

## Cultural Identity and Social Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Acculturative Stress

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of acculturative stress in the relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment among culturally diverse individuals residing in Bulgaria.

**Methods and Materials:** This research adopted a descriptive correlational design with a sample of 390 participants selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size determination table. Participants were culturally diverse residents of Bulgaria who completed standardized questionnaires measuring cultural identity (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure), acculturative stress (Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students), and social adjustment (Social Adjustment Scale – Self-Report). Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS-27, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS-21 to examine the direct and indirect relationships among the study variables.

**Findings:** Pearson correlation results indicated a significant positive correlation between cultural identity and social adjustment ( $r = 0.38, p < .001$ ), a significant negative correlation between cultural identity and acculturative stress ( $r = -0.42, p < .001$ ), and a significant negative correlation between acculturative stress and social adjustment ( $r = -0.45, p < .001$ ). The SEM results confirmed that acculturative stress significantly mediated the relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment. The model demonstrated good fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 111.82, df = 48, \chi^2/df = 2.33, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.057$ ). The total effect of cultural identity on social adjustment was significant ( $\beta = 0.14, p < .01$ ), including both direct ( $\beta = 0.29, p < .001$ ) and indirect ( $\beta = -0.15, p < .001$ ) paths.

**Conclusion:** Cultural identity plays a crucial role in promoting social adjustment, both directly and through its negative influence on acculturative stress. These findings underscore the importance of supporting cultural identity development and reducing acculturative stress to facilitate successful adaptation in multicultural societies.

**Keywords:** Cultural Identity, Social Adjustment, Acculturative Stress.

## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural identity has become a central construct in understanding how individuals adapt and thrive within multicultural societies. Cultural identity not only provides a sense of belonging but also serves as a psychological anchor that shapes individuals' behaviors, values, and social interactions within a host culture. The significance of cultural identity becomes particularly salient in migration contexts, where individuals are often required to navigate between their heritage culture and the dominant cultural norms of their host country. This dual cultural navigation, while potentially enriching, may also present challenges that hinder social adjustment. Social adjustment, a multidimensional construct involving effective functioning within social, educational, and occupational domains, is widely regarded as a critical outcome of successful intercultural adaptation (Baumert et al., 2023; Haoran et al., 2023).

Among the factors that influence the interplay between cultural identity and social adjustment, acculturative stress has emerged as a critical mediating variable. Acculturative stress refers to the psychological strain experienced during the process of adapting to a new cultural environment, often resulting from perceived discrimination, language barriers, social isolation, and identity conflict (Kumari et al., 2022; Mersh & Auburn, 2021). Understanding how cultural identity influences social adjustment through acculturative stress offers a more nuanced understanding of the adaptation processes experienced by migrants, international students, and ethnocultural minorities. While some individuals maintain strong cultural identities that serve as a source of resilience and empowerment, others experience identity confusion or marginalization that may hinder successful adaptation (Hoffman et al., 2021; Wu & Ying, 2022). Consequently, this study aims to explore the mediating role of acculturative stress in the relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment among culturally diverse individuals residing in Bulgaria.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of cultural identity as a predictor of well-being, adjustment, and academic success in multicultural settings. For instance, Hoffman and Umaña-Taylor (2023) highlighted that a well-developed ethnic or cultural identity can promote psychological resilience and a sense of self-worth, particularly during adolescence when identity formation is most active (Hoffman & Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Baumert et al. (2023) demonstrated that a coherent cultural

identity significantly contributes to better academic performance, stronger peer relationships, and lower levels of emotional distress among adolescents with immigrant backgrounds (Baumert et al., 2023). These findings align with earlier research by Jetten et al. (2018), which framed successful aging in culturally diverse contexts as a function of ongoing identity reconstruction and group affiliation processes (Jetten et al., 2018). Collectively, these studies underscore the protective value of cultural identity and its influence on various aspects of adjustment.

Despite these insights, cultural identity is not universally beneficial; its impact is context-dependent and mediated by sociocultural experiences such as discrimination, alienation, and acculturative stress. Nawaz and Bhutta (2024) observed that cultural identity can be both a resource and a liability depending on how individuals perceive their cultural belonging within the dominant societal framework (Nawaz & Bhutta, 2024). This is particularly relevant in urbanizing contexts where socio-cultural fragmentation may dilute traditional support systems and heighten vulnerability to stress (Yasir & Farooq, 2024). Indeed, Yang (2018) found that Chinese international students' social media engagement influenced their acculturation patterns, with stronger cultural identification sometimes intensifying feelings of cultural dissonance and alienation (Yang, 2018). Such ambivalence reflects the need to investigate the conditions under which cultural identity supports or undermines social adjustment.

