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Turks in Bulgaria and the Netherlands: A comparative study of their acculturation orientations and outcomes



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ABSTRACT

This study compared Turkish ethnic minority groups in Bulgaria and the Netherlands by examining (a) differences in acculturation orientations (mainstream culture adoption and heritage culture maintenance) as well as psychological and sociocultural outcomes and (b) the relation of acculturation orientations and outcomes in a group that is involved in acculturation for a long term (Turkish-Bulgarian) as compared to a group that is more recently involved in acculturation (Turkish-Dutch). Participants were 391 Turkish adults (280 in Bulgaria and 111 in the Netherlands). Results showed that Turkish-Bulgarians were more strongly oriented toward their mainstream culture, whereas Turkish-Dutch showed a stronger orientation toward their Turkish heritage culture. Turkish-Bulgarians reported a lower degree of life satisfaction. A good fit was found for a multigroup path model in which mainstream culture adoption was related to life satisfaction for both groups in the same way. The more stigmatized Turkish-Bulgarian group was more focused on the mainstream culture than the less stigmatized Turkish-Dutch group, contrary to expectations. We conclude that extant acculturation models need to pay more systematic attention to local issues, such as the history of the immigrant group.

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This study addresses the question of whether minority groups of the same ethnic heritage, but living in different countries, differ in their acculturation orientations and outcomes. In so doing, the study adds to the literature in several ways. First, we add to knowledge of acculturation by conducting a comparative study, thereby providing insight into the role of context in acculturation in an Eastern European postcommunist country. Second, there is much interest in understanding acculturation in Turkish minority groups in Europe as they represent one of the largest immigrant groups ([Council of Europe, 2007](#)). Third, both Bulgaria and the Netherlands represent contrasting acculturating contexts for bicultural Turkish groups. Turkish-Bulgarians have lived in Bulgaria for many more generations than Turkish-Dutch in the Netherlands. Turkish Bulgarians have repeatedly experienced extensive assimilation campaigns in the late 1980s which forced nearly one million people to change their names ([Dimitrov, 2000](#)), whereas Turkish-Dutch have been exposed to conditions that are more conducive for cultural maintenance due to the Dutch multicultural approach to diversity. Although studies have been conducted with Turkish-Bulgarian ([Dimitrova, Bender, Chasiotis, & Van de Vijver, 2012](#)) and Turkish-Dutch groups ([Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003](#)), no research so far has compared the acculturation process and outcomes of bicultural Turkish groups in Bulgaria

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and the Netherlands. We were particularly concerned with the local conditions of long-term acculturating groups such as Turkish-Bulgarians in comparison to the Turkish-Dutch who have been exposed to different contextual influence in their acculturation and adaptation.

1. Acculturation

Theory and research have identified two major acculturation dimensions: cultural maintenance and adoption. Cultural maintenance refers to the extent to which cultural characteristics of the heritage culture of immigrants are retained, whereas cultural adoption deals with the extent to which characteristics of the mainstream culture become part of the behavior and attitudes of acculturating individuals. On the basis of these dimensions, four prototypical acculturation strategies have been proposed: integration (simultaneous maintenance of heritage and adoption of mainstream cultures), separation (maintenance of heritage and rejection of mainstream), assimilation (devaluation of heritage and strong identification with the mainstream culture), and marginalization (rejection of both heritage and mainstream cultures) (Berry, 1997). This bidimensional model is the successor of unidimensional models that assume the complete absorption into the mainstream culture across generations (Gordon, 1964); bidimensional models hold that long-term biculturalism by retaining both heritage and mainstream cultures is possible (Berry, 1997).

The conceptual framework that guided our study integrates insights from two specific areas of research and theory on ethnic minority groups. First, acculturation research shows that endorsement of both the heritage culture and mainstream culture leads to more positive developmental outcomes, whereas disengagement from both cultures is associated with mental health problems among immigrants (Berry, 1997). Research has also shown that well-being of minority groups relates to challenges of reconciling multiple cultural systems as well as to experienced stress due to one's minority status (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Second, we draw on the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM; Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Sénécal, 1997). We use the premise of the IAM that the strength of both heritage and mainstream culture identifications of minority members depends on, among other things, the acculturation climate in a society, including indirect threats posed by multiculturalism policies and attitudinal climate in the society at large. Another central assumption of the IAM is that the combination of the acculturation attitudes by the immigrant and mainstream group yields relational outcomes, which can be consensual, problematic, or conflictual. Lack of support and acceptance of cultural diversity in the society and the minority group's heritage culture maintenance could lead to conflictual outcomes and threaten the minority's identity. Findings in support of Bourhis et al.'s (1997) ideological model suggest that immigrants show high levels of identification with the mainstream culture in countries with more pluralistic policies compared to societies with less pluralistic policies, where immigrants have the lowest level of sociocultural adjustment and the highest level of heritage culture orientation (Yagmur & Van de Vijver, 2012).

In order to refine the investigation of acculturation outcomes, scholars have differentiated psychological and sociocultural adjustment outcomes (Searle & Ward, 1990). Psychological adjustment includes psychological well-being and satisfaction with life, whereas sociocultural adjustment refers to competencies signifying the ability to adapt to the new cultural context or achievements in that domain. Much research has been devoted to how acculturation strategies impact on acculturation outcomes. Whereas research has established a positive relation between heritage culture maintenance and psychological well-being (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009; Smith & Silva, 2011), mainstream culture adoption has been found to enhance sociocultural outcomes (Ward, 2001). It has been argued repeatedly that maintaining one's heritage culture, while at the same time adopting the mainstream culture (Berry, 1997) is the most adaptive acculturation orientation (see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Sam & Berry, 2006). In the present study we are interested in abilities and achievements in the mainstream domain (sociocultural adjustment) as well as abilities and achievements in the ethnic domain, such as the skill to speak the ethnic language and having friends from the ethnic group. We refer to these features as sociocultural outcomes in the mainstream and heritage domain, respectively.

2. Acculturation and adaptation in context

Extant studies have addressed the relationship between acculturation and adaptation of different acculturating groups across national contexts (Berry et al., 2006; Chiu, Feldman, & Rosenthal, 1992; Feldman, Mont-Reynolds, & Rosenthal, 1992; Wiking, Johansson, & Sundquist, 2004). Overall, there is evidence that immigrant groups that endorse integration rather than assimilation have the best psychological and sociocultural adaptation outcomes (Berry et al., 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdržálek, 2000; Vedder, Sam, & Liebkind, 2007). However, the context specificity in acculturation and adaptation of immigrant groups also needs to be taken into account. For example, the relationship of acculturation orientations and adaptation may be time-specific with an adaptive value only at earlier stages of the acculturation process (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Horenczyk, & Kinunen, 2011; Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). Related to that, Titzmann, Silbereisen, Mesch, and Schmitt-Rodermund (2011) examined acculturation-related hassles (minor negative experiences originating from being an immigrant) by comparing immigrant groups from the former Soviet Union, ethnic Germans in Germany, and Russian Jews in Israel. The results showed important country differences in terms of necessity and opportunities to integration such that immigrants in the former Soviet Union and Israel reported fewer acculturation-related hassles after being in the country for a longer period of time than those in Germany.

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