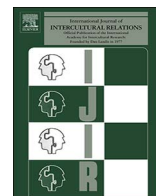




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Protective or harmful? Exploring the ambivalent role of social identification as a moderator of intergroup stress in sojourners

Kinga Bierwiazzonek^{a,*}, Sven Waldzus^a, Karen van der Zee^b^a Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)/CIS-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal^b Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

International students
 Cross-cultural adaptation
 Ingroup identification
 Perceived discrimination
 Intergroup threat

ABSTRACT

Living outside one's home country may be stressful, and having strong social ties should help deal with this stress. However, social ties may be protective or harmful depending on whether the social group they evoke belongs to the host- or the home country context. The current study examines how social identification with different groups may either buffer or aggravate the negative effects of two stressors (perceived discrimination and symbolic threat) on sojourner adaptation. Two hundred and twenty international students sojourning in nine different countries responded to an online questionnaire. As expected, adaptation was negatively predicted by both stressors. Moreover, high identification with the group of international students attenuated the negative effects of perceived discrimination on psychological adaptation, while home country identification aggravated the negative effects of symbolic threat on sociocultural adaptation.

Introduction

Living outside one's home country may be stressful. Some major stressors that sojourners confront arise from experience with members of the host society, with its unfamiliar cultural norms and not always friendly attitudes toward foreigners. Perceiving the host society as in some way forbidding is detrimental to sojourner adaptation and functioning in the new cultural environment (e.g., perceiving discrimination; Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013). Moreover, such perceptions may prevent a sojourner from realizing his or her potential while abroad. For example, they may indirectly affect work (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003) or academic outcomes (Hwang, Wang, & Sodanine, 2011; Tsang, 2001), and lead to early return to the home country.

2 One major source that may buffer stress amongst sojourners is their social capital. For instance, the social context provides the sojourner with a sense of social identification and other social ties which, one could expect, should be empowering and facilitate dealing with the stress of intercultural transitions. The reality, however, appears to be more complex with evidence suggesting that social capital may be either beneficial or devastating to sojourner adaptation depending on what group provides it (cf. Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006). The current study explores this ambiguity and investigates the moderating role of two sources of identification, the co-national group and the group of fellow foreigners, in cross-cultural adaptation of international students.

* Corresponding author at: ISCTE-IUL, Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Social (CIS), Av. Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal.
 E-mail address: kinga_bierwiazzonek@iscte.pt (K. Bierwiazzonek).

Perceived discrimination and intergroup threat as sources of sojourner stress

3 Cross-cultural adaptation, often defined in terms of the amount of stress or degree of comfort associated with sojourning abroad (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), may be viewed as a process of coping with the stressors present in international transitions (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; see also Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2014). The literature distinguishes between socio-cultural (sojourner social functioning within the host culture) and psychological adaptation (sojourner well-being). While both dimensions are empirically related and predicted by similar stress-related factors (e.g., perceived discrimination; see Wilson et al., 2013; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), the stress and coping perspective has generally been used to predict psychological adaptation rather than socio-cultural adaptation.

Stressors are broadly defined as “events impinging on the person” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An international transition not only constitutes such an event in itself (Ward et al., 2001), but is also accompanied by a number of more specific stressors due to changing one’s cultural environment. For instance, after moving to a new country a sojourner interacts with locals, and this interaction often takes the form of intergroup contact in which the foreignness of the sojourner is salient. Such contact may be stressful, especially when it involves perceived discrimination. The experience of discrimination causes individuals to perceive a hostile social environment, which leads to increased stress and undermines psychological health in minority members (Meyer, 2003).

Irrespective of how much it corresponds to actual unequal treatment based on group membership (e.g., being denied a job or housing because of one’s foreign nationality), the appraisal of discrimination towards one’s national, cultural or ethnic group as such is detrimental for people’s social functioning and well-being, considering it threatens one’s social identity and leads to feelings of rejection that are harmful to people’s self-esteem (Branscombe et al., 1999). There is robust meta-analytical evidence from various minority samples, including sojourners and migrants, that perceived discrimination is indeed negatively associated to well-being (Schmitt et al., 2014) and sojourner socio-cultural adaptation ($r = -0.50$; Wilson et al., 2013).

Symbolic threat, or the discrepancy between the norms, values, or beliefs of one’s native culture and the host culture, is another potential social difficulty for sojourners (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 1996, 2000; Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2014). For example, people moving from a secular occidental country to a religious state may appraise the predominance of religion in social life as a threat to their own cultural identity associated with values such as freedom of conscience. People moving in the opposite direction may perceive the secular culture as threatening because its liberalism is perceived as incompatible with their country’s moral norms. Given that most sojourners are exposed to the host culture on a daily basis, such symbolic threats may result in high levels of stress, translating into poor adaptation.

While there is some work associating symbolic threat with unfavorable individual-level outcomes (see Hofhuis, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2013, for one example), this earlier work has not included adaptation. At the intergroup level, symbolic threat has been consistently linked to negative outcomes (e.g., increased prejudice; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). These may translate into increased intergroup tension which, similarly to discrimination, is likely to contribute to a hostile and stressful social environment that undermines sojourner adaptation (see Meyer, 2003).

Ingroup identification as a coping resource

In the present study, we assume that the extent to which perceived discrimination and intergroup threat will affect cross-cultural adaptation is determined by the effectiveness of coping responses, both psychological (i.e., dealing with the emotions triggered by intercultural encounters, relevant to psychological adaptation) and behavioral (i.e., adapting one’s behavior to the new socio-cultural context, relevant to socio-cultural adaptation; Ward et al., 2001; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). The acculturation literature views coping as a critical moderator between stressors faced by migrants and their adaptation to the host society, and a process profoundly shaped by the social context of acculturation (Kuo, 2011, 2014).

Coping depends heavily on the availability of resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Access to coping resources reduces the negative impact of stress in general (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2003; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and in intercultural situations in particular (e.g., Van Erp, Van der Zee, Giebels, & Van Duijn, 2013). One powerful example of a coping resource related to social interactions is social support, which has been shown to facilitate coping in general (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; see Taylor, 2011, for a more recent review, and Thoits, 2011, for a theoretical elaboration) and in cross-cultural contexts (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Podsiadlowski, Vaclair, Spiess, & Stroppa, 2013; Stroppa & Spieß, 2010; Wang et al., 2012). Since the effects of support are extensively documented, we consider that they should be controlled for when examining the role of the social context in sojourner adaptation.

Social identification has also been studied as a coping resource (e.g., Gaudet, Clément, & Deuzeman, 2005; Haslam et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990; Sellers et al., 2003; Outten, Schmitt, Garcia & Branscombe, 2009; see also and Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & Haslam, 2009, for a review). However, in this case findings are more ambivalent. Work on intergroup relations tends to view identification with one’s minority ingroup, such as the co-ethnic group, as beneficial (see Haslam et al., 2009; for a review) and associate it with favorable individual level outcomes (e.g., well-being and life satisfaction, Outten et al., 2009; self-esteem, Phinney, 1990; less depressive symptoms, Gaudet et al., 2005; less psychological distress, Sellers et al., 2003). Moreover, minority group identification is seen as a buffer against intergroup stressors. For instance, according to the well-known rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999; Giamo et al., 2012; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003), identifying with one’s minority group (e.g., co-ethnic group, sexual minority, etc.) enhances a feeling of belonging and being accepted, which facilitates coping with perceived discrimination. This also applies to sojourners. In a study among international students in the USA, Schmitt et al. (2003) found that social

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5045529>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5045529>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)