

The Integration Into Diversity Paradox: Positive Attitudes Towards Diversity While Self-Segregating in Practice

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Abstract

More and more people without a migration background are living in neighborhoods in large Western European cities where they form a numerical minority. This raises a new research question: Are they integrated in such diverse city contexts or do they live a segregated life? We developed the integration into diversity (ID) matrix to distinguish nine “integration into diversity positions” based on people’s positive or negative attitudes towards diversity together with the ethnic composition of their friendship groups. Using the data from the recent *Becoming a Minority (BaM)* project we found ID positions that are each other’s opposites, a number of positions that are in-between, and two seemingly paradoxical positions. In this article, we will concentrate on one of these paradoxical positions: people who display positive attitudes towards diversity but do not have a mixed friendship group. This is one of the largest groups in our sample. Apparently, mixing does not happen by itself. Through quantitative and qualitative data, we explore how this ID paradox can be resolved. We found that for interethnic contact to take place among this group, there needs to be a structured activity in place. This can be a mixed social activity, a mixed sports team, the mixed school of their children, or a mixed working place. What these all have in common is that the mixing is organized and the expectations and rules of engagement are clear.

Keywords

belonging; European cities; integration into diversity; majority–minority; segregation

1. Introduction

For over forty years attention in the field of migration and ethnic studies has been focused on the integration or assimilation of people with a migration background; first, second, or by now even third

generation. Theoretical frameworks have been developed to study the integration or assimilation of these groups into society, the “mainstream” or different segments of society (segmented assimilation; Portes & Zhou, 1993). In the 1960s and 1970s, when American and Western European cities saw relatively small groups of migrants arriving, assimilation was a logical concept to describe how new migrant groups adapted to the large majority group (Alba & Nee, 2003). According to Alba and Nee (2003), assimilation means becoming more similar to the majority group in both economic and social terms. The majority group was mainly posed as the norm group to which newcomers adapt. This notion is illustrated by the indicators developed by migration scholars to measure assimilation. The more personal relations people with a migration background had with members from the majority group, the more assimilated they were deemed (Alba & Nee, 2003). Today’s ethnically and racially diverse city context poses new challenges regarding assimilation—or integration, as it is mostly framed in Europe. We see two important reasons for this. Today, when arriving in major cities in Europe or North America, newcomers—low-income especially—mostly find housing in neighborhoods characterized by migration-related diversity where the people without a migration background form a numerical minority. The other important reason for the old concept of assimilation or integration to be reconsidered lies in the major change in the situation of the people without a migration background. Nowadays, people without a migration background living in large American and North-Western European cities are often faced with the position of being a numerical minority. Navigating and cultivating a sense of belonging in such environments requires new skills and actions from the old majority group. This situation begs for new research questions that target the integration of both people with and without a migration background into a highly diverse context.

In this article, we are taking on board existing criticism of the concept of integration (Crul, 2018, 2024; Dahinden, 2016; Phillimore, 2021; Spencer & Charsley, 2021). The most fundamental change we propose regarding the traditional idea of assimilation or integration is that becoming assimilated or integrated within the context of a diverse city or neighborhood entails a shift away from the idea of adapting to a presumed norm group towards integration into the diverse context. In our new framework, we shift the focus to also include measuring the integration of people without a migration background into a diverse context. It is not a novel idea that integration is a two-way process, and in theory, this has been emphasized both in academic work and in public policies (see Phillimore, 2021; Schinkel, 2018). Unlike some authors (see, for instance, Spencer & Charsley, 2021), we think it is important to develop an alternative for the measurement of classical integration into the majority group. We propose to measure “integration into diversity” instead, both for people with and without a migration background. We will measure this type of integration based on people’s attitudes towards migration-related diversity and people’s interethnic contacts. This then allows us to assess the climate regarding migration-related diversity in different neighborhoods and cities based on the relative weight of the different positions people occupy.