The concept of acculturative stress has been extensively studied as a barrier to successful intercultural adaptation. It represents the negative psychological effects of navigating a new cultural landscape, especially when individuals encounter systemic inequities, value conflicts, or social exclusion (Harari et al., 2018; Terzis & Beasley, 2023). Amini and Nguyen (2021) found that acculturative stress among Muslim and Jewish immigrants in the U.S. was significantly associated with experiences of perceived discrimination and lack of religious-American identity harmony (Amini & Nguyen, 2021). Similarly, Kumari et al. (2022) emphasized that acculturative stress is often amplified by limited digital literacy and online exclusion, particularly when individuals are not fully integrated into the digital public sphere (Kumari et al., 2022). These findings suggest that acculturative stress not only impacts emotional well-being but also impairs the ability to build and maintain effective social relationships—a key component of social adjustment.

The relationship between acculturative stress and social adjustment has also been observed in international student populations. Terzis and Beasley (2023) documented that student-athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds often struggle with sociocultural adjustment due to the dual demands of academic and athletic performance, compounded by cultural isolation and identity challenges (Terzis & Beasley, 2023). Lam et al. (2018) further noted that individuals who maintained multiple social group memberships experienced less acculturative stress and greater well-being during retirement transitions, highlighting the social buffering effects of group belonging (Lam et al., 2018). In another study, Singh et al. (2019) confirmed that emotional intelligence and social competencies could reduce the negative impact of acculturative stress on expatriates' cultural adjustment, thus reinforcing the need for adaptive coping mechanisms and cultural skills (Singh et al., 2019).

Digital environments have also been shown to shape the dynamics of cultural identity and stress. According to Liew et al. (2021), access to digitized indigenous knowledge collections enhances individuals' sense of identity and connection to cultural heritage, thereby potentially mitigating acculturative stress and improving social connectivity (Liew et al., 2021). Conversely, Alamri (2018) warned that reliance on digital media can both aid and hinder intercultural adaptation, depending on the nature of online interactions and representation of cultural narratives (Alamri, 2018). This dual role of media in identity formation and adjustment necessitates further exploration in culturally complex societies like Bulgaria, where digital and offline experiences coexist in shaping intercultural relations.

Moreover, cultural transitions are not solely cognitive or emotional processes; they involve strategic social identity management. Merish and Auburn (2021) outlined how international students employ strategies like social creativity, social mobility, and place identity to cope with cultural dissonance and reestablish a coherent self in unfamiliar environments (Merish & Auburn, 2021). Similarly, Tormala et al. (2024) demonstrated the value of identity-based affinity groups among clinical trainees, finding that such interventions promoted cultural consciousness and collective well-being in intercultural professional settings (Tormala et al., 2024). These findings lend empirical support to the social identity approach, which posits that people derive psychological benefits from group memberships that affirm their sense of belonging and self-worth (Herrmann & Varnum, 2018).

From a strengths-based perspective, the cultural transition journey also presents opportunities for identity enrichment and adaptive growth. Brazill (2022) highlighted that Chinese international doctoral students leveraged their multiple identities as assets in their socialization process, facilitating academic integration and resilience (Brazill, 2022). Similarly, in an earlier study, Brazill (2021) argued that storytelling and narrative identity helped students make sense of their experiences, thereby promoting psychological adaptation through self-affirmation (Brazill, 2021). These narratives suggest that when cultural identity is not rigid but rather dynamic and multifaceted, individuals are more likely to navigate cultural transitions with flexibility and agency.

Nonetheless, the contextual environment in which individuals attempt to acculturate plays a decisive role in shaping outcomes. Sochacka and Rzeszotarska-Pałka (2021) demonstrated how urban environments influence cultural identity and social perception, particularly through the symbolic meanings embedded in urban landscapes and public narratives (Sochacka & Rzeszotarska-Pałka, 2021). In multicultural urban centers such as those in Bulgaria, where cultural diversity coexists with rising nationalistic discourse, the experience of acculturative stress may be especially salient. Foroudi et al. (2020) warned that without inclusive policies and social media narratives that embrace cultural heterogeneity, marginalized groups may internalize negative stereotypes, exacerbating feelings of alienation and undermining social integration (Foroudi et al., 2020).

