

## Author responses to reviewers:

### Reviewer #1

**Comment 1: It would be helpful for the reader to list all the questions or statements (interview guide) the researcher used to stimulate discussion during the in-depth interview in one place. For instance, they provided such information for the mini phone survey on page 9.**

We thank the reviewer for this comment and agree that the attachment of the interview guide might be helpful for the reader, as well as for other researchers who are willing to test the study results in other settings. However, in the present manuscript, we only used the data derived from several questions included in the interview guide. We represented these questions in the Methods section under the subheading "Variables".

Moreover, the Editor would like to consider the present manuscript as a brief report, not longer than 10 pages.

We therefore attach the semi-structured interview guide, but leave it up to the editor to decide whether it should be included in the final version of the manuscript.

**Comment 2: Is it possible to include the number of people who responded to the items on Table 1 in the table? They could be in brackets accompanied by a footnote.**

We thank the reviewer for the suggestion, but we strongly believe that numbers may be misleading in a qualitative study since the sample is small and not randomized and no conclusions and generalizations can be drawn from the numbers.

As Dr. Flick (in Flick, U. [2006] *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage) argues: "...to generalize findings of a study based on a limited number of interviews in a representative survey is just one form of generalization. This numerical generalization is not necessarily the right one, as many qualitative studies aim at developing new insights and theories. The more relevant question is how to generalize qualitative findings on a solid theoretical background. It is less the number of cases that is studied, but rather the quality of sampling decisions on which the generalization depends. Relevant questions here are "which cases?" rather than "how many" and "what do the cases represent or what were they selected for?" Thus the question of generalization in qualitative research is less closely linked to quantification than it is sometimes assumed."

Therefore, the theoretical generalization applied in qualitative research depends on the variation of the sample and data. The sampling method employed in this study guaranteed variation in the participants' characteristics and their responses and ensured a collection of data covering a wide variety of aspects of acculturation. To discuss this important issue, we added the following text, page 12, paragraph 2:

*Yet, given the explorative approach of the study, the small sample size, and its limitation to one language group and geographical area, the findings should be considered cautiously. Firm evidence requires testing of the findings in other settings with larger randomized samples and in quantitative analyses. However, the theoretical proposal that the self-reported integration could be used as a proxy for acculturation is firmly grounded in the data presented in this study. The sampling procedure was set up in accordance with the aim of theoretical exploration and guaranteed variation in the sample characteristics and in the respondents' answers. Moreover, the variation in the sample characteristics, ensured by strategic sampling, guaranteed the credibility of the findings; and the updating of the*

*complementary interview guide, in accordance with theoretical sampling, guaranteed saturation of the data. Thus, the sampling procedure ensured collection of the saturated data on a variety of aspects of acculturation, levels of acculturation, self-reported criteria, and general determinants of integration. In qualitative research, it is less the number of cases studied that is important, but more the quality of the sampling decisions. The generalization depends on the latter and is less closely linked to quantification. For theoretical generalization, the relevant questions are “which cases?” rather than “how many?” and “what do the cases represent?” (Flick, 2006). We therefore suggest that the characteristics of the four acculturation levels described in the present study can be viewed as prototypical, and the self-reported integration might be used as a proxy for acculturation.*

Due to the particularity of the theoretical generalization, we find indicating the number of people who responded to the items in Table 1 not to be informative and more suitable for quantitative studies, where generalization of the finding depends on the sample size.

**Comment 3: In the limitation section, please comment about advantage(s) and disadvantage(s) of snow-ball sampling.**

On page 13, first paragraph, we have added the following text:

*Variation in the sample was further guaranteed by accounting for the limitations of the applied recruitment techniques. The limitation of using public announcements - i.e. the risk of recruiting only persons who were more responsive than the average population - was counteracted by complementary use of the snowball technique. The limitation of the latter – i.e. recruiting persons with the same demographic characteristics as the ones who recommended them – was counteracted by strategic sampling, i.e. by only recruiting respondents with characteristics which had not been represented in the sample previously.*

**Comment 4: the back-translation was not done in this study. Please comment about it in relation to your study.**

The interview guide was created in Russian by the first author. The interviews were conducted in Russian by the same author as well. The transcription and the primary analysis of data were also conducted in Russian and only then translated into English.

We did not feel that an additional translation from English back to Russian to test whether the translation was correct was needed here, as the same author has continued working with the data and checked continuously the correctness of the translation and its comparability to the original quotations in Russian.

**Comment 5: With the uni-dimensional approach to measuring acculturation, one adapts to the mainstream culture and 'abandons' the old ways. The old ways may become dormant but would surface during stressful times like illness situations. For instance, a presumably assimilated individual may start to ask for methods that worked in the past (in the old country) or longs for some food that is specific for those in the old country. In this line of thought, this reviewer believes that there can never be true assimilation or relinquishing of many attitudes, values, and behavior of the original culture. That would be a complete loss of one's identify. It is time to start seeing immigrants' attitudes, values, and behaviors as assets for their survival in the new country rather than variables that need to be thrown away. My last comment may not relate to your study but it is an important thought to consider in cross-cultural research.**

We appreciate this thoughtful comment. We agree that many of the immigrants'

attitudes, values, and behaviors should be viewed as assets for the immigrants' survival in the new country. This is why we see the importance of studying the immigrants' own views on the extent of their integration and of learning what is important for them to feel integrated. This is difficult to assess by other methods and is often neglected.