In earlier articles, we developed what we first called the “superdiversity matrix.” We presented this superdiversity matrix in a chapter of the book *Coming to Terms With Superdiversity: The Case of Rotterdam* (Crul & Lelie, 2019). Our initial matrix had four possible outcomes (a quadrant) placing *diversity attitudes* (respondents’ opinions on migration-related diversity) on one axis and *diversity practices* (the social circle of respondents) on the other. The empirical data for this matrix were derived from the Teaching Immigration in European Schools (TIES) project, a large international survey focused on adult children of immigrants which also surveyed an equally large control group of people without a migration background. The third author of this article later nuanced the initial matrix and included one more potential position (Kraus, 2023): that of

the group coined *moderates*, a group that scored in the middle. This new matrix was empirically based on the data of the Becoming a Minority (BaM) project, which provided a much richer data set, allowing a more precise positioning of respondents. In this article, we elaborate on this matrix and have renamed it the integration into diversity (ID) matrix. The ID matrix allows us to place people in one of nine ID positions. We included four more positions to allow for positions that score in the middle on one axis but on one of the extreme ends on the other. The new ID matrix enables more precise descriptions of the ID positions of people in a diverse neighborhood or city (Crul, 2024). This then allows us to compare the ID climate in different neighborhoods and cities based on the relative weight of the nine positions present. It also allows us to analyze the underlying mechanisms that explain the differences between these positions.

The empirical data used in this article come from the BaM survey, executed in six majority–minority cities among people without a migration background who are all living in majority–minority neighborhoods (Crul, 2024; Crul & Lelie, 2023). We will especially focus on the paradoxical position of people who are positive about migration-related diversity, but live a self-segregated life.

2. Key Concepts and a Short Overview of the Literature

In this article, we use the concept of people without a migration background both in the conceptual ID matrix as well as in the empirical analysis and define this group as people who, along with both of their parents, were born in the country of survey. In the US and the UK, race is an important category used next to ethnicity. This means that race often also appears as a category in administrative data. In continental Europe, race is, for various reasons, hardly used by statistical and administrative offices. Therefore, to identify people for a representative quantitative cross-country research based on administrative data, the category of race cannot be used to select respondents, even if this would otherwise be the preferred option. In continental Europe, the fallback option for identifying people for large-scale research on the topic of diversity and integration is ethnicity or nationality. As nationality does not cover the groups targeted in integration research and policies over the last decade, the concept of people with a migration background has become increasingly common across continental Europe. As with all concepts, this concept also has shortcomings. Most importantly, it categorizes everyone born abroad or of whom one or both parents were born abroad into the category of people with a migration background. This category therefore, for instance, contains both people who are phenotypically white and people who are non-white. The mirror group of the people with a migration background consists of people *without* a migration background, who were born in the country and whose both parents were born in the country. The defining characteristic of this group is that they have a family history of at least two generations of being established in the country. This category also includes people who have a history of migration in their family in the generation of their grandparents or longer ago and it also includes people who are phenotypically white and non-white. The respondents of the BaM survey in one of the survey questions could self-identify as non-white or as having a migration background. A relatively small group (6%) identified as such. Although it is beyond the scope of this article, this group did present a different ID position (see Crul & Lelie, 2023).

The BaM survey asked respondents both about their *attitudes* towards living in a diverse city and neighborhood context, as well as about their friendships and interactions in *practice* with people with a migration background. We are aware that people will have different images of who belongs to the category “people with a migration background.” Analysis based on the so-called “temperature question” for different

groups shows that the BaM respondents indeed make a differentiation between different groups of people with a migration background, for example from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East. The general trend (Knipprath, 2023) is that those respondents who deem diversity to be “threatening” make more differentiation between groups, and essentialize groups more often, while people who see diversity as “enriching” essentialize groups to a much lesser extent and judge people more based on characteristics other than ethnicity, religion, or skin color. In this article, we will primarily focus on people who see migration-related diversity as enriching.

Integration is a key concept in the field of migration and ethnic studies. Differently from how most researchers in general use the term integration, in this article we will use it in its original meaning: referring to parts (or groups) that in their interaction change and adjust towards each other. In most integration and assimilation research, the concept of integration is only empirically studied from one side—that of people with a migration background. However, we argue that with more and more cities turning into majority–minority contexts, it is becoming more urgent to investigate the question of how people without a migration background integrate into a diverse context. Following up on Schinkel’s (2018) call we should not give this group a “dispensation of integration.” This approach also changes our perspective on the goal of integration. Our interpretation of “being integrated” is whether or not an individual is integrated into the diverse city context they live in. This approach looks at their acceptance or rejection of diversity, rather than their adjustment to the norms or values of the national majority group. It also questions individuals’ social integration. Other than in most integration and assimilation studies, we do not merely research contact with people without a migration background as the yardstick of integration or assimilation; rather, we measure the level of interethnic friendships as a sign of being integrated into the diverse city context.

