem ambitious, it would be valuable to see the author move in this direction. Considering that social comparisons are suggested to be more influential predictors of acculturation outcomes than static models that simply account for engagement preferences without these comparisons, a key prediction could involve testing the relative importance of these social comparisons.

To enhance the paper's impact, it would also be beneficial to provide guidance on how social comparison measurements can be integrated into studies of acculturation preferences.

Returning to the point about the salience of comparison dimensions (a fundamental self-categorization theory concept), the development of hypotheses regarding how the salience of these comparison dimensions and social comparisons might interact to influence outcomes would also be beneficial.

Lastly, it was surprising that the paper did not address relative gratification research. This body of work argues that dissatisfaction can stem from positive social comparisons, which foster feelings of entitlement and resentment when one's perceived entitlements are not fulfilled. The mechanisms underlying relative gratification differ from those associated with relative deprivation and warrant discussion.

Minor Issues

33. On page 2, the paragraph beginning with "The specificity principle and these models challenge..." is somewhat complex and difficult to follow. Simplifying this paragraph to clarify the main points would improve its readability.

Reviewer 2:

Review of Ms "Acculturation and social comparisons: Considering the integration paradox"

I thank for the opportunity to read this submission that aims at better incorporating social comparison theorizing into the field of acculturation research. I welcome this initiative as bridging social psychological and acculturation models could foster the understanding and analysis of interactive intergroup processes involved in immigrant integration. The ms, however, only partly succeeds in this task. The argumentation is somewhat superficial and very repetitious. The problem definition starts from the discussion of an immigrant paradox, which is described on pp. 4-5 without any references. Next, the author describes the integration paradox on p. 5, but again with only two repetitious sentences and one reference. These paradoxes are indeed interesting and relevant to be explained by the social comparison approach.

The ms promises to discuss how different theories that focus on social comparisons have been used and could be better used within the context of acculturation (pp. 3-4). However, neither these theories are properly presented nor the ways previous acculturation research has used them is actually discussed. For example, the theory of rising expectations is explained without references (p. 7). The same applies to the relative deprivation theory (p. 10). Similarly, the social identity theory is included into the argument in a very brief and superficial manner with only two references, one of which (Wills, 1981) representing actually identity theory and not SIT. The ms is also characterized by many insights from previous research without providing actual references. For example, the notion that "the higher educated tend to be more sensitive to acceptance and rejection by the majority population and are likely to be

exposed to societal discrimination since they consume more national media and have more contacts with majority members” is not supported by any reference. In addition, on p. 5, the author refers to the acculturative model of subjective discrimination by Flores (2015) by saying that “acculturative model of subjective discrimination’ predicts that higher education goes along with less perceived discrimination (Flores, 2015)”. However, Flores (2015) actually suggests that “discrimination reports by immigrants depend on three main factors: the specific type of discrimination under study (cultural or racial), immigrants’ acculturation level, and immigrants’ visibility”.

The main argument seems to be that “there is a range of individuals and groups with which people can compare themselves and their group, and there are also temporal comparisons in which one’s current situation is compared with the past”. Thus, one could expect that the discussion will be devoted to the individual vs group level upward, downward, and lateral comparisons, as well as different motivations and strategies involved in and resulting from those comparisons. Unfortunately, this is done in a very inconsistent manner, which in my view, is due to less than satisfactory integration of theories and empirical findings that differ in terms of the level of analysis and explanation. The social categorization theory has not been used at all, but it could have actually helped here by providing a bridge between interpersonal and intergroup phenomena (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2006). In addition, more conceptual work could have been made to distinguish between identity, cognitive (attitudinal, motivational), and behavioral mechanisms, functions, and outcomes of social comparison. This could have subsequently helped to better understand not only the strategies employed by immigrants to overcome disadvantage but also the difference between their subjectively perceived and objective outcomes of acculturation. Methodologically, this would lead to adding more dimensions (several intra- and intergroup comparisons) into the existing interactive and relative models of acculturation, which already often include a normative dimension. I think the taxonomy provided by Blanz et al. (1998) could be very useful here. In addition, the insights from a person/group discrimination discrepancy –approach (e.g., Hodson & Esses, 2002) could also help to explain the variability in reactions to disadvantage among highly educated/integrated immigrants.

