



Honeymoon periods and expat blues

- acculturation orientation and social support as antecedents of adjustment abroad

Studium Generale / Wageningen University & Research
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Studies conducted together with:

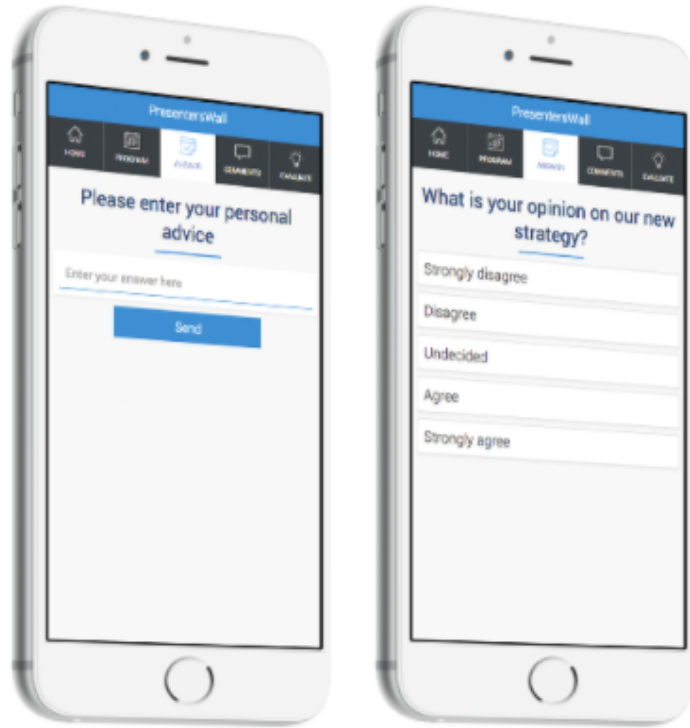
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Best,
Michael

Overview

What is happening when you relocate?

> *Shock, Stress, and Coping*

Who does better? And where do we belong?

> *Distance, Growth, and Tridimensional Acculturation*

> *Personality*

> *Social Support*

The Situation

The Netherlands

- 91 000 international and 660 000 domestic students
- Steady increase

The world

- 50% increase between 2005 and 2012, 5 million in 2016 (OECD, 2015)

The focus

- international students reap many benefits from their stay but also experience more mental health problems than local students (Mori, 2000)

Part 1: What is acculturation?

Maintenance and Adoption



What do you do in an acculturation setting?