Are the challenges and processes of integration for people *without* a migration background similar to or different from those faced by people with a migration background? A major difference, we assume, is that people without a migration background are used to the privilege of being the norm group to which all other groups should adapt. While cities have become increasingly diverse, people without a migration background have, as a rule, not been asked to adapt to this new reality. For people without a migration background, adapting to the increasingly diverse context in which they live probably asks for a much larger psychological shift, especially if they still see themselves as being the norm.

Also, in relation to establishing meaningful relations beyond their own group, the situation of people without a migration background is probably different from that of people with a migration background. Even though people without a migration background may be a numerical minority in majority–minority cities, they still usually form the largest ethnic group. It seems easier for them to remain living in their own ethnic bubble than it is for members of other (far) smaller ethnic groups.

There is a growing literature on the reactions of people without a migration background to living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods (Noble, 2009; Wessendorf, 2014). In the literature, especially the reactions of working-class people living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods have been addressed (see, for instance, Gest, 2016; Hochschild, 2018; Lamont, 2002; Mepschen, 2016). Authors like Lamont (2002) and Hochschild (2018) have scrutinized the causes of potential negative reactions to increased ethnic diversity among working and middle-class white people based on extensive qualitative fieldwork. Both “dignity” and “resentment” are keywords in the work of Lamont and Hochschild respectively. Hochschild (2018) shows

how some respondents feel resentment about other ethnic groups supposedly “cutting the line” and receiving an unjust advantage. Lamont (2002) shows the importance of ethnic and racial ordering of groups. In her research, Anglo-Saxon whites tend to consider people who have made it as people they envy, while looking down on the “undeserving” poor and/or people of color. In the literature about the economic domain, there has been ample attention paid to potential economic competition between migrants and people of native descent in the labor market (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996; Hjerm & Nagayoshi, 2011; Polavieja, 2016). In this type of literature, competition is often related to the lower echelons of the labor market. The overview of the literature shows us that when addressing this topic, we should pay attention to class and education. Often, in research, a negative attitude towards diversity is related to lower levels of education and a lower position in the labor market. There is also, however, criticism of both the supposedly strong correlation and overemphasis on conflict related to the lower educated and, at the same time, the absence of attention to negative attitudes among higher-educated groups (see, for instance, Gest, 2016).

3. Introducing the ID Matrix

Building on our focus on people without a migration background and taking the diverse context as the unit of analysis, we constructed the ID matrix (see Table 1) as part of a broader attempt to develop an ID theory (Crul, 2024). The ID matrix is composed of the outcomes for two main factors: people’s diversity attitudes and people’s diversity practices. We assess whether people state that increased ethnic diversity is enriching or threatening and we also assess their diversity practices in terms of having an ethnically diverse friendship group (for the relationship between the two see Crul & Lelie, 2023; Savelkout et al., 2017). People who display positive attitudes towards migration-related diversity and have an ethnically mixed friendship group are labeled as being integrated into the diverse context in which they live. On the other end of the spectrum, we find people who find the increased ethnic diversity threatening and who, accordingly, primarily engage with their own ethnic group: This is the group least integrated into the ethnically diverse context in which they live. Using the ID matrix, we assess and analyze different pathways of integration into an ethnically diverse context. In total, we distinguish nine integration positions.

Table 1. ID matrix: Diversity attitudes and diversity practices.

	Negative attitudes towards migration-related diversity	Neutral	Positive attitudes towards migration-related diversity
Half or more friends or acquaintances with a migration background	Position 1	Position 2	Position 3
Some friends or acquaintances with a migration background	Position 4	Position 5	Position 6
No or almost no friends or acquaintances with a migration background	Position 7	Position 8	Position 9

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

The item “Would you say that [country]’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?” was used to measure *attitudes* towards ethnic diversity. Respondents could indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a scale from 0 (*undermined*) to 10 (*enriched*). In the matrix, 0–4 is negative, 5 is neutral, and above 5 is positive.