Overall, I think that there is an enormous value of a better theorizing acculturation as a process that involves both interpersonal and intergroup interactions characterized by social comparisons, norms, and influence. It is also crucial to place group identities and status differences into the core of acculturation models as social comparisons are guided by identity motives. I also fully agree with the author that the social psychological theories on social comparison could help us to explain the variability of acculturation strategies and outcomes among immigrants. However, in order to assist acculturation research to better incorporate social psychological theories into the existing acculturation models and methodology, it is important to first provide as clear conceptual understanding of the social psychological dynamics of social comparison as possible. I think the ms in its current form is not ready yet to serve this function.

Blanz, M., Mummendey, A., Mielke, R., & Klink, A. (1998). Responding to negative social identity: A taxonomy of identity management strategies. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28(5), 697-729.

Hodson, G., & Esses, V. M. (2002). Distancing oneself from negative attributes and the personal/group discrimination discrepancy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(5), 500-507.

Schmitt, M. T., Branscombe, N. R., Silvia, P. J., Garcia, D. M., & Spears, R. (2006). Categorizing at the group-level in response to intragroup social comparisons: a self-categorization theory integration of self-evaluation and social identity motives. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 36(3), 297-314.

Round 2

Dear Authors,

Thank you for your responsiveness to our comments. It has become clear that you had more of a perspective paper in mind rather than a review paper, and we agree that the current manuscript is well-suited for this format. As you will see, one reviewer is still skeptical, whereas the other recommends accepting the paper after considering some smaller issues. Even though the reviewers diverge in their recommendations, we think your paper offers refreshing perspectives and should become an important contribution to the field, especially as a perspective paper, which should alleviate many of the one reviewer's concerns. Thus, we invite you to address the comments by the reviewers one more time and submit a likely final revised paper. In addition, we would like you to address the following points:

1. Your paper has the potential to make a significant impact on the field, but for this, a more bold title would be preferable. We suggest changing the title to "The Neglected Role of Social Comparisons in Acculturation: Reconsidering the Immigration Paradox."
2. The methodological implications section is great, but we would like additional focus on how the effect of comparisons could be tested experimentally (this seems a suitable method for the topic) and how longitudinal research can help investigate how and why comparison targets change over time, thereby approaching causal processes.
3. The language is generally very good. Please make sure to address some smaller revisions:
 - a. Make sure there is a comma after any "i.e.," or "e.g.,"

b. There is a missing space at: "(e.g.,Maldi et al., 2022; Lou & Noels, 2024)"

c. Please ensure consistent capitalization at the start of these examples: "(e.g., "In terms of your cultural values", "in terms of your typical behaviors", "In terms of social identifications"; e.g., Keum, 2016)." Either capitalize the start of each or none.

d. Please change the verb in this sentence to singular: "Further, the rank-order paradigm (Gruder, 1977) offers (correct this word) participants a selection of comparison targets that vary in their preferences and evaluations, or ask participants to rank their own situation with that of similar others (e.g., equally educated)."

e. There is a missing "to" in this sentence: "those who feel gratified are more anxious about their future wealth and fear of losing advantage, leading them to (add this word) oppose immigration."

4. The automated citation report indicates several inconsistencies. Please read it and make all corrections. The report can be found here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yxh_2i96LI4hLQ7HF2vaED-e04AQZYP8/view?usp=sharing

Thank you again for submitting this important work to our special issue. We believe it is close to reaching the level of being accepted and look forward to receiving a further revised version within one month (i.e., by Dec. 11, 2024, but preferably earlier to facilitate a fast publication process).