Cultural maintenance =

Maintaining characteristics of own (heritage) culture

Cultural adoption =

Adopting characteristics of the culture of the (host) society of settlement

Unidimensional Conceptualization of Acculturation

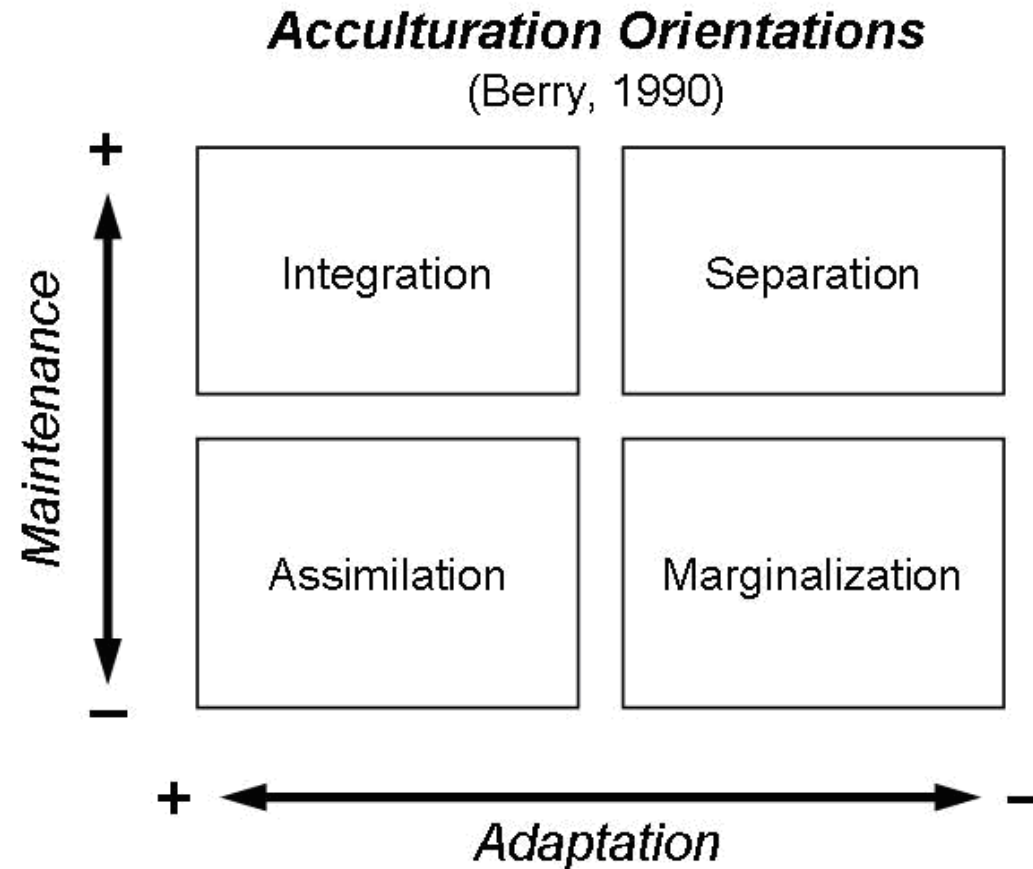


Gordon (1964)