The *practice* of people without a migration background was measured by the amount of meaningful contact the respondents had with people with a migration background. Here, the question of how many of their friends and acquaintances have a migration background, ranging from 1 (*no or almost no*), 2 (*some*), 3 (*about half*), 4 (*the majority*) to 5 (*almost all*), was used.

The aim of the ID matrix is to gain insights into what characterizes the nine positions and to analyze which variables could move respondents from one position to another to reach an understanding of the underlying mechanisms of ID.

The most opposing positions are:

Position 3: Positive attitudes and an ethnically mixed friendship group—integrated and feeling enriched.

Position 7: Negative attitudes and no ethnically mixed friendship group—segregated and feeling threatened.

Then there are people who score in between. People who show a neutral score when it comes to their diversity attitudes and either have an ethnically mixed, a somewhat mixed, or a non-mixed friendship group (respectively positions 2, 5, and 8) and people who score in the middle when it comes to their social circle, who have some friends with a migration background and are in one of the three possible diversity attitudes positions (positions 4, 5, and 6).

Finally, we see two seemingly paradoxical positions: respondents who see diversity as threatening while having a mixed friendship group, and respondents who see diversity as enriching but still do not have a mixed social circle:

Position 1: Negative attitudes, but an ethnically mixed friendship group—integrated but feeling threatened.

Position 9: Positive attitudes, but no ethnically mixed friendship group—segregated but feeling enriched.

There is some limited research on ID position 9. Blokland and van Eijk (2010) have labeled people who choose to live in a diverse neighborhood because they find its diversity attractive as “diversity seekers.” Blokland and van Eijk’s study shows that it is important to approach their diversity practices empirically, rather than assuming that their diversity practices are in alignment with their diversity attitudes. This research has shown that a large group of people without a migration background are happy to live in diverse neighborhoods, but, when it comes to their circle of friends, they mostly engage with people from their own ethnic group

(see also Wessendorf, 2014). Other studies have also shown that people without a migration background have relatively little or even no meaningful contact with people with a migration background, while living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods (Butler, 2003; Jackson & Benson, 2014; van Beckhoven & van Kempen, 2003). This pattern applies not only to themselves but also to their children: When it comes to choosing a school for their children, parents without a migration background living in a diverse neighborhood and who are positive about diversity still often choose a school outside of their neighborhood that is less mixed (see Crul & Lelie, 2023). Apparently, proximity in a neighborhood context does not automatically lead to more contact and more interethnic social networks.

4. Methodology

To empirically examine the ID positions of people without a migration background in majority–minority contexts, we used survey data from the BaM project. BaM survey data was collected in 2019 and 2020 in six different European cities: Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Malmö, Rotterdam, and Vienna. In total, 3,089 responses from people without a migration background, defined as being born in and having both parents born in the surveyed country, were collected in 226 majority–minority neighborhoods. The respondents of the BaM survey are between the ages of 25 and 45 ($M = 34.11$, $SD = 5.92$), and 52.3% of the sample identify as female, 47.2% as male, and 0.5% as other. We chose this age group because in this phase of their life people have to make important decisions on where to live, often find a partner, and part of this group already has children. The outcomes of our analysis apply to this age group and only to people living in majority–minority neighborhoods and cannot be generalized to all people without a migration background living in the researched cities. For the ID matrix, we make use of the two variables already mentioned in the BaM survey.

The item “Would you say that [country]’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?” was used to measure *attitudes* towards ethnic diversity ($M = 7.33$, $SD = 2.86$). Respondents could indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a scale from 0 (*undermined*) to 10 (*enriched*).

The *behavior* of people without a migration background was measured by the amount of contact the respondents had with friends with a migration background. Here, the question of how many of their friends and acquaintances have a migration background, ranging from 1 (*no or almost no*), 2 (*some*), 3 (*about half*), 4 (*the majority*) to 5 (*almost all*), was used ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .85$).