In light of these findings, the current study investigates the role of acculturative stress as a mediator between cultural identity and social adjustment among culturally diverse individuals in Bulgaria.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationships between cultural identity, acculturative stress, and social adjustment among individuals residing in Bulgaria. The study population consisted of culturally diverse residents, and a total of 390 participants were selected using stratified random sampling based on the guidelines provided by the Morgan and Krejcie sample size determination table. This sample size was deemed sufficient to ensure statistical power and generalizability of findings. Participants represented various age groups, educational backgrounds, and cultural origins, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the constructs

under investigation. All participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

## 2.2. Measures

### 2.2.1. Social Adjustment

To assess the dependent variable of social adjustment, the Social Adjustment Scale – Self-Report (SAS-SR) developed by Weissman and Bothwell in 1976 was utilized. This standard instrument comprises 54 items that evaluate various aspects of an individual's functioning in different domains, including work, social and leisure activities, relationships with extended family, marital role, parental role, and role within the family unit. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater social maladjustment. The SAS-SR has been widely used in clinical and non-clinical populations, with robust psychometric properties reported across studies. The tool has demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.74 to 0.89 across subscales) and good test-retest reliability. Its validity has been supported through correlations with clinical assessments and related behavioral indices (Maya et al., 2024; Tamimi et al., 2023; Uyar & Yildirim, 2023).

### 2.2.2. Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress was measured using the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), developed by Sandhu and Asrabadi in 1994. The ASSIS consists of 36 items across several subscales, including perceived discrimination, homesickness, perceived hate, fear, stress due to change, and guilt. Respondents rate their experiences on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of acculturative stress. The instrument has been extensively validated among diverse populations of international students and immigrants, and it shows high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha reported as 0.92 for the total scale) and confirmed construct validity through factor analyses. Its application has been supported in numerous cross-cultural and adjustment-related research studies (Le & Huyen-Nguyen, 2024; Park & Bayne, 2024).

### 2.2.3. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity was measured using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) originally developed by Phinney in 1992. The MEIM includes 14 items that assess two core dimensions: ethnic identity search (exploration) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Participants respond on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a stronger and more positive ethnic identity. The MEIM has been widely employed across various ethnic and cultural groups and has shown high reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.81 to 0.90) and sound construct and convergent validity in both adolescent and adult samples. The measure's versatility and empirical support make it a widely accepted tool for examining cultural identity in cross-cultural psychological studies (Baumert et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Mosanya & Kwiatkowska, 2023; Shafiei & Zahedi, 2021).

## 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using both SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics and primary variables. To examine the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (social adjustment) and each independent variable (cultural identity and acculturative stress), Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was then employed using AMOS-21 to test the hypothesized mediating role of acculturative stress in the relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment. SEM allowed for the simultaneous analysis of multiple pathways, providing a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect effects among variables. The model's goodness of fit was evaluated using standard indices such as the Chi-square test, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI.

## 3. Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 390 participants residing in Bulgaria. Among them, 226 participants (57.95%) identified as female and 164 participants (42.05%) as male. The mean age of participants was 27.84 years ( $SD = 6.47$ ), ranging from 18 to 45 years. Regarding educational background, 142 individuals (36.41%) held a bachelor's degree, 98 (25.13%) had completed secondary education, 89 (22.82%) held a master's degree, and 61 participants (15.64%) had completed

vocational or technical training. In terms of cultural background, 201 participants (51.54%) identified as native Bulgarians, while 189 (48.46%) identified as first- or

second-generation immigrants from various countries, including Turkey, Armenia, and Russia.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables*

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Cultural Identity	43.72	5.61
Acculturative Stress	91.85	11.47
Social Adjustment	102.64	13.58

Participants reported a moderate to high level of cultural identity ( $M = 43.72$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ), which suggests a generally strong sense of ethnic or cultural belonging. The mean score for acculturative stress was 91.85 ( $SD = 11.47$ ), reflecting a wide range of stress experiences among participants. Social adjustment scores were relatively high ( $M = 102.64$ ,  $SD = 13.58$ ), indicating that the majority of participants were functioning well across social domains (Table 1).

