



Assimilation

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What is it?

Assimilation is the process by which individuals or groups from different ethnic backgrounds are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. This involves adopting the dominant group's cultural characteristics to such an extent that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from others in the society. Assimilation is also viewed as a phase, form, or strategy of acculturation. [Acculturation](#) encompasses various approaches including integration, separation, marginalization, and assimilation. Assimilation occurs when individuals prioritize interaction with the new culture over maintaining their original cultural identity. Assimilation is a gradual process that unfolds over time. Immigrant groups may initially retain their native language and traditions but gradually adopt the dominant language, dietary habits, and societal norms. Full assimilation, where the group blends seamlessly into the new culture, takes generations.

Who uses the concept?

Assimilation is widely used in disciplines including social psychology, anthropology, and sociology. It is also frequently referenced by the media, pro-migration advocates (often critically), and politicians in migrant-receiving countries. Politicians tend to use the term strategically to emphasize their commitment to social cohesion, cultural stability, and economic integration. This rhetoric is often employed to address concerns raised by right-wing parties and viewpoints, which are gaining influence globally.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Assimilation is primarily a unidirectional process, where the host culture exerts influence on the migrant group, and the migrant group adapts to the dominant culture with little reciprocal influence. Hence, assimilation functions more like a monologue than a dialogue. However, the process can also be viewed as the result of intercultural interactions and dialogue. Adopting a cultural element requires understanding it, which necessitates engagement at various social levels. Thus, assimilation is shaped by complex exchanges and interaction.

What work remains?

More research is needed to comprehend the assimilation process, particularly on the diversity of migration backgrounds, social and economic outcomes (such as labor market performance and gender differences), social dynamics (like ethnic and national identity), and the role of technology (such as the influence of new media on intercultural interactions).

Resources

- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5-34.
- Kivisto, P. (Ed.). (2005). *Incorporating diversity: Rethinking assimilation in a multicultural age*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.