Honeymoon periods and expat blues
– acculturation orientation and social support as antecedents of adjustment abroad

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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 Orientations**
(Berry, 1990)

- Integration
- Separation
- Assimilation
- Marginalization

**Maintenance**

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

**Acculturation Conditions**
- Characteristics of the receiving society
- Characteristics of the society of origin
- Characteristics of the immigrant group
- Personal characteristics (Family)

**Acculturation Orientations**
- Cultural adoption
- Cultural maintenance

**Acculturation Outcomes**
- Psychological well-being (stress, mood states, acceptance, satisfaction)
- Socio-cultural competence in ‘mainstream’ culture
- Socio-cultural competence in ‘ethnic’ culture
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

The W-Curve Hypothesis Model
Gullahorn and Gullahorn

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

Conditions
- Personal Growth Initiative
- Perceived cultural distance
- Proficiency Dutch
- Proficiency English
- Length of residence

Orientations
- Host Culture Orientation
- Expatriate Orientation
- Heritage Culture Orientation

Outcomes
- Acculturative Stress
- Satisfaction with Life
- Mental Health Problems
Importance of Belonging

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acculturation Orientations</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expatriate Orientation</td>
<td>3.63 (.94)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host Orientation</td>
<td>2.64 (.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage Orientation</td>
<td>2.58 (.99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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

Picture from https://communicatehealth.com/2015/08/useful-theory-social-support/
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 $r$:

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

• Small, but uniform effect

• Subjective support deserves more attention: make sure it is perceived!

• Support sources are underinvestigated

• Positive adjustment ≠ negative adjustment: elevating positive side ≠ 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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