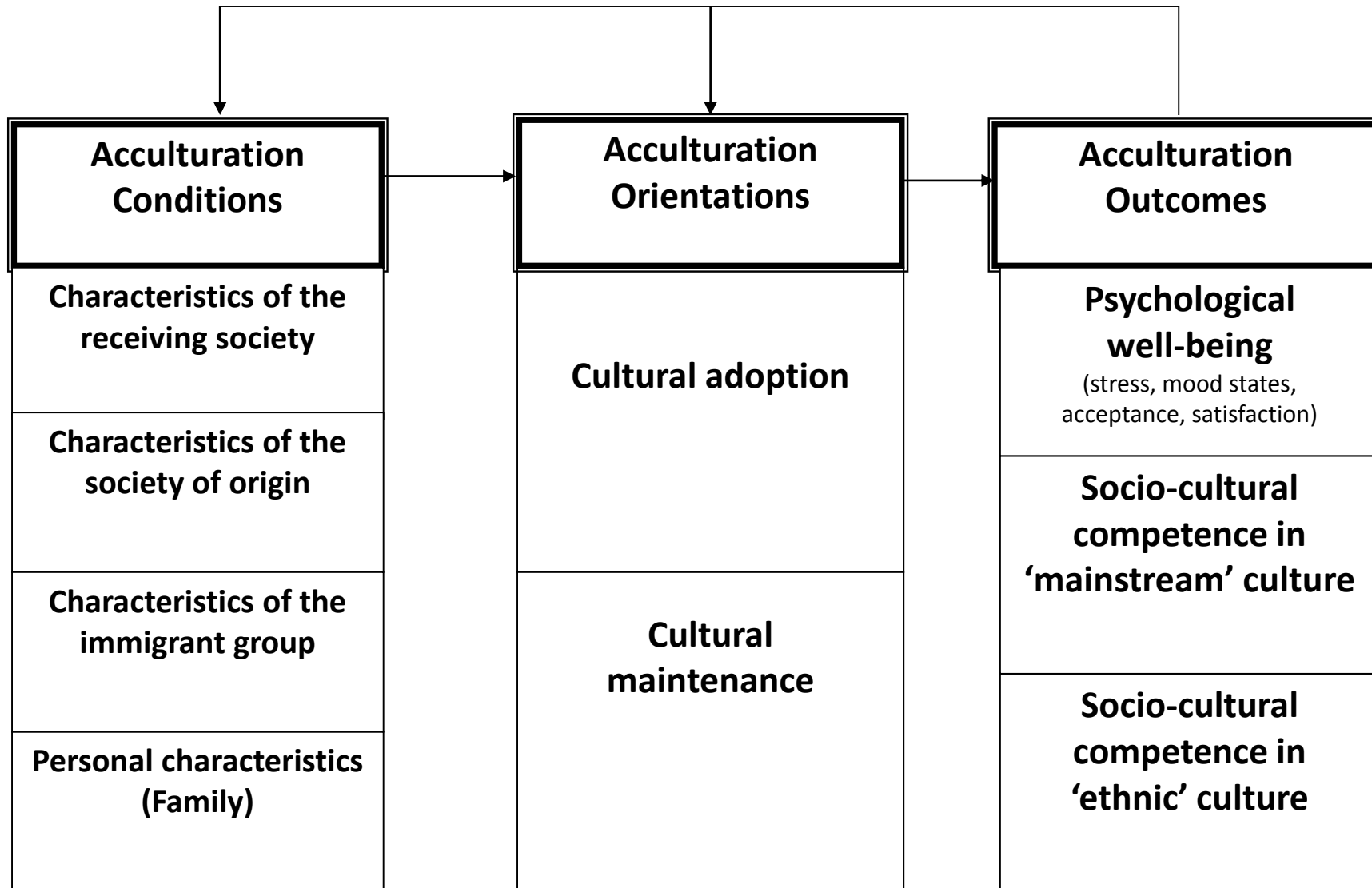


What does that imply?

Bidimensional Conceptualization of Acculturation



Acculturation Framework (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006)



Part 2 - From Shock To Stress:
What happens when we move?