Prior to conducting the main analyses, statistical assumptions were evaluated and confirmed. Normality of distribution for the main variables was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within acceptable

ranges (skewness: cultural identity = -0.37, acculturative stress = 0.41, social adjustment = -0.19; kurtosis: cultural identity = 0.65, acculturative stress = -0.48, social adjustment = 0.21). Linearity and homoscedasticity were visually inspected through scatterplots and residual plots, showing no major violations. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values; all tolerance values were above 0.71 and VIF values ranged from 1.12 to 1.39, indicating no concerns. Additionally, the absence of significant outliers was verified using Mahalanobis distance, with no values exceeding the critical threshold ( $\chi^2 = 16.27$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Cultural Identity	—		
2. Acculturative Stress	-0.42** ( $p < .001$ )	—	
3. Social Adjustment	0.38** ( $p < .001$ )	-0.45** ( $p < .001$ )	—

As shown in Table 2, cultural identity was negatively correlated with acculturative stress ( $r = -0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that stronger cultural identity was associated with lower stress related to cultural adaptation. Additionally,

cultural identity was positively correlated with social adjustment ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and acculturative stress was negatively correlated with social adjustment ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). All correlations were statistically significant.

**Table 3**

*Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Cutoff
$\chi^2$ (Chi-square)	111.82	—
df	48	—
$\chi^2/df$	2.33	$< 3.00$
GFI	0.94	$> 0.90$
AGFI	0.91	$> 0.90$
CFI	0.96	$> 0.95$
TLI	0.95	$> 0.95$
RMSEA	0.057	$< 0.08$



The model demonstrated a good fit to the data. The Chi-square value was 111.82 with 48 degrees of freedom, yielding a  $\chi^2/df$  ratio of 2.33. Other key fit indices, including GFI (0.94), AGFI (0.91), CFI (0.96), TLI (0.95), and

RMSEA (0.057), all met or exceeded the recommended thresholds, indicating that the hypothesized model was well supported by the data (Table 3).

**Table 4**

*Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Equation Model*

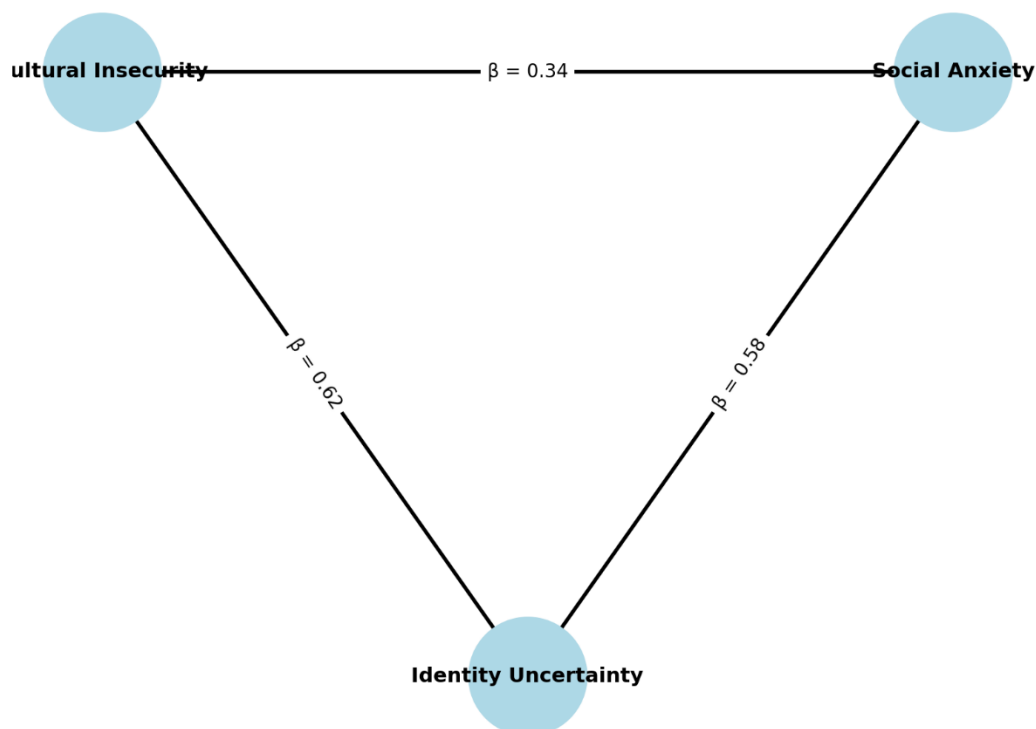
Path	b	S.E.	$\beta$	p
Cultural Identity → Acculturative Stress	-0.61	0.09	-0.42	< .001
Cultural Identity → Social Adjustment	0.47	0.10	0.29	< .001
Acculturative Stress → Social Adjustment	-0.53	0.08	-0.36	< .001
Cultural Identity → Social Adjustment (Indirect)	-0.32	0.07	-0.15	< .001
Cultural Identity → Social Adjustment (Total)	0.15	0.06	0.14	< .01

