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MIDA Revisited: Does the Multidimensional Individual Difference Acculturation Model Hold in Short-Term Acculturation Contexts?

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ABSTRACT

Psychophysical distress and in- and out-group contact have been found to be crucial for successful acculturation. Core determinants of these variables are daily hassles, psychological well-being, cultural competence and ethnic identity as well as support by members of the in- and out-group. Previous research examining the effects of these constructs within the multidimensional individual difference acculturation (MIDA) model focused on long-term acculturation processes of immigrants. Extending previous research this study examines whether the MIDA model factors are also essential for a successful short-term acculturation process. The aim of this study was to test the proposed MIDA model in a temporary short-term acculturation process as experienced by exchange students ($N = 316$). Results of path-analyses indicate that especially high cultural competence and out-group support led to more out-group contact, whereas strong ethnic identity and in-group support led to more in-group contact. Furthermore, people experiencing only a small amount of hassles and a large degree of psychological well-being as well as support by the out-group showed less psychophysical distress. In conclusion, implications for research and practice of study abroad programs are discussed.

In recent history, cross-cultural migration considerably gained prevalence, especially in the student context as many students nowadays spent some abroad as exchange students. This development makes it necessary to take a closer look at the process of adjustment to a new culture and to identify the diverse factors connected to successful psychological adjustment. Studies showed, that a wide range of factors is related to the acculturation process (e.g., Walker, Wingate, Oabsi, & Joiner, 2008). Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung (2008) found that with international students acculturation is positively related to educational satisfaction. Moreover, students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding seem to be enhanced by study-abroad programs. The development of these skills can be predicted by students' plans to study abroad (e.g., Kitsantas, 2004). Kagan and Cohen (1990) found, that employment level, language spoken at home and having both, foreign and native friends, influences cultural adjustment. Interestingly, for individuals whose socialization is not yet completed, such as younger sojourners, acculturation-related changes to their lives are more evident (e.g., Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

But what are the factors constituting a successful acculturation? The multidimensional individual difference acculturation (MIDA) model, tested and validated with three samples of Iranian immigrants (Safdar & Lay, 2003), seems most adequate for identifying acculturation factors. The model includes three predictor variables (psychosocial resources, co-national connectedness, and hassles), predicting three outcome adaptation variables (in-group contact, out-group contact, and psychophysical distress). The model is based on a more general idea of acculturation attitude and not on the differentiated model of Berry (1994) and includes two dimensions of acculturation attitudes, separation and assimilation as mediators in the model. Safdar, Struthers, and van Oudenhoven's (2009) found a positive relation between psychosocial resources and out-group contact and a negative relation between psychosocial resources and psychophysical distress. They found anticipated positive relations between co-

national connectedness and in-group contact and between perception of hassles and psychophysical distress.

Some of these factors were recently examined as antecedents of sociocultural adaptation in an exchange student context by Brisset, Safdar, Lewis, and Sabatier (2010). The authors found psychological distress as well as identification with host- and co-nationals to be drivers of a successful adaptation. It is the aim of this study to extend previous research and to conduct an overall examination of the relations stated in the MIDA model in a short-term acculturation context.

Taking the MIDA model into account, we assume that these variables are not only important to predict immigrants' acculturation processes but can also be transferred into other acculturation areas, which are based on a temporary short-term acculturation process, as experienced by expatriates or exchange students. Therefore the aim of this study was to test the entire multivariate model and the relations assumed by Safdar, et al. (2009) with an exchange student sample. Thus, we state that the constructs promoted in the MIDA model and their relations will be relevant in short-term acculturation processes as experienced by exchange students. At this students with more psychosocial resources (i.e., cultural competence, support from out-group members, psychological well-being) are (a) more likely to maintain contact with the larger society (out-group contact), and are (b) more likely to report less psychophysical distress than those with fewer cultural competences. Students with high co-national connectedness (i.e., ethnic identity, support from in-group members) in contrast are more likely to maintain contact with their ethnic community (in-group contact). The relation between psychosocial resources and co-national connectedness with out-group and in-group contact will be mediated by acculturation attitudes. Furthermore, students who perceive low levels of hassles are anticipated to experience less psychophysical distress.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The online questionnaire was completed by 316 participants (approx. 72% female) at three Universities in Europe, one in Germany and two in Spain. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to the participants via a number of authorities and institutions dealing with exchange students abroad and in the respective countries. The participants' mean age was 23.21 years (SD_{age} = 2.53; Range $_{age}$ = 16 to 39 years). Approximately 70% of the participants were taking part in a study abroad program at the time of the survey, 29% had done so within the last 12 months. Germany was the home country of 27% of the participants. 10% were from Spain, 4% were from Italy, 4% from the USA, 3% from China and 52% from other countries like Afghanistan, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (UK). As their host country, 25% of the participants named Germany, 17% Spain, 6% the UK, 4% France and 48% other countries like Afghanistan, Belgium, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, and the USA.

Measures

All measures were assessed on a 6-point Likert scale and fitted to our sample: wherever a country or culture was mentioned explicitly in the original scale, it was replaced with *home country/home culture* or *host country/host culture*. In order to prevent mix-ups the words *host* and *home* were shown underlined in the questionnaire. The study from Safdar el al. (2009) was replicated mainly using the same measures all showing good psychometric characteristics (for reliabilities see Table 1). A different measure was used to assess social support of the out- and in-group to better adapt the items to our sample. Therefore, we used items from the Index of Sojourner Social Support (Ong & Ward, 2005). To correct for the low

reliabilities found by Safdar et al. (2009) a different measure was also applied to assess out- and in-group contact. We therefore used the cultural contact questionnaire by Feather (1981).