We selected one majority–minority neighborhood in each of the six cities of the BaM project in which to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews with people without a migration background in the same age cohort as the respondents of the BaM survey. These respondents were partly recruited by following up on the survey if people had indicated that they were open to being approached again, partly through network contacts and neighborhood activities, and partly through the snowball method. For this article, we selected respondents in ID position 9. These people see diversity as being enriching but have different outcomes in terms of their circle of friends and acquaintances. We used the interviews of respondents who see diversity as enriching from the qualitative fieldwork from all of the BaM cities. We especially selected material that discusses the social interactions with people with a migration background. The empirical material illustrates both the struggles that some people experience with making contact—or not—with people with a migration

background, as well as the struggles experienced by those who have regular contact with people with a migration background.

5. The ID Matrix: Nine ID Positions

In the literature section, we already discussed the presumed importance of class and education in relation to potential reactions toward living in an increasingly ethnically diverse context (see Gest, 2016; Hochschild, 2018; Lamont, 2002; Mepschen, 2016). The literature puts great emphasis on people's socio-economic position in relation to differences in reactions to migration and ethnic diversity. Although we also found a relation between these factors in the BaM data, we found a much stronger positive correlation for education than for income in relation to the attitude variable in the ID matrix. We then looked at what is the most important cut-off point for education. The most decisive difference is found between the higher educated (BA or MA diploma) and the lower educated (no BA or MA diploma). We will therefore present the results in the ID matrix for lower-educated respondents and higher-educated respondents separately.

Let's first look at the size of the different ID positions. ID position 3 harbors the group that could be considered the most integrated into the ethnically diverse city context. It represents 13% of the respondents among the lower educated and 10% among the higher educated. The size of the group in ID position 7 is much larger (15%) among the lower educated than among the higher educated (7%). In terms of having a friendship group in which half or more of one's friends or acquaintances have a migration background, lower-educated people (total 25%) outpace higher-educated people (total 14%) in their social integration into a diverse context. The literature pays less attention to practices than to attitudes. Our outcomes show that to obtain a more complete picture it is important to also include practices.

Among the higher educated, see Table 3, the group that is positive about diversity, but socializes primarily with people without a migration background (ID position 9) is very large. The group of people in ID position 1 in Tables 2 and 3 is much smaller, which would be expected given that this is the group that has a mixed group of friends but, in apparent contradiction to this, expresses negative attitudes towards diversity.

Table 2. ID matrix: Diversity attitudes and diversity practices of lower-educated respondents (no BA or MA) in six majority-minority cities.

	Negative attitudes towards ethnic diversity	Neutral	Positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity	Total
Half or more friends or acquaintances with a migration background	7% (position 1)	5% (position 2)	13% (position 3)	25%
Some friends or acquaintances with a migration background	14% (position 4)	6% (position 5)	20% (position 6)	40%
No friends or acquaintances with a migration background	15% (position 7)	8% (position 8)	12% (position 9)	35%
Total	36%	19%	45%	100%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

Table 3. ID matrix: Diversity attitudes and diversity practices of higher-educated respondents (BA or MA diploma) in six majority–minority cities.

	Negative attitudes towards ethnic diversity	Neutral	Positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity	Total
Half or more friends or acquaintances with a migration background	2% (position 1)	2% (position 2)	10% (position 3)	14%
Some friends or acquaintances with a migration background	6% (position 4)	5% (position 5)	37% (position 6)	48%
No friends or acquaintances with a migration background	7% (position 7)	5% (position 8)	26% (position 9)	38%
Total	15%	12%	73%	100%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

6. Characterizing the Paradoxical ID Position 9

We will now take a closer look at the paradoxical ID position 9 in the matrix: the people who are *positive* about diversity and who do *not* live an integrated life. This position contains many more higher-educated people, making educational level one of the most important predictors for this position. We found in the BaM survey that many higher-educated people, more so than lower-educated people, had not grown up in the city, but had moved there to study or for work (see also Crul & Lelie, 2023). Only a quarter of the higher-educated respondents had been born in the city, compared to about half of the lower-educated respondents. Forty percent of the higher educated had only moved to the city in the last 10 years. Most of them had not grown up in an ethnically diverse setting. If we only look at the higher educated in the paradoxical position 9, more than half (58%) had attended a primary school that had no or almost no peers with a migration background and 34% had only some. Only 8% attended a school with a population comparable to their current neighborhood composition. As a logical consequence, many of their childhood and young adolescent friends did not have a migration background.

