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Multicultural experience: Development and validation of a multidimensional scale

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ABSTRACT

In response to the lack of a psychometrically tested instrument that can measure different types and modes of multicultural experience (MCE), we introduce the Multicultural Experience Assessment scale (MExA) that distinguishes between multicultural *exposures* and multicultural *interactions*, which are measured based on *frequency*, *duration*, and *breadth*. We evaluated MExA's factor structure, internal consistency, and construct-related validity in six studies using highly diverse student and U.S. national samples (total $N = 1373$). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the two-factor structure. Results provide full support for the convergent and criterion-related validity, and partial support for discriminant validity, and reveal high internal consistency of the subscales. Exploratory results identified frequency (vs. duration and breadth) of MCE as a better predictor of creativity. This research improves our understanding of the MCE construct and presents a psychometrically tested measure to investigate its dimensions and their relationships with other constructs.

Global interconnectedness, facilitated by migration, increasing ease and reduced cost of international travel, the globalization of firms, as well as the availability of new forms of social media has increased cultural diversity in our societies and indelibly changed our experiences. Almost everyone in developed countries is exposed to cultures different from their own (Dong, Day, & Collaco, 2008). The increasing levels of multicultural experiences (MCEs) have implications in our personal, social, and occupational lives. For example, clothing designers are inspired by fashions from India to Peru, restaurateurs fuse ingredients and methods from Malaysia to Russia, and legislators look for precedents from France to South Africa. Thus MCE has become an important construct of interest for a variety of fields, including management, cross-cultural psychology, education, and diversity research.

A critical problem in this growing MCE literature is the lack of psychometrically tested instruments that can measure different types and modes of MCE. The current research presents a multifaceted conceptualization of MCE that separates it from attitudinal aspects (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003; Narvaez & Hill, 2010) and distinguishes both different *types* and *measurement modes* of MCE. We introduce a parsimonious, psychometrically tested, and multidimensional MCE scale, the Multicultural Experience Assessment (MExA).

Current problems in the conceptualization and measurement of MCE

MCE refers to individuals' experiences of encountering or interacting with the elements and/or members of foreign cultures

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(Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). “Experience” is generally conceptualized and studied as a multidimensional construct (cf. work experience, Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995; Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; and international experience, Selmer, 2002; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). Similarly, MCE has been theorized to be a multidimensional construct (cf. Narvaez & Hill, 2010) with different components that need to be distinguished (Maddux, Leung, Chiu, & Galinsky, 2009; Rich, 2009). For example, it has been found that the experience of living abroad is related to increased creativity in both individual problem solving situations and dyadic negotiations, while the experience of traveling abroad is not (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Maddux, 2011). Unfortunately, the current measures of MCE include only broad indicators as proxy measures (e.g. living and traveling abroad) and two scales, the Multicultural Experiences Questionnaire [MEQ] (Narvaez & Hill, 2010) and the Multicultural Experiences Survey [MES] (Leung & Chiu, 2010), none of which reflect the multifaceted conceptualization of MCE or provide a psychometrically tested measurement. Conceptually, MCE has been proposed to encompass both multicultural experiences (i.e., behaviors) and openness to such experiences (i.e., attitudes; see Endicott et al., 2003; Narvaez & Hill, 2010). However, the proposed two-factor model lacked psychometric support (see Narvaez & Hill, 2010), suggesting perhaps that the utilized scale confounded the experiences and attitudes. Experiences are what a person encounters, undergoes, or lives through, while attitudes are psychological tendencies that are expressed as favorable or unfavorable evaluations (Albarracín, Johnson, Zanna, & Kumkale, 2005; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Thus, consistent with the work and international experience literatures, we argue that the conceptualization of MCE should focus solely on experiences, excluding attitudinal aspects.

The measurement of MCEs has also been a challenge. Some research utilizes broad proxies, e.g. being bicultural or having binational families (cf. Chang, Hsu, Shih, & Chen, 2014; Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012) and traveling, living, studying, or working abroad (cf. Cao, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2014; Godart, Maddux, Shipilov, & Galinsky, 2015; Lee, Theriault, & Linderholm, 2012; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) that confound trivial and substantial MCEs, in addition to exhibiting poor measurement properties. The current MCE scales do not measure different aspects of the construct¹ and lack internal consistency (see Leung & Chiu, 2008) and support for the proposed factor structure (see Narvaez & Hill, 2010). Although some aspects of MCE have been operationalized in a more differentiated manner in the literature (e.g. measuring depth, breadth, and cultural distance, see Cao et al., 2014; Godart et al., 2015), minor multicultural exposures and substantial MCEs remain confounded. In the same way, some research manipulates *exposure* to a different culture, while neglecting a crucial component of the construct, namely multicultural *interactions* (cf. Cheng, Leung, & Wu, 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010; Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012). In order to progress in our understanding of the relationships of MCE with various individual and organizational performance outcomes, we need a psychometrically tested MCE scale that reflects a multidimensional conceptualization of the construct and focuses on the experience itself and not conceptually separate attitudes.

New multi-faceted conceptualization of MCE

Culture is a learned system of meanings that promotes a sense of shared identity among its members (Ting-Toomey, 2004). It consists of institutions, traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings (Lytle, Brett, Barness, Tinsley, & Janssens, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 2004). Cultures are identified and distinguished by differences in these cultural elements. The word *culture* used to define MCEs can be operationalized in different ways, such as “foreign cultures” or “cultures that exist within one country” (e.g., minorities, women, different ethnicities, etc.; cf. Endicott et al., 2003; Narvaez & Hill, 2010). In our model, we follow the majority of the research on MCE (cf. Leung et al., 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) and in the field of cross-cultural management (cf. K. Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005; Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007) that defines culture at the country/national level, and we conceptualize the term “*multicultural*” as relating to or reflecting elements and/or members of *one or more foreign* countries. In this perspective, “*foreign culture(s)*” refer to the culture of countries that are different than one’s primary national culture. National culture is an important construct to focus on as it impacts individuals’ cognitive development, social communication and interactions (c.f. Rogoff, 2003), negotiation and conflict management behaviors (c.f. Adair, Okumura, & Brett, 2001), and leadership behavior and expectations (c.f. Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness –GLOBE- Research Program; Chhokar et al., 2007; House et al., 2004).

We define MCE as an individual-level construct that refers to past and current exposures to and interactions with foreign cultures and people. This conceptualization distinguishes relatively superficial and more substantial MCEs, which we posit will result in two basic types of MCEs: multicultural exposure and multicultural interaction.

Multicultural exposure

Multicultural exposure describes all instances in which a person observes elements or members of different cultures without interacting with them. Cultural elements can include architecture, arts, crafts, media, language, alphabet, food, stories, proverbs, clothing, and social, behavioral, religious, spiritual, and non-verbal practices. Individuals are exposed to different cultures in a variety of ways, such as observing people from different cultures, trying different cuisines, watching foreign movies or videos, hearing people speak a different language, or looking at foreign architecture. Such exposure does not involve any communication or interaction with people from different cultures.

¹ One MCE scale that attempted to distinguish “breadth” and “depth” of multicultural activities (the 105-item Multicultural Experiences Questionnaire [MEXQ], Endicott et al., 2003) is no longer available due to its expansive nature and some “inconsistent results” found with this measure (Narvaez & Hill, 2010, p. 46).

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