Best regards,

Jonas R. Kunst

David L. Sam

Special Issue Editors

Reviewer 1:

Thank you for being responsive to previous suggestions. I also appreciate the detailed cover letter outlining the responses to initial feedback. I'm in favour of publication of this version of the paper.

A few thoughts the author might take into account when finalising the paper:

1. I understand why the author does not want to present a specific model, but it might be good to state this in the paper so the reader better understands the reasoning and so that the scope of this analysis is defined more clearly.
2. My suggestion to include relative gratification reasoning more generally has been adopted and I appreciate that, but it would be good to take this a little further: many of the effects described could be due to relative deprivation (comparing the self to a higher performing group and feeling deprived in comparison) or relative gratification: comparing the self to other immigrants and feeling better off compared to them, but then feeling frustrated for not having much better outcomes than those other immigrants. Negative emotions are then due to feeling a frustrated sense of entitlement. It might be interesting to bring this reasoning in more fully as it is nicely compatible with the central argument that social comparisons matter in relation to the majority group, but also the minority group (e.g., the first two opening quotes to the paper).

Reviewer 2:

Review of the revised ms “Acculturation and social comparisons: Considering the integration paradox”

I have now read the revised version of the manuscript (ms). I identified a number of improvements, mainly related to the addition of more references and minor clarifications throughout the text. However, regarding the main critiques presented in the original submission, very few structural and content-related changes have been implemented. The second reading of the manuscript actually highlights the caveats of the text more clearly than before.

One of the primary issues that remains in the revised version is the lack of clarity. As I mentioned in my first review, the main concepts are poorly defined, beginning with acculturation and immigrant integration and adaptation. This lack of clarity makes it almost impossible to follow the argumentation, which mixes objective and subjective indices, individual and group levels, as well as attitudinal, identity, and behavioral measures across different dimensions and domains of integration and adaptation.

The author describes various situations and aspects of immigrant acculturation, integration, adaptation, and disadvantage where social comparisons occur. While this approach effectively highlights the heterogeneity of immigrant populations, the dimensionality of acculturation, and its context- and domainspecificity, it fails to provide a coherent picture regarding the paper's main aim—namely, to demonstrate the role of social comparisons in acculturation. Instead, the reader is left with a sense of a variety of (imagined) groups and audiences that influence immigrant acculturation, which should be better addressed.

The author does suggest some specific theories (such as Social Identity Theory and relative deprivation) as useful frameworks, but does not systematically review previous studies that have utilized these theories to explain immigrant integration and adaptation. Thus, it remains unclear whether and to what extent these social psychological theories have already been integrated into acculturation research.

The references below could help to better situate this paper within the field and articulate its specific contribution. For example, Liebkind (2003) has addressed intergroup strategies largely based on social comparisons employed by members of acculturating groups. Additionally, Schwartz et al. (2014) have made significant strides in bridging the social psychological perspective to group identities and intergroup relations within the acculturation literature to explain immigrant acculturation outcomes.

Finally, in my view, the improvements suggested by the author regarding measures of acculturation have already been at least partially implemented in models that include immigrants' normative and/or metaperceptions of acculturation attitudes, behaviors, and acculturation preferences from relevant social groups. I think this should be mentioned in the article.

Bourhis, R. Y., Moise, L. C., Perreault, S., & Senecal, S. (1997). Towards an interactive acculturation model: A social psychological approach. *International journal of psychology*, 32(6), 369-386.

Brown, R., & Zagefka, H. (2011). The dynamics of acculturation: An intergroup perspective. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 44, pp. 129-184). Academic Press.

Liebkind, K. (2003). Acculturation. *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intergroup processes*, 386-406.

Schwartz, S. J., Vignoles, V. L., Brown, R., & Zagefka, H. (2014). The identity dynamics of acculturation and multiculturalism: Situating acculturation in context. *The Oxford handbook of multicultural identity*, 57-93.