It is a bit different when it comes to their present life. Among the lower educated in ID position 9, no less than a quarter work in a place where at least half of their colleagues have a migration background. The picture for the higher educated is different. Their working environment is much less diverse. Only 9% work in a place where at least half of their colleagues have a migration background. More than a third have no or almost no colleagues with a migration background. When we zoom in on the respondents in ID position 9, they share characteristics we also find among the respondents in ID positions 3 and 6 that are also positive about diversity. A vast majority see themselves as a “world citizen”: 78% among the lower educated and 79% among the higher educated. The people in ID position 9 largely identify as left-wing voters: 65% among the lower educated and 73% among the higher educated, as is the case with people in ID positions 3 and 6.

Based on our qualitative BaM interviews (see also Kraus, 2022), we describe that people in this group may experience “belonging uncertainty” (Walton & Cohen, 2007) in places where their own ethnic group is no longer dominant. This sometimes causes them to avoid certain places (bars, restaurants, or shops) or even

whole areas of the neighborhood. The qualitative interviews show that people feel uneasy about making contact because they don't know the codes of conduct and are afraid of making mistakes when approaching people with a migration background. They also express that they are not sure whether the people in these contexts would welcome them in these contexts and engage with them. A male BaM respondent from Malmö explained his discomfort:

Respondent: If I walk past people and they look up, I may smile at them or even say hello, but I will not often stop to talk to them.

Interviewer: Why not?

Respondent: Hmm...I think that I am more...careful with what I say, because I am not always sure how they will react, because we, maybe...because we have different backgrounds. Different...now I forget the word I was looking for. As if we have different values.

Originating in studies concerning ethnic minorities, belonging uncertainty can be described as "people like me do not belong here" (Walton & Cohen, 2007). In a new social environment, people base the decision of belonging on personal characteristics and group identities. If people have the feeling that one of their social identities, in this case, their ethnic identity, is marginalized, they may feel uncomfortable in this setting or avoid it altogether (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

In addition to the experience of belonging uncertainty, it is also possible that people without a migration background have never learnt how to negotiate difference. For many, this was not necessary while growing up. Unlike migrant children who had to survive in often unfamiliar and highly diverse environments where they had to figure out different codes, children without a migration background mostly grew up in places where they more or less understood the codes and knew what was expected of them in interactions. Often, this lack of diversity competencies among people without a migration background only becomes apparent when they are confronted with situations in which their group is not the numerical majority. A female respondent from Antwerp explained what happens in playgrounds:

Respondent: Also in the playgrounds, there's Moroccan mums with their children there. But it's all separate from each other. You really see that the white mums are standing chatting with each other and that the Moroccan mums are sitting in a different place.

Interviewer: And what do you think of that?

Respondent: Uhm...hmmm....I always think that it is a pity, because, on the one hand, I would like to know more people and to get more involved. But it does not seem to be a natural given.

Crul (2018) has described the reaction of many people without a migration background in such situations as being "paralyzed." Experiencing both a loss of control and power in a majority-minority situation seems problematic for people who are used to being the norm group that dictates the rules of conduct. It can create feelings of being uncomfortable and not knowing the codes to be used. A male BaM respondent from Rotterdam also mentioned that he lacks the right vocabulary, does not know the codes, and is afraid of offending people by saying the wrong things:

Respondent: Yes, I'm not at all schooled in that. I also find it very difficult to choose my words, like, what should I call something, you know.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Respondent: Yes, with people with a migration background. I feel that I have to walk on eggshells, so that I don't use a word that may not be nice. Yes, I find this pretty uncomfortable. But that is also because I'm not used to it. Yes, because you don't want to be unjust to anyone with your choice of words or to hurt anyone's feelings because of the words you choose.

