ACCULTURATION TRAJECTORIES OF MINORITY ADOLESCENTS: A CONTEXTUAL AND DYNAMIC APPROACH

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As society is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, adolescents from different cultural backgrounds come into sustained intergroup contact. Acculturation refers to subsequent changes in their cultural orientations. Following a well-established bi-dimensional model of acculturation, minority adolescents have orientations towards mainstream culture adoption and heritage cultural maintenance, which are seen as two independent dimensions. In line with a contextual and dynamic approach of entwined acculturation and developmental processes in adolescence, the acculturation orientations of minority adolescents change over time as a function of peer norms of acculturation in culturally diverse schools. The present study takes a more fine-grained person-centered approach of differential trajectories of acculturation (using multivariate latent growth mixture modelling). Furthermore, we predicted these trajectories from the intergroup school context and used them to predict school adjustment.

Drawing on large-scale school-based panel data (i.e., an accelerated longitudinal design with 3 waves and 3 cohorts, Mages 12, 13 and 14 at wave 1), we compared two minority subsamples in Belgian secondary schools: most devalued Moroccan and Turkish minorities (N=1189) and less devalued European minorities (N=530). We asked minority adolescents about their mainstream and heritage culture orientations and tested how these acculturation orientations changed over this three-year time period, distinguishing differential acculturation trajectories between and within minority groups.

Our findings showed differential trajectories for acculturation orientations across both samples. We differentiated three latent trajectories in the Turkish- and Moroccan-origin sample, and two latent trajectories in the European-origin sample. Follow-up analyses predicted different trajectories as a function of school diversity climate and cross-ethnic friendships in schools. Furthermore, these trajectories were also predictive of school adjustment (i.e., emotional and behavioral engagement). To conclude, our findings document the dynamic and contextual nature of acculturation in minority adolescents, and highlight the importance of a supportive school environment in the development of minority adolescents’ acculturation orientations and beyond.