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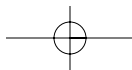
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## BICULTURALISM

### A Model of the Effects of Second-Culture Exposure on Acculturation and Integrative Complexity

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Growing numbers of people are being exposed to a second culture, yet the process by which individuals absorb a cultural identity and the role played by second-culture exposure in shaping sociocognitive skills have received little theoretical attention. This article begins to fill these knowledge gaps by delineating the factors that affect the adoption of specific acculturation strategies and focusing on the power of second-culture exposure to stimulate integratively complex cognitions that give people the flexibility to shift rapidly from one cultural meaning system to another. We propose a model, influenced by prior work on value pluralism and accountability, which outlines the underlying mechanisms that determine acculturation choice and that produce both individual difference and situational variation in integrative complexity of social functioning. Implications for expatriate performance are discussed.

**Keywords:** acculturation; biculturalism; integrative complexity; accountability; overseas assignments; perspective taking; value pluralism

**Exposure to a second culture** has become a staple of modern times, and nowhere is this more pronounced than in the realm of business. Whereas in the past, technical competence may have sufficed to ensure competitiveness, today with globalization, business success has increasingly come to depend on understanding a variety of cultural outlooks (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). As Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, has attested,

The Jack Welch of the future cannot be like me. I spent my entire career in the U.S. The next head of General Electric will be somebody who spent time in Bombay, in Hong Kong, in Buenos Aires. We have to send our best and brightest overseas and make sure they have the training that will allow them to be the global leaders who will make GE flourish in the future. (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999, p. 1)

The claim is, moreover, more than business-book hyperbole. Research has indeed found links between the profitability of multinational firms and their ability to develop leaders with the linguistic, cultural, and political skills necessary for coping with diverse constituencies (e.g., Stroh & Caligiuri, 1998). And yet there is a surprising paucity of research

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on the effects that such cross-cultural experiences have on individuals' skills, capabilities, and cultural inclinations (Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl, & Osland, 2002).

One line of research that has dealt with these processes is that on acculturation. It focuses on the internal changes that take place in the individual when she or he is exposed to the values, norms, and expected behaviors that are essential for assuming a cultural identity and for participating as a cultural member (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000). This research, which has traditionally focused on how acculturation orientations can affect psychological adaptation (e.g., Dasen, Berry, & Sartorius, 1988), has recently begun to consider contextual effects of the host community attitudes on acculturation orientations (e.g., Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). However, the factors that affect intrapsychic attitudes toward acculturation and the role played by second-culture exposure in shaping cognitive, affective, and motivational processes has received little attention (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). Even less is known about the organizational implications of such transitions.

This article begins to fill these knowledge gaps by modeling the impact of second-culture exposure on acculturation choice and on individual cognition and coping skills (Tadmor, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Specifically, it delineates (a) the factors that affect individuals' adoption and achievement of specific acculturation strategies; (b) the differential effects that second-culture exposure can have on the integrative complexity of sociocognitive functioning, in which integrative complexity refers to the capacity and willingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing perspectives on the same issue and to forge conceptual links among these perspectives (Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993). Within the cross-cultural context, integrative complexity refers to the degree to which a person accepts the reasonableness of different cultural perspectives on how to live, both at the micro interpersonal level and at more macro organizational-societal levels and, consequently, is motivated to develop integrative schemas that specify when to activate different worldviews and/or how to blend them together into a coherent holistic mental representation.

The study of integrative complexity has its roots in Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory. Originally, integrative complexity has been viewed as a relatively stable personality trait and therefore as a stable source of individual differences. Only later did researchers discover that integrative complexity can be increased or reduced by such environmental cues as stress, value conflict, and accountability pressures (e.g., Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993). Here, we suggest that integrative complexity of functioning will depend on the type of acculturation strategy that people choose when they are exposed to a second culture, and that choice, in turn, will hinge on the value conflicts and role conflicts activated by second-culture exposure.

Most research on acculturation is based on Berry's (1980) widely accepted acculturation framework, which assumes the orthogonality of the culture of origin and mainstream culture and posits degree of internalization of each culture to be free to vary independently (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). According to Berry and as reformulated by Bourhis et al. (1997), four acculturation strategies exist: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. Assimilation involves relinquishing cultural heritage and adopting the beliefs and behaviors of the new culture. Separation involves maintaining only the heritage culture without intergroup relations. Marginalization involves nonadherence to both the old and new culture. Integration or biculturalism involves maintaining one's cultural heritage and adopting a new cultural identity; the identities are suggested to remain independent of each other, and the activation of each is context dependent (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000).

We propose that individuals who cope with social and cultural conflict situations by internalizing the values of both groups (i.e., become bicultural) will respond in reliably

more complex ways than those who choose to adhere to the values of only one cultural group (i.e., become separated or assimilated). The choice of acculturation strategy will depend on the combination of internal and external accountability pressures faced by the individual. The model, based on an extensive body of work on value pluralism and accountability (e.g., Tetlock, 1986, 1992, 2002) outlines the mechanisms via which such differences in acculturation choice and integrative complexity are likely to arise.

The article is divided into three sections: (a) an overview of the model and the three simplifying assumptions on which it is based; (b) a description of the specific steps in the model that captures the mechanisms via which acculturation choice occurs and, which consequently, is hypothesized to affect integrative complexity; (c) an analysis of the implications of this model for understanding the acculturation process and expatriate job performance.

### THE IMPACT OF SECOND-CULTURE ON ACCULTURATION AND INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Culture provides people with well-established habits and scripts that guide their attitudes and behaviors. The Acculturation Complexity Model (ACM) maintains that when people enter new cultural settings, the cultural stimulus cues that would normally automatically activate these habits are no longer present. The resulting ambiguity about how to act, in turn, activates more self-conscious scrutiny of the environment in search of cues as to how to respond (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Louis, 1980). This constitutes Step 1 in the second-culture exposure model. During this step, people begin to notice the value differences between their old and new cultures. In Step 2, it is suggested that the choice of acculturation strategies will depend on whether people become accountable to a single or mixed audience and on the degree that people gravitate to the values of each culture.

Step 3 of the model clarifies why, depending on the prevailing type of accountability pressure, the dissonance people feel between the two cultural value systems can range from minimal to severe. Step 4 shows why these varying levels of dissonance will demand varying levels of integrative complexity in acculturation-coping responses (Tetlock, Peterson, & Lerner, 1996). Finally, Step 5 of the model addresses whether these modes of resolution will generalize to other culturally related domains and discusses how a specific acculturation strategy is ultimately achieved (see Figure 1).

Before explaining each step, it is useful to lay out the simplifying assumptions underlying our analysis. First, although we agree with self-categorization theorists (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Blackwell, 1987) that people have multiple identities (e.g., American, doctor, woman), we also agree with the distinctiveness model of the spontaneous self-concept (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978) that there are conditions under which particular identities are likely to become particularly salient. One such condition arises when people move into a new culture with its own long-standing traditions (Sussman, 2000), and old cultural identities become salient.

Second, although people do not answer a dichotomous yes or no to Berry's (1980) acculturation questions of retaining cultural heritage and adopting a new culture, for simplicity's sake, we begin by positing that they do, and that their responses remain constant throughout the acculturation process (e.g., an individual who chooses biculturalism early in the acculturation process also chooses that strategy at every other stage in the process). Because we suggest that choice of acculturation strategy depends on the accountability pressures an individual experiences, we furthermore assume that these accountability pressures remain

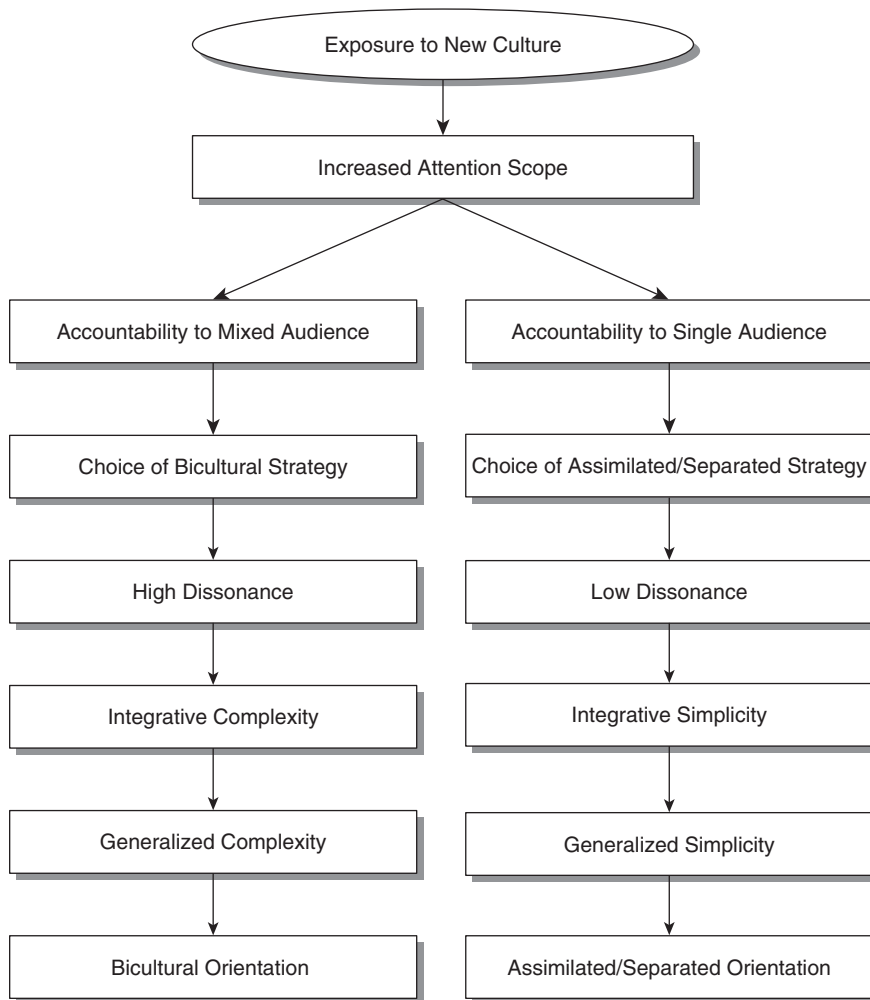


Figure 1: Model Overview

constant. Finally, we assume that there is a minimal level of conflict between the value sets of the two cultures to which the individual is exposed.

**STEP 1: INCREASING THE SCOPE OF ATTENTION THROUGH EXPOSURE TO A NEW CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**EXPOSURE TO A SINGLE CULTURE: THE BASIS FOR AUTOMATIC ATTENTION**

Any realistic social environment encompasses an extreme array of complexity in both the number and the kinds of stimuli to which people can pay attention. Because there is a limit to how much information a person can process at a given time, people create mental schemas or scripts that simplify the environment by reducing its complexity into manageable chunks

(Bruner, 1957). People use these perceptual schemas to automatically process information and to efficiently guide their interpretation of and responses to familiar social situations (e.g., Louis & Sutton, 1991).

The schemas are derived from our past social interactions. They depend on the activation of values, expectations, and other endogenous factors (Thomas, 2002). Because the most fundamental source of value differences is culture (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003), culture becomes the basis for the perceptual filters, such as schemas and scripts, that people rely on to guide their attention (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rosch, 1975; Triandis, 1975). The schemas created by culture become chronically accessible and automatically filter how individuals view their world (Briley & Wyer, 2001). Because different cultures value different things, different cultures notice different things. For example, research suggests that East Asians' collectivistic nature brings with it greater attention to the field, whereas American individualistic focus produces greater attention to the object (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

However, when the unexpected occurs, reliance on automatic processing becomes insufficient. In new circumstances, people need to become engaged in analyzing their environment and give more thought to what they had previously been filtering out.

#### EXPOSURE TO A NEW CULTURAL CONTEXT: INCREASE IN ATTENTION SCOPE

Researchers have suggested that a person will switch from automatic to conscious attention in new situations that contain much ambiguity and when previous modes of behavior seem inadequate (e.g., Louis & Sutton, 1991). Encountering a new culture is such a situation. An individual in a new culture encounters unfamiliar norms, values, and basic assumptions (Louis, 1980). That his or her previous ways of viewing the world are inappropriate will quickly become evident from nonverbal universal signifiers of disapproval such as frowns, scowls, and glares that norm enforcers in the new culture will provide. These cues will cause the individual to realize that something is amiss and that she or he can no longer rely solely on previous response routines. By switching to a conscious attention mode, an individual continues to view the world through her or his existing perceptual schemas but also begins to notice things she or he would normally have filtered out (Louis & Sutton, 1991). These are the things that members of the new cultural group notice routinely or automatically. Thus, her or his scope of attention will increase.

Because perceptual differences between two cultures are rooted in difficult-to-detect values and normative prescriptions (e.g., Peng & Nisbett, 1999), a person who relies on more effort-demanding conscious processing will be better positioned to notice the discrepancies between the new and old cultures. For example, an East Asian who comes to live in America will begin to notice that people feel less defined by their in-groups and more by their personal accomplishments (e.g., Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988). These cultural differences are at the heart of the dissonance acculturating individuals will experience. But the level of dissonance felt by acculturating individuals will depend on the type of accountability pressures they experience.

#### STEP 2: ACCOUNTABILITY DETERMINANTS OF ACCULTURATION STRATEGY

Researchers