The path analysis indicated that cultural identity had a significant negative effect on acculturative stress ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and both cultural identity ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and acculturative stress ( $\beta = -0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ) had direct effects on social adjustment. The indirect path from cultural identity to social adjustment through acculturative stress was also

significant ( $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming the mediating role of acculturative stress. The total effect of cultural identity on social adjustment, accounting for both direct and indirect effects, remained significant ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (Table 4).

**Figure 1**

*Structural Model of The Study*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of acculturative stress in the relationship between cultural

identity and social adjustment among culturally diverse individuals residing in Bulgaria. The results of the Pearson correlation analyses indicated significant positive associations between cultural identity and social adjustment,

as well as significant negative associations between cultural identity and acculturative stress. Additionally, acculturative stress was negatively correlated with social adjustment. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) further confirmed that acculturative stress significantly mediated the relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment. These findings provide a robust empirical foundation for understanding how individuals' identification with their cultural background can influence their psychosocial adjustment, particularly through the psychological process of stress adaptation.

The positive relationship between cultural identity and social adjustment observed in this study supports previous research emphasizing the adaptive role of a well-anchored sense of identity in intercultural contexts. Hoffman and Umaña-Taylor (2023) argued that social identities, when positively integrated, serve as psychological resources that promote resilience, well-being, and functioning across diverse life domains (Hoffman & Umaña-Taylor, 2023). Similarly, Baumert et al. (2023) demonstrated that adolescents with strong cultural identities exhibited better academic and social outcomes, suggesting that cultural identification is a crucial developmental asset in navigating multicultural environments (Baumert et al., 2023). These findings converge with the current study's results, illustrating that individuals who feel connected to their cultural background are more likely to engage confidently with their host society, resulting in more effective social adjustment.

Furthermore, the inverse relationship between cultural identity and acculturative stress aligns with previous scholarship highlighting the buffering effect of identity clarity against cultural dissonance. Amini and Nguyen (2021) found that when minority individuals perceive harmony between their cultural and national identities, they are less likely to experience identity-based stress (Amini & Nguyen, 2021). Likewise, Jetten et al. (2018) illustrated that maintaining a coherent identity narrative allows individuals to navigate transitions in foreign settings with a stronger sense of agency and meaning (Jetten et al., 2018). The current study extends these findings by showing that in the Bulgarian context, cultural identity operates not only as a direct predictor of adjustment but also indirectly through its influence on stress levels during cultural adaptation.

The negative association between acculturative stress and social adjustment further reinforces prior research showing that stress related to cultural adaptation impairs individuals' social functioning, emotional stability, and ability to form

meaningful relationships. Harari et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis confirming that high levels of acculturative stress hinder expatriates' integration and well-being across occupational and social domains (Harari et al., 2018). Similarly, Terzis and Beasley (2023) found that international student-athletes in the U.S. faced considerable difficulties in sociocultural adjustment due to stressors such as discrimination, isolation, and language challenges (Terzis & Beasley, 2023). The present study's findings resonate with this body of work, offering further empirical support for the debilitating role of acculturative stress in undermining adjustment outcomes.

The mediation analysis confirmed that acculturative stress serves as a significant intermediary variable linking cultural identity and social adjustment. This result provides important theoretical insights into the mechanisms through which identity translates into real-world behavioral and emotional outcomes. According to the social identity approach, individuals derive strength and stability from group identification, which enables them to interpret and respond to environmental challenges more effectively (Herrmann & Varnum, 2018). When such identity is threatened or devalued in a host culture, the ensuing stress can erode social confidence and hinder adaptive behaviors. The current findings support this framework, suggesting that the protective benefits of cultural identity may be contingent on the individual's experience of stress during acculturation.

These findings also echo results from digital and sociocultural studies examining identity and adaptation. For example, Liew et al. (2021) reported that access to digitized indigenous knowledge bolstered cultural identity and enhanced social connectedness among Indigenous youth, thereby potentially mitigating acculturative stress (Liew et al., 2021). Conversely, Yang (2018) observed that social media platforms sometimes exacerbate stress when individuals are exposed to cultural comparisons or discriminatory content, emphasizing the importance of context in shaping identity experiences (Yang, 2018). In the Bulgarian context, which features a dynamic interplay between European integration and national identity discourse, such digital and social factors likely shape the nature of cultural identification and perceived stress.