7. Overcoming the Diversity Paradox

How can people in ID position 9 overcome the diversity paradox? We will explore how people with positive attitudes towards diversity can resolve the diversity paradox. In practice, this means looking at the differences between respondents in ID positions 3, 6, and 9 (all of whom have a positive attitude towards diversity).

One of the clearest and most robust indicators in the BaM Survey is romantic relationships: people who are in a mixed union with a partner with a migration background. In our BaM survey, one in four people without a migration background in a relationship is in such a relationship. As we see in Table 4, having a partner with a migration background shows a strong correlation with having a mixed friendship group. This might be because their partner has a mixed circle of friends, which would add to their common friendship group (see Crul & Lelie, 2023). It is also possible that the partners got to know each other because the friendship group of the person without a migration background was already more mixed to begin with. It is a bit of a chicken and egg question. In the first case, the context of meeting other people with a migration background might be less awkward and contain fewer of the typical elements seen in belonging uncertainty. Being the partner makes it more natural to be in a mixed setting and their partner's friends are probably interested in meeting and getting to know the person without a migration background.

The second variable that is correlated to having a more mixed friendship group is sending your child to a mixed school, see Table 5. Here the impact is more indirect. Parents often meet up and get to know other parents through their children's friends and school activities that involve parents. Once again, one can imagine that this type of interaction creates less anxiety because everyone involved has the role of being a parent/caretaker, and relationships develop in an organized and formalized school environment and through the children.

Table 4. People without a migration background in all six BaM cities: Having a partner with a migration background and having friends with a migration background.

	No or almost no friends with a migration background	Some friends with a migration background	Half or more friends with a migration background
Partner with a migration background	27%	26%	47%
Partner without a migration background	43%	47%	10%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

Table 5. People without a migration background in all six BaM cities: Ethnic school composition of oldest child and having friends with a migration background.

	No or almost no friends with a migration background	Some friends with a migration background	Half or more friends with a migration background
No or almost no pupils with a migration background	63%	19%	18%
Some pupils with a migration background	48%	37%	15%
Half of the pupils with a migration background	28%	55%	17%
Majority of the pupils have a migration background	27%	44%	29%
Almost all pupils have a migration background	22%	41%	37%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

A female BaM respondent from Antwerp reflected on the importance of her child going to a mixed school and her contact with the other parents:

Respondent: I have known my friends for a long time. Real friends, you know, the people from way back. But new people too, you know, via the children's school. Because they go to school in Borgerhout [a highly diverse neighborhood]. And so I know people, of course, also people with a migration background.

Interviewer: What exactly is this interaction like?

Respondent: Actually, just the same as with the other parents.

The third variable, shown in Table 6, concerns people engaged in social activities. More precisely, people who participate in activities that attract an ethnically mixed group of people. This could be a team sport or a cultural or religious organization in which people interact because of their shared interests in this activity. Most of these activities are, again, organized and formalized with a clear role for members which gives, again, fewer reasons for belonging uncertainty.

Table 6. People without a migration background in all six BaM cities: Taking part in a mixed activity and having friends with a migration background.

	No or almost no friends with a migration background	Some friends with a migration background	Half or more friends with a migration background
No mixed activity	37%	49%	14%
Mixed activity	24%	53%	23%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

A male BaM respondent from Antwerp explained how participating in a mixed soccer team has brought him into contact with boys he would not meet in other settings:

Respondent: Yes, I used to play football and that is a more diverse environment. I was in a team in which I was a minority.

Interviewer: How was that for you?

Respondent: Yes, well....Those boys had a very different life. Much less protected in that way. As far as that goes, football is quite easy....Easy to get a group feeling in any case. I never had the idea that you were being excluded or anything, absolutely not. But it was an interesting sensation. Normally you are used to being in the majority.

The fourth important variable is having colleagues with a migration background, see Table 7. The workplace setting is, next to the neighborhood setting, the other context where BaM respondents often interact with people with a migration background. Again, it is an organized and formalized sort of contact: that of colleagues working towards a common goal in an organization or business.

What all these variables have in common is that they involve bringing people together from different ethnic backgrounds without making people feel out of place. Partly, these activities are the result of deliberate choices made by the respondent (a partner with a migration background or their child's school), but partly they are the result of being in places where there is a mixed group of people (workplace and activities). What seems most important is that there is an unambiguous reason that makes you (in one of your identities) belong in the space.