## Reviewer #2

### **Comment 1: Additional information is needed regarding**

- a) the rationale for inclusion of participants who were initially not included (i.e. why were they excluded) and**
- b) for the difference in qualitative methods (i.e telephone interview versus face-to-face) for validation of findings. This variation in methods may have affected results.**

We thank the reviewer for a constructive comment.

a) In the last paragraph of the Methods section on page 7, we have added the following text:

*The respondents were mostly those who contacted the office earlier to participate in the in-depth interview but were not interviewed because respondents with the same characteristics had already been included in the sample.*

b) The telephone interview was carried out as a validation of the original interview. Validating results with a different method of gathering data is sooner a strength than a limitation when it confirms the original results. Triangulation (using different methods or different sources of data) is a recognized approach to achieve credibility of results in qualitative research.

In the last paragraph of the Method section on page 7, we added the following text to explain this:

*The data from the mini-interviews by telephone were not included in the main analysis, but were used to validate the results. Applying different methods of collecting data and different sources of data (so-called triangulation) is a recognized approach to achieve credibility of results in qualitative research.*

**Comment 2: Another concern regards the heterogeneity of the group that is listed as a strength of the study. Perhaps this would have been a strength if the sample had been larger than 15 participants however with inclusion of males, females, age ranges including young and older adults and persons who had lived in Sweden for varying amounts of time it seems this is more of a limitation. Perhaps the authors would consider discussion of findings by gender, age and length of residence in Sweden to facilitate a more indepth discussion of findings.**

The qualitative study design requires variation in the sample characteristics. The society is not homogeneous and, therefore, the sample should not be either. The quantitative research design ensures variety of characteristics by means of large sample sizes. The qualitative research design ensures it by strategic sampling of the participants, so that as many characteristics as possible will be represented in the sample: i.e. a wide range of ages, socioeconomic status, etc.

Homogeneous samples can also be studied in qualitative research, if such is the research design. However, this was not applicable to the present study aimed at studying self-reported integration among Russian-speaking immigrants in Sweden. This population group is not homogeneous in Sweden and is represented by people with different backgrounds, reasons for migration, acculturation levels, etc.

Therefore, ensuring that the sample was not homogeneous was intentional and we consider this to be sooner a strength than a limitation of the study.

We agree with the reviewer's comment that the number of the respondents in the present study is much too small to draw any conclusions concerning the effect of gender,

age, etc. However, the generalization of findings in qualitative research is less quantified and depends on the variation of sample characteristics, which was provided here by strategic and theoretical sampling.

Nevertheless, we thank the reviewer for bringing up this important issue. The following text on the matter has been included in the Discussion, page 12, last paragraph, and page 13, first paragraph:

*Yet, given the explorative approach of the study, the small sample size, and its limitation to one language group and geographical area, the findings should be considered cautiously. Firm evidence requires testing of the findings in other settings with larger randomized samples and in quantitative analyses. However, the theoretical proposal that the self-reported integration could be used as a proxy for acculturation is firmly grounded in the data presented in this study. The sampling procedure was set up in accordance with the aim of theoretical exploration and guaranteed variation in the sample characteristics and in the respondents' answers. Moreover, the variation in the sample characteristics, ensured by strategic sampling, guaranteed the credibility of the findings; and the updating of the complementary interview guide, in accordance with theoretical sampling, guaranteed saturation of the data. Thus, the sampling procedure ensured collection of the saturated data on a variety of aspects of acculturation, levels of acculturation, self-reported criteria, and general determinants of integration. In qualitative research, it is less the number of cases studied that is important, but rather the quality of the sampling decisions. The generalization depends on the latter and is less closely linked to quantification. For theoretical generalization, the relevant questions are "which cases?" rather than "how many" and "what do the cases represent?" (Flick, 2006). We therefore suggest that the characteristics of the four acculturation levels described in the present study can be viewed as prototypical, and the self-reported integration might be used as a proxy for acculturation.*

*Variation in the sample was further guaranteed by accounting for the limitations of the applied recruitment techniques. The limitation of using public announcements - i.e. the risk of recruiting only persons who were more responsive than the average population - was counteracted by complementary use of the snowball technique. The limitation of the latter - i.e. recruiting persons with the same demographic characteristics as the ones who recommended them - was counteracted by strategic sampling, i.e. by only recruiting respondents with characteristics which had not been represented in the sample previously.*

Moreover, a discussion of findings in terms of gender, age, and length of residence in Sweden was not possible, because we did not see any causal pattern in the present study. Respondents with the same duration of residence could be "Integrated" as well as "Marginalized", as shown in Table 1 and explained on page 9, starting with the fourth line from the bottom:

*In the present study we have seen that immigrants who have spent as few as 3 or as many as 16 years in Sweden can be equally unacculturated (Table 1). Also, both people who migrated as children and those who did so at a mature age can become acculturated.*

Nor was there any obvious association between age and gender and self-reported integration (the extent of acculturation).

It was not the aim of the present study to investigate the association of acculturation with gender, age, or other demographic variables. While acculturation is undoubtedly influenced by these factors, as has been shown in a large number of studies, the present study was not designed to confirm this, but rather to explore whether the extent of acculturation assessed by the researchers corresponded with the respondents' own

assessment. The demographic variables were of less importance. They were used only in assessing the extent of the immigrants' acculturation.