Moreover, our findings support the idea that cultural identity is not a static or uniform construct, but one that is often shaped by place, environment, and strategic social negotiation. Mersh and Auburn (2021) described how international students employ identity strategies such as social mobility and social creativity to reduce the negative

effects of cultural transitions (Merish & Auburn, 2021). Similarly, Tormala et al. (2024) emphasized the value of identity-based affinity groups in promoting cultural consciousness and psychological safety among diverse professional trainees (Tormala et al., 2024). These insights are highly relevant to the current study, in which individuals with more integrated and proactive identity strategies were less vulnerable to stress and better able to navigate the social landscape of their host environment.

Additionally, our results are supported by the literature emphasizing the context-dependence of identity and adjustment. Yasir and Farooq (2024) argued that urban sociocultural shifts can challenge traditional identity frameworks, often resulting in increased stress and reduced communal cohesion (Yasir & Farooq, 2024). Sochacka and Rzeszotarska-Palka (2021) also discussed how urban reurbanization processes influence the social perception of cultural spaces, highlighting the symbolic and material conditions that shape identity affirmation and adjustment (Sochacka & Rzeszotarska-Palka, 2021). This supports the view that cultural identity and adjustment are not only personal experiences but also deeply influenced by the environment in which they unfold.

Digital culture, again, plays a dual role in this process. Kumari et al. (2022) found that while social media can facilitate acculturation by fostering communication and exposure, it may also induce stress when cultural misrepresentation or marginalization occurs (Kumari et al., 2022). Alamri (2018) similarly reported that social media content significantly affects intercultural adaptation outcomes, depending on how cultural narratives are represented and engaged with (Alamri, 2018). In Bulgaria's increasingly digital society, such dynamics may play an important role in shaping how individuals perceive their own cultural identity and navigate intercultural challenges.

Finally, the current study echoes the strengths-based perspective advanced by Brazill (2022), who noted that international doctoral students leveraged multiple identities and coping strengths to adapt to new cultural environments (Brazill, 2022). In earlier work, Brazill (2021) argued for the power of personal narrative and meaning-making in navigating acculturation, suggesting that identity processes are fundamentally interpretive and evolving (Brazill, 2021). These frameworks support the notion that a strong, flexible cultural identity not only resists the harmful effects of acculturative stress but can also empower individuals to adjust positively and purposefully in new settings.

#### Limitations

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the use of self-report questionnaires may have introduced social desirability bias or inaccuracies in participants' introspective assessments of identity and stress. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences between variables; longitudinal data would be more effective in tracing the dynamic process of identity development and adjustment. Third, while the study sampled a culturally diverse population from Bulgaria, it did not distinguish between immigrant generations, time since migration, or specific ethnic backgrounds—all of which may significantly influence the experiences of cultural identity and stress. Lastly, although the sample size was statistically sufficient, its generalizability may be limited to similar sociocultural contexts and cannot be readily applied to radically different host cultures without further validation.

#### 5. Limitations & Suggestions

Future studies should consider employing longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to capture the evolving nature of identity and adaptation processes over time. Researchers are encouraged to include qualitative interviews or narrative methods to better understand the subjective experiences of acculturative stress and identity negotiation. Examining moderating variables such as perceived discrimination, community support, or digital media usage could also enhance the explanatory power of the proposed model. It would be beneficial to replicate this study in other national contexts, especially in countries with different integration policies or sociopolitical climates, to explore cultural variability in the observed relationships. Additionally, focusing on specific subgroups—such as refugees, international students, or second-generation immigrants—may reveal unique pathways of adaptation and resilience.

Practitioners, educators, and policymakers working in multicultural environments should actively support identity-affirming practices that allow individuals to maintain and express their cultural heritage. Interventions that reduce acculturative stress—such as culturally sensitive counseling, peer mentorship programs, and language support services—should be integrated into educational and community settings. Institutions should also foster inclusive spaces that value diversity and reduce cultural marginalization, both online and offline. Training programs that enhance cultural competence among staff and leaders can contribute to a more supportive and adaptable environment for diverse



populations. Ultimately, investing in strategies that recognize and nurture cultural identity can play a pivotal role in promoting social cohesion and successful adaptation in multicultural societies.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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