RESULTS

See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and correlations. As we could not replicate the composite factors "Psychosocial resources" and "Connectedness" in principal components analysis like Safdar et al. (2003, 2009), we did not aggregate the constructs of these factors, but used them as independent constructs in the model to show evidence at sub-dimensional level in a differentiated way.

==== TABLE 1 HERE ===

In order to test the entire multivariate model and the causal steps assumed in the MIDA model we performed a path analysis. The model fits the data well, despite the significant Chi²-value (χ^2[22, $N = 316$] = 46.65, $p < .05$. Normed $\chi^2 = 2.12$, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06, RMSEA 90%, confidence interval = [.04, .08], SRMR = .05). Figure 1 shows that all three psychological resources constructs had a significant influence on assimilation attitudes, but only two of them, that is psychological well-being and social support of the out-group, had a significant negative influence on psychophysical distress. And again only two, that is cultural competence and social support of the out-group, had a significant positive influence on out-group contact. Regarding the connectedness constructs only ethnic identity showed a significant positive influence on separation attitudes, but both, social support of the in-group and ethnic identity showed a significant positive influence on in-group contact. There was no significant influence of the acculturation attitudes on either out-group or in-group contact. Finally, hassles showed a significant positive influence on psychophysical distress. Even though, previous research could show that identification with the in-group leads to less perceived stress (Heim, Hunter, & Jones, 2011), explorative analysis showed no significant

effect of ethnic identity and social support of the in-group on psychophysical distress of exchange students in our data.

Thus, we can state that overall the MIDA model could be replicated in a short-term acculturation process with exchange students. When looking at the individual paths some additional information at sub-dimensional level can be derived which extents previous findings of the MIDA model. However, there was no mediation of either of the two acculturation strategies in our model.

==== FIGURE 1 HERE ===

DISCUSSION

It was the aim of this study to examine whether the MIDA model, which was proposed by Safdar et al. (2003, 2009) in a long-term acculturation process of Iranian migrants, can be assigned to a short-term acculturation process, for example as experienced by exchange students. Path analysis indicated that the structure of the original MIDA model components is replicated in a short-term acculturation process. As proposed in the model, high cultural competence and strong support from out-group members led to more out-group contact. Also in line with the MIDA model, strong ethnic identity as well as support from in-group members led to more in-group contact. With regard to the prediction of psychophysical distress we detected, as expected, that students with high psychological well-being as well as strong social support from out-group members and little hassles did report less psychophysical distress than students who lacked one or more of these factors during their stay abroad. There were no significant influences of the acculturation attitudes on the outcome variables out-group contact and in-group contact as could be shown by Safdar et al. (2003, 2009). One possible explanation for this finding might be that the establishment and use of acculturation attitudes needs some time that is not given in a short-term acculturation process. For example Sodowsky and Plake (1992) could show that the degree of acculturation

depended on the years people had lived in the new country. At this people who had lived at least six years in the new country were significantly more acculturated than people who had lived five or less years in the country. Therefore students might not develop specific acculturation attitudes during their comparatively short stay abroad.

Overall, the results of the present study show that the main assumptions made by Safdar et al. (2003, 2009) could be replicated in a sample which is quite different to the original one, and with methods of measurement which have been, in parts, adapted to the different conditions of that sample. However, a limitation of this study is the fact that only two acculturation strategies, assimilation and separation, were included in the original MIDA model and were thus used in this study. Berry's (1994) two-dimensional model of acculturation with four strategies maybe could have an important impact on future revisions of the MIDA model. Furthermore, future research should examine whether acculturation attitudes cannot evolve during short-term acculturation processes.

Finally, we want to take a closer look on the practical implications that could be derived from the present study. As our analysis could show, one factor that is strongly connected to out-group contact is cultural competence. Therefore, the training of skills which are related to cultural competence, such as the language and specific knowledge about the host country, could help students who are planning an exchange semester to better prepare themselves for their trip abroad.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Variables of the MIDA Model

	M	*SD*	*SK*	*KU*	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
(1) Hassles	2.46	0.67	0.67	0.54	*.72*										
(2) Psych. Well-Being	4.67	0.58	-0.76	1.42	-.32	*.81*									
(3) Cultural Competence	4.67	0.60	-0.84	2.09	-.09	.34	*.79*								
(4) Support In-group	4.36	1.04	-0.74	0.49	-.05	.26	.23	*.91*							
(5) Support Out-group	4.16	1.25	-0.62	-0.30	-.11	.29	.23	.59	*.94*						
(6) Ethnical Identity	3.91	0.98	-0.29	-0.39	.05	.16	.01	.20	.06	*.86*					
(7) In-group Contact	4.20	1.02	-0.94	0.66	.00	.24	.10	.40	.22	.26	*.79*				
(8) Out-group Contact	3.68	1.15	-0.04	-0.72	.02	.21	.39	.25	.49	-.01	.19	*.84*			
(9) Psychophysical Distress	4.27	0.75	-0.66	-0.03	.27	-.51	-.27	-.31	-.37	-.17	-.21	-.16	*.85*		
(10) Assimilation Strategies	4.38	0.91	-0.54	-0.10	-.01	.03	.31	.12	.16	.03	-.01	.22	.01	*.85*	
(11) Separation Strategies	3.60	0.99	0.03	-0.40	.14	.00	-.10	.15	-.03	.45	.08	-.08	.05	.07	*.80*

Notes. M = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation; *SK* = Skewness, *KU* = Kurtosis.; *N* = 316. Spearman rank correlations: $|r| \geq .11$, $p \leq .05$ (two-tailed), $|r| \geq .16$, $p \leq .01$ (two-tailed). Within main diagonal: Reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha)

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Path Analysis of the MIDA Model