International Journal of Intercultural Relations xxx (2015) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

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

The many faces of expatriate identity

Byron G. Adams [a,b,*], Fons J.R. van de Vijver [a,c,d]

[a] Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands
[b] University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
[c] North-West University, Mahikeng, South Africa
[d] University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Expatriates
Acculturation
Expatriate identity
Personal identity
Relational identity
Social identity

ABSTRACT

With the advent of globalization, the number of expatriates within the international labor force is continuously increasing. While expatriate acculturation and adjustment receive much empirical and theoretical attention, less attention is afforded to expatriate identities. Expatriates, compared to other migrant workers, have more options to deal with acculturation and identity issues. We conceptualize expatriate identity by linking acculturation and a tridimensional model of identity (personal identity, relational identity, and social identity). We argue that expatriate identity, which is important for psychosocial adjustment and well-being, can take on two forms: a more cosmopolitan perspective, which expatriates develop after much experience in various cultures and a more pragmatic perspective in which expatriates maintain their original identity and make only superficial adjustments to a new context. We provide recommendations for future research as well as implications for organizations.

There has been much research on expatriate adjustment (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013; Lee & Kartika, 2014); however, there has been less research on expatriate acculturation (Lineberry, 2012), expatriate identity (Kohonen, 2008), and their association. This absence is remarkable, as we know from literature among individuals who immigrate and settle permanently (permanent settlers) how important identity is for well-being (e.g., Smith & Silva, 2011). We argue that insight into expatriate identity is important for understanding their well-being and job success. Compared to permanent settlers, expatriates often have much more freedom in dealing with the host society. This allows them greater freedom to negotiate their identities in these contexts. It is our objective in this article to provide a theoretical framework for understanding expatriate identity and its links with acculturation. We start by defining types of expatriates, and then consider acculturation as a process for expatriate adjustment in comparison with other immigrant groups. This is followed by a general overview of identity and current perspectives of expatriate identity, before we present our tridimensional model of identity. We conclude with recommendations for future research.

1. Types of expatriates

An expatriate is an individual who moves abroad on extended work assignments (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2013). Janssens, Cappellen, and Zanoni (2006) define an expatriate as an individual who is able to successfully deal with conditions presented by working in subsidiary organizations outside of his or her home country. Largely based on background

* Corresponding author: Department of Culture Studies, Tilburg University, PO Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands.
E-mail addresses: b.g.adams@uvt.nl (B.G. Adams), Fons.vandeVijver@uvt.nl (F.J.R. van de Vijver).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.05.009
0147-1767/

characteristics, there are three different types of expatriates considered in the literature: traditional, non-traditional, and self-initiated expatriates. Traditional expatriates are generally Western senior/executive males aged 40–50 years, on international assignments through their multinational organization, accompanied by their wives and children (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014). Non-traditional expatriates are generally female executives, early (<30 years) and late (>60 years) career individuals, single individuals, same-sex couples, and couples without children sent on international assignment through their multinational organization (McNulty, 2013; Shaffer et al., 2013). Lastly, self-initiated expatriates are highly skilled professionals or knowledge workers who actively pursue employment opportunities abroad (McNulty, 2013).

The concept of expatriates has recently evolved to include different forms of '—patriates' (McPhail, Fisher, Harvey, & Moeller, 2012), discussed in this special issue. These forms of '—patriation' are largely defined by the length of the assignment (as in flexpatriates; Shaffer et al., 2013), the origin of the expatriate (as in inpatriates; Reiche, 2011), or the return at the completion of the assignment (as in repatriates; Shaffer et al., 2013). These may also include highly skilled professionals (as in propatriates; McPhail et al., 2012) or knowledge workers (Riusala & Suutari, 2004), considered experts in their fields. When an assignment ends, some of these '—patriates' may be provided with the opportunity to return to their home country (and organization), or may have their assignment prolonged within the same or other international contexts (as in glopatriates; McPhail et al., 2012).

In this article, we use expatriate as the generic term, denoting traditional and non-traditional expatriates. These are individuals who (a) are employed by a multinational organization; (b) are on a specific assignment abroad (i.e., one of their main purposes is to act as a proxy or representative for the multinational in the subsidiary); (c) stay abroad for a substantial, yet often predetermined period. We exclude self-initiated expatriates and other forms of '—patriates'. Although there may be some similarities between expatriates and other '—patriates', we wish to maintain a more focused discussion dealing with more frequently studied groups of expatriates. Applicability of our model to other forms of expatriation falls outside of the scope of the current article.

1.1. Acculturation and expatriation

Acculturation is the process by which there is a psychological change in one or more cultures when individuals from different cultural groups are in continuous, first-hand, long-term contact (Sam & Berry, 2006). Culture is defined as the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes ascribed to a particular group (Goulet & Schweiger, 2006), essentially amounting to "the way we do things around here" (Martin, 2006, p. 1). It encapsulates the practices and behaviors particular to a society. Psychological acculturation refers to the change ascribed to an individual's interaction with people from other cultures (Sam & Berry, 2010). The outcome of the acculturation process is adjustment, which could be both psychological (subjective well-being) and sociocultural (behavioral competence; Hippler, Caligiuri, Johnson, & Baytalskaya, 2014). In models of acculturation, adjustment refers to the degree to which the individual experiences comfort in the absence of stress associated with moving to a new cultural context (Olsen & Martins, 2009). Haslberger et al. (2013) argue that adjustment is multidimensional and that person–environment fit takes place at affective, behavioral, and cognitive levels.

The acculturation process involves the adoption of values and norms of a new culture and the modification of behaviors associated with the old culture, as required by the host (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). Four acculturation orientations (Sam & Berry, 2006) result from an individual's endorsement of two dimensions: (a) cultural maintenance and (b) cross-cultural engagement (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007). These acculturation orientations are assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation. Assimilation is the acceptance of the host nation's culture at the expense of one's own culture. Integration is engaging in certain aspects of the host nation's culture while simultaneously maintaining aspects of one's original culture. Marginalization is the rejection of both the host nation's and one's own culture. Separation is the rejection of the host nation's culture while maintaining one's own culture (see Sam & Berry, 2006, for a full review). There is much evidence that integration is important for psychosocial success in the host society (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2007; Ward, 2013).

1.2. Differentiating acculturation experiences of expatriates and other immigrants

It is important to recognize how expatriates may be different from other immigrants such as economic migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, especially as this would influence their acculturation process. First, the reasons why immigrant groups choose to leave their country of origin may be either voluntary (moving of one's own volition in search of better work, education, and/or lifestyle) or forced (moving due to the economic or political contexts threatening one's safety or livelihood). Expatriates usually relocate temporarily, whereas the other groups settle with the prospect of staying permanently (Sam & Berry, 2006). This combination of a pull motive and temporary stay makes expatriates similar to sojourners, but different from most immigrant groups.

Second, acculturation is traditionally studied in Western contexts with an emphasis on immigrants (Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013). As many of the world's expatriates are in the Middle East and developing or emerging non-Western contexts becoming more popular expatriate destinations, acculturation may be different for expatriates in comparison with other immigrant workers. Expatriate adjustment may be voluntary, primarily because expatriates are not considered a 'minority' in the common sense of the word (Schwartz et al., 2006). Expatriates are usually skilled professionals and knowledge workers who are well remunerated (Oltra, Bonache, & Brewster, 2013). They may be classified as a powerful minority, typically having access to social (e.g., schools), economic (e.g., credit facilities), and public (e.g., healthcare) services

Please cite this article in press as: Adams, B. G., & van de Vijver, F.J.R. The many faces of expatriate identity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.05.009