Table 7. People without a migration background in all six BaM cities: Having colleagues with a migration background and having friends with a migration background.

	No or almost no friends with a migration background	Some friends with a migration background	Half or more friends with a migration background
No or almost no colleagues with a migration background	49%	41%	10%
Some colleagues with a migration background	33%	53%	14%
Half of the colleagues with a migration background	18%	55%	27%
Majority of colleagues have a migration background	19%	39%	42%
Almost everybody has a migration background	13%	49%	38%

Source: BaM Survey (2024).

8. Conclusion and Debate

We started this article by proposing a different approach to assimilation and integration, arguing that in contemporary cities marked by migration-related diversity, assimilation and integration can no longer be approached primarily as a one-way process in which migrants and their descendants assimilate or integrate into the majority group. In the old paradigm, the majority group was mainly posed as the norm group to which newcomers adapt. Though in theory integration was thought to be a two-way process, in practice the indicators developed by migration scholars to measure assimilation and integration were solely aimed at people with a migration background. In cities and neighborhoods where ethnic and racial diversity is now the norm, we need a new framework to understand the processes involved in addressing the challenges for people both with and without a migration background who have to participate and belong in such a diverse city context. Throughout different stages of our research, we developed a new research instrument that captures different ID positions. Taking the diverse context as our unit of analysis, we have constructed the ID matrix, composed of the outcomes for two main factors: diversity attitudes and diversity practices. The ID matrix allows us to distinguish nine ID positions that capture different reactions to living in a diverse context. The outcomes enable us to also make an indication of the ID climate in a neighborhood. In contrast to most instruments that measure assimilation or integration processes, the ID matrix can be used for both people with and without a migration background.

In this article, making use of the ID matrix, we have analyzed the reactions of people without a migration background to living in majority–minority neighborhoods. We have shown that people without a migration background show very different reactions to living in an ethnically diverse context—this is by no means a homogeneous group. Among the higher educated, there is a particularly large group that is positive about diversity while at the same time hardly interacting with people with a migration background. We coined this position a “diversity paradox” because it seems that their practices show a different pattern than their positive attitudes towards diversity would presume.

We found that to resolve the paradox of having positive attitudes towards diversity in theory, while living in a segregated social circle in practice, it is necessary for people in this position to overcome “belonging uncertainty.” They often feel reluctant and uncertain about interacting in ethnically diverse places and with people from a different ethnic background. In the BaM survey data, we found four variables that seem helpful for overcoming that uncertainty. The variables point in the direction of activities that are formalized and organized, such as taking part in social, cultural, religious, or sports activities in which there is a mix of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Such spaces lower anxieties about interactions and potential mistakes as the people in them all have a designated role and a common goal and are expected to work together. Being employed in a mixed workplace or attending a mixed school has a similar effect. A crucial takeaway from our analysis is that meaningful interethnic contact does not often come about spontaneously. People can live in a majority–minority neighborhood while not engaging with people with a migration background, even though they have a positive attitude towards migration-related diversity. This has important consequences for potential policies aimed at integration. Our study shows that beyond living in the same context, and seeing each other in public spaces, something extra is needed to establish meaningful interethnic contact.

The outcomes presented in this article show that reframing the classical idea of integration into the new idea of “integration into diversity” opens up new avenues for research. Here, we especially focused on the people

without a migration background living in a diverse context, the often-overlooked group in the process of assimilation and integration. As they still form the most powerful group in this process, it is urgent to analyze the different ID positions they occupy and the mechanisms underlying their attitudes and behavior.

An ambitious aim for further research will be to develop an ID theoretical framework (see Crul, 2024) to further the understanding of the mechanisms underlying different ID positions. This will enable us to identify which specific neighborhood and city characteristics and which interventions can influence the ID positions that people adopt. By going beyond the traditional assimilation and integration theories, such a more full-fledged ID theory would make an important contribution to understanding the processes at work in present-day diverse cities.

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Conflict of Interests

In this article, editorial decisions were taken by Ismintha Waldring (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

Data Availability

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