

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

Clara Hoffmann<sup>1</sup>, Mariana Nikolova<sup>2\*</sup>, Giulia Romano<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Child and Adolescent Development, Free University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany

<sup>2</sup> Department of Family Counseling, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

<sup>3</sup> Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Rome La Sapienza, Rome, Italy

\* Corresponding author email address: m.nikolova@nbu.bg

## Editor

Salahadin Lotfi<sup>id</sup>  
PhD in Cognitive Psychology &  
Neuroscience, UWM & Rogers  
Behavioral Health Verified,  
Lecturer at University of Wisconsin  
slotfi@uwm.edu

## Reviewers

**Reviewer 1:** Zahra Yousefi<sup>id</sup>  
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Khorasgan Branch, Islamic Azad  
University, Isfahan, Iran.  
Email: yousefi1393@khuif.ac.ir  
**Reviewer 2:** Mehdi Rostami<sup>id</sup>  
Department of Psychology and Counseling, KMAN Research Institute, Richmond  
Hill, Ontario, Canada.  
Email: dr.mrostami@kmanresce.ca

## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The claim that “cultural identity is not universally beneficial” is important but needs to be followed by a concrete example relevant to the study's population in Bulgaria for contextual grounding.

The phrase “participants represented various age groups, educational backgrounds, and cultural origins” is vague. Consider specifying the number of countries represented or categorizing the cultural backgrounds more clearly.

The authors state that “higher scores indicate greater social maladjustment,” yet later interpret higher scores as reflecting good adjustment (see Table 1 description). This inconsistency must be clarified to avoid interpretive confusion throughout the article.

The interpretation “participants were functioning well across social domains” is questionable given that the scale indicates maladjustment. Authors must either reverse-score or correct this interpretation to match the instrument’s scoring.

While assumptions for SEM are mentioned (e.g., normality, linearity, multicollinearity), the paper lacks a justification for the absence of measurement model validation (e.g., CFA) before the SEM path analysis. This should be addressed or explicitly acknowledged as a limitation.

The correlations are well reported, but the authors should discuss the potential for suppression effects due to multicollinearity or shared method variance among self-report measures.

The authors report fit indices, but they should justify the use of CFI and TLI thresholds of 0.95 by referencing standard literature (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999), and discuss the implications of  $\chi^2$  being significant despite acceptable RMSEA.

The reported indirect effect is negative ( $\beta = -0.15$ ), yet the total effect is positive ( $\beta = 0.14$ ). The authors should reconcile this seeming contradiction by explaining the interpretation of partial mediation in this context.

The phrase “illustrating that individuals who feel connected to their cultural background are more likely to engage confidently with their host society” is speculative. The authors should more cautiously link identity with “confidence” unless such a variable was directly assessed.

The repeated citation of Brazill (2021, 2022) without critical comparison to other narrative-based approaches limits the theoretical diversity. Consider integrating other frameworks such as dialogical self theory or intersectionality to enrich the discussion on identity negotiation.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

### 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The phrase “strategic social identity management” is used but not clearly defined or operationalized. A brief explanation of this concept in relation to the study variables would enhance theoretical clarity.

The authors mention the Bulgarian context only at the end. The introduction would benefit from an earlier and more comprehensive integration of why Bulgaria is a suitable and meaningful site for this study, given its ethnic composition and migration trends.

The sentence “The instrument has been extensively validated among diverse populations of international students and immigrants” would benefit from citing specific populations or studies validating its use among Eastern European or Bulgarian samples.

While the MEIM’s psychometric properties are well described, there is no justification for its applicability to non-U.S., non-adolescent populations. The authors should discuss the appropriateness of applying MEIM to culturally diverse adults in Bulgaria.

The sentence “Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) allowed for the simultaneous analysis...” should include justification for choosing SEM over other mediation analysis techniques, such as PROCESS macro, especially considering the sample size.

The sentence “ensuing stress can erode social confidence and hinder adaptive behaviors” is theoretically sound but unsubstantiated in the current dataset. Consider citing specific empirical support or qualifying the statement as a theoretical extrapolation.

The authors write, “such digital and social factors likely shape the nature of cultural identification...” but never measured digital media use. This speculative link should be reframed as a suggestion for future research rather than a conclusion.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.