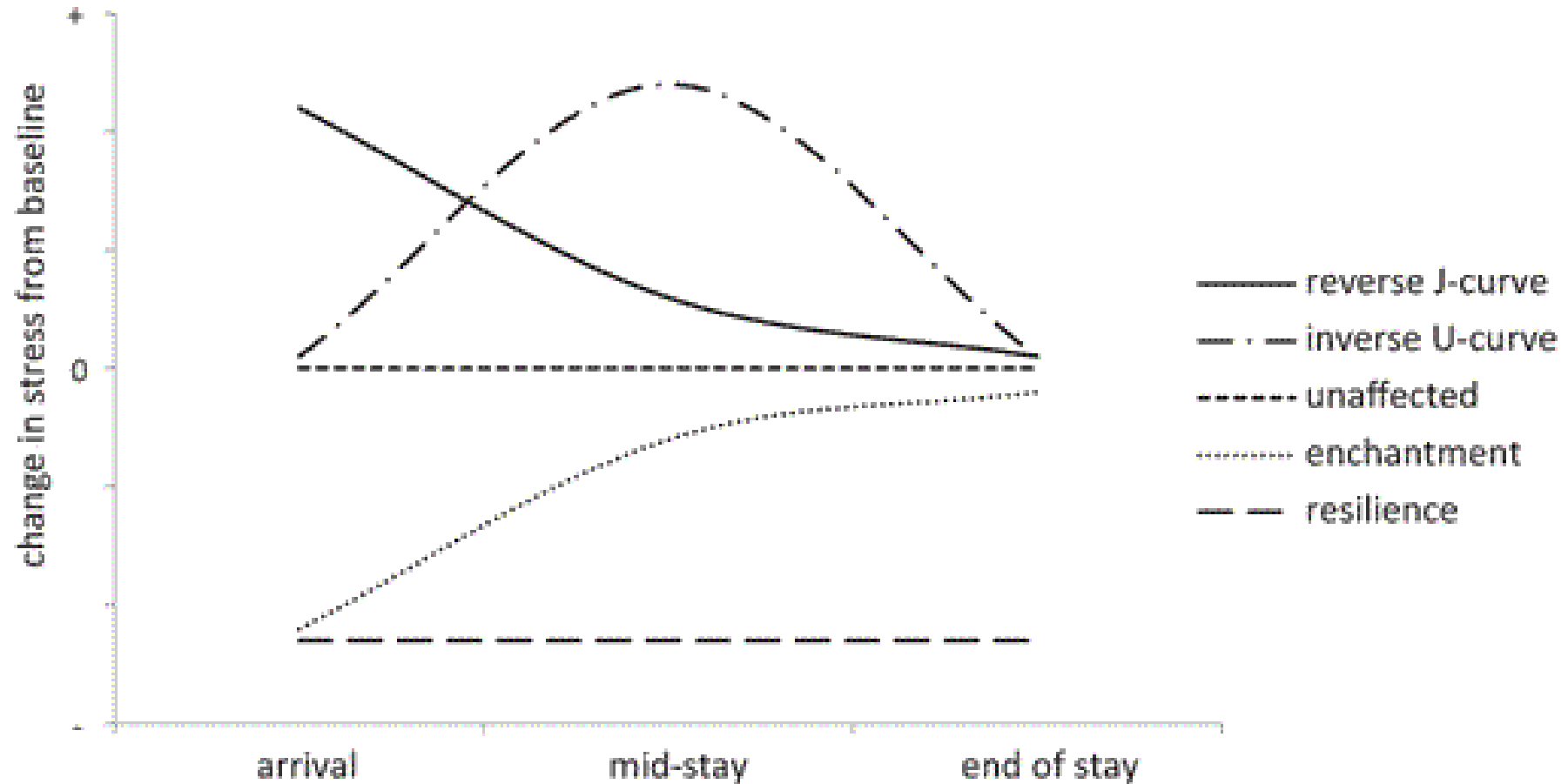
Terminology

- Culture Shock
- Acculturative Stress

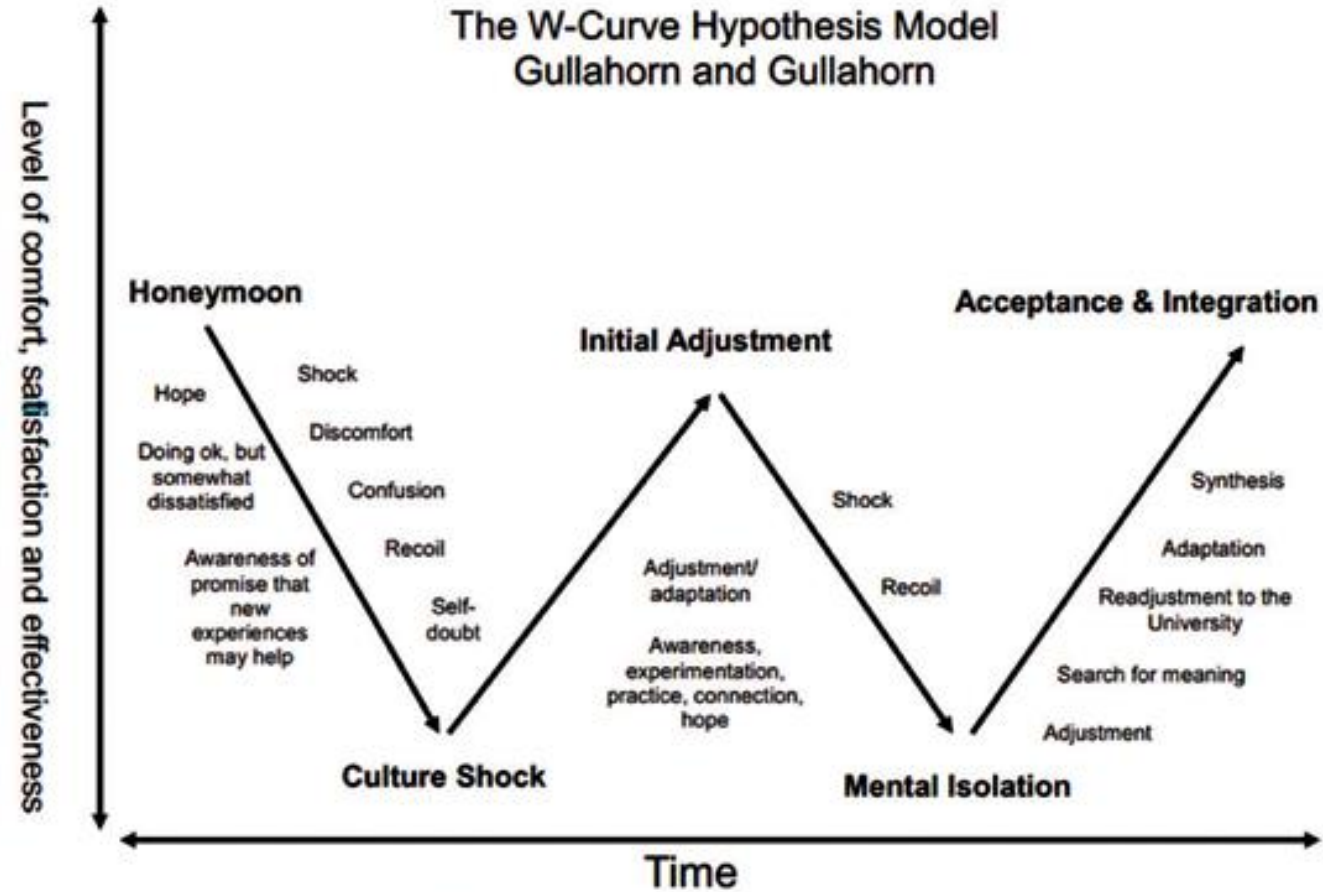
How could things develop for international students?



Possible Trajectories (Demes & Geeraert, 2015)



Possible Trajectories: W



Source: Hoffenburger, K., Mosier, R., & Stokes, B. (1999). Transition experience. In J.H. Schuh (Ed.), Educational programming and student learning in college and university residence halls. Columbus, OH: ACUHO-I

Where are we now?

- Lysgaard, 1955, Oberg, 1950: U shaped acculturation pattern (armchair theories, without data)
- Ward et al., 1998, 2001: J curve; but could be many patterns
>> evidence is conflicting J, U, inverted U, etc.
- Impact of Living Abroad (ILA) project, ESRC 2008-2013
2,500 sojourners, 600 controls, longitudinal, 18 months
[<http://www.ilaproject.org/>]

Empirical Trajectories (Demes & Geeraert, 2015)

- J and u shaped are relatively few (<10% combined)
- other patterns are all flat and make up the majority (!)
- J and U shapes return earlier (Demes & Geeraert, 2015)

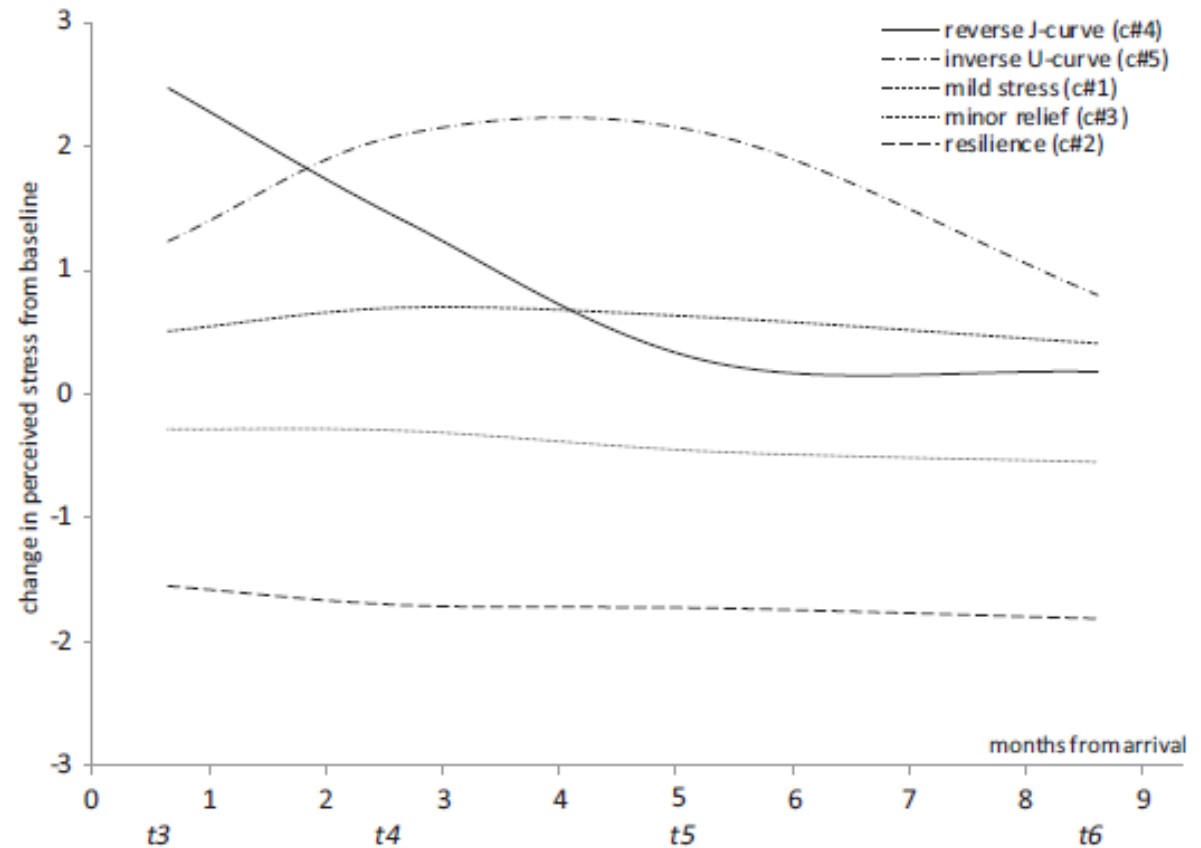


Figure 2. Five class representation of change in perceived stress over time for sojourners. Change in stress is relative to pretravel baseline.

Part 3 - Good to know: Distance, Growth, Belonging, Personality

Tausova et al., 2018, under review

Sample

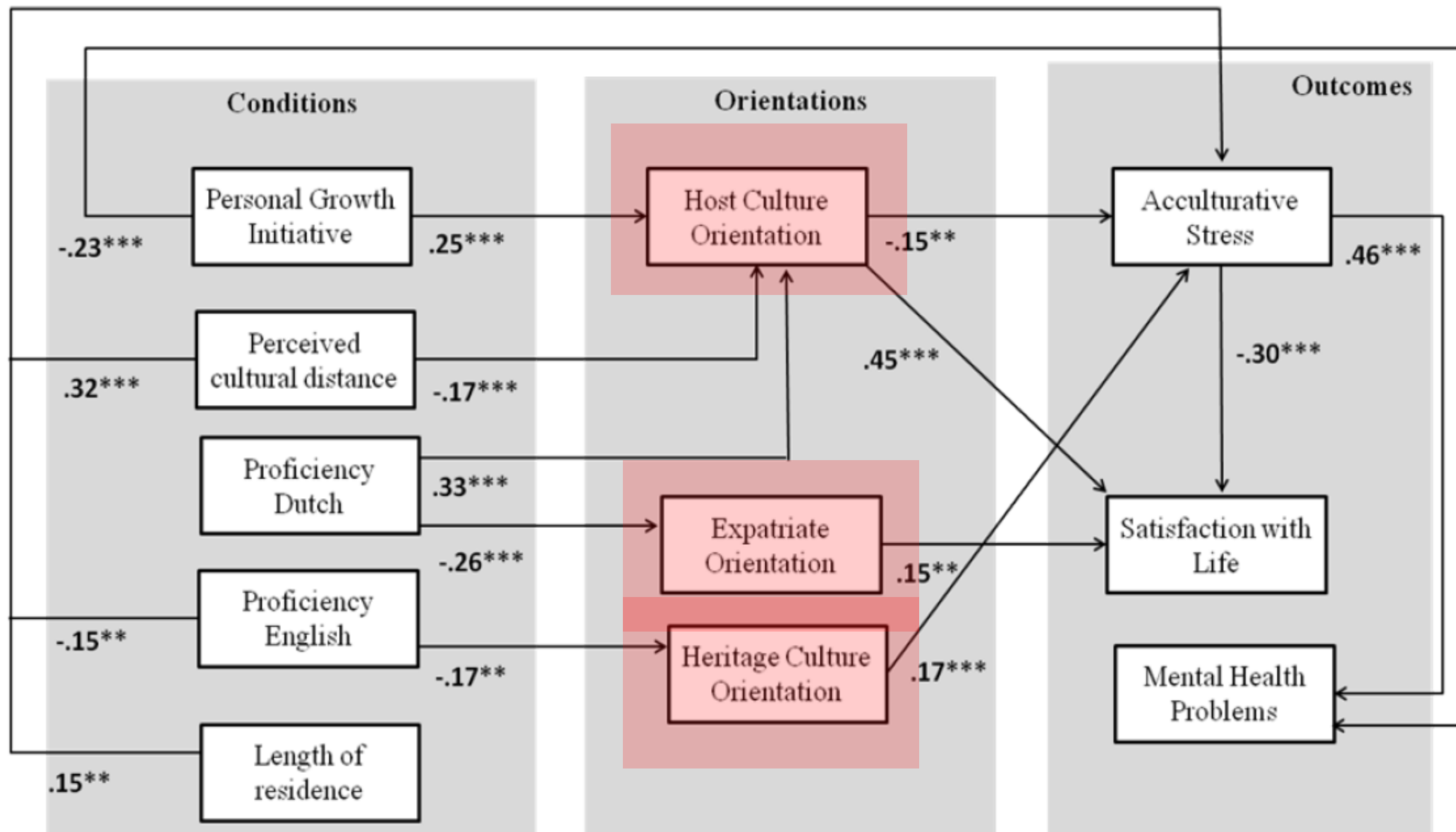
- 319 international students
- 62 countries (majority European)
- Average length of stay in NL: 24 months
- Age: $M = 24.51$, $SD = 3.57$
- 52 % previous stay abroad
- 75 % degree seeking, 23 % exchange (Erasmus program) students

Variables of Interest

- Demographics (language, residence)
- Perceived cultural distance scale (Galchenko & van de Vijver, 2007)
- Personal Growth Initiative Scale (Robitschek et al., 2012)
- Acculturation, Habits, and Interests Scale for Adolescents (Unger et al., 2002)
 - Host, Heritage, Expatriate (for a similar approach see Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015)
- Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994)
- Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983)
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)

All alphas >.77

Final empirical model - Relationships between acculturation conditions, orientations, and outcomes



Importance of Belonging

Expatriate Orientation is more important than both host and heritage culture orientation

Acculturation Orientations	M (SD)
Expatriate Orientation	3.63 (.94) ***
Host Orientation	2.64 (.93)
Heritage Orientation	2.58 (.99)

Manova $F(1.83, 583.02) = 104.19, p < .001$ (with Greenhouse-Geisser correction)

*** = $p < .001$ (Post hoc tests with Bonferroni correction)

Thoughts

- Consideration of acculturation orientations as **mediators** between conditions and outcomes (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007)
- **Tridimensional** acculturation orientations – multiple reference points in future studies and practice (Ferguson, Iturbide, & Gordon, 2014)
- Striving for **growth** aids adjustment by promoting participation in the host culture – even when distance is high



Part 4 – Who can you count on: Social Support

Bender et al., 2018, in preparation

Where are we?

Social Support is useful – many studies show that.

... but how useful?

... and which type of support is best?

... and what is it useful for?

What we did

Meta-analysis of 65 studies on social support as a condition

Types of social support:

- Subjective social support: “I can count on my friends when things go wrong”
- Objective social support: actual received social support /size of social network
- + Overall social support

Sources of support

- Conational
- Non-conational
- Both
- Unspecified

Adjustment

- Well-being: self-esteem, life satisfaction (*positive*)
- Mental health: acculturative stress, somatic and psychological symptoms (*negative*)
- Overall (both present)

We find

- **Positive but small** overall (effect size r) association ($r = .24$, 95% (CI) [.19, .28]) between social support and psychological adjustment
- Irrespective of type and source: **uniform positive** effect on positive psychological adjustment
- **Subjective social support** relates more strongly to positive and negative psychological adjustment than objective social support

Effect Sizes r :

Antecedent variation	Positive adjustment	Negative adjustment
	$r(k)$	$r(k)$
Total	.21*** (29)	.21*** (49)
Support type		
Subjective	.22***(14)	.24*** (29)
Objective	.26*** (8)	.02 (7)
Overall	.18** (7)	.22*** (14)
Between-groups Q_M	0.72	7.55*
Support source		
Conational	.22 (1)	N/A
Non-conational	N/A	.26*** (4)
Both sources	.23*** (13)	.06 (15)
Unspecified	.20*** (15)	.26*** (31)
Between-groups Q_M	0.15	11.11**

Thoughts

- Small, but uniform effect
- Subjective support deserves more attention: make sure it is perceived!
- Support sources are underinvestigated
- Positive adjustment \neq negative adjustment:
elevating positive side \neq dealing w/ adversity
- *Limitation: findings are not to be causally interpreted!*

Where are we now?

- Significant episodes of acculturative stress only occur for a minority of individuals! ... and there is no honeymoon.
- We need to understand the process!
- **Bad news:** dealing with stress is associated with many factors (conditions, orientations, outcomes)
- **Good news:** dealing with stress is associated with many factors (conditions, orientations, outcomes)
>> individual constellations matter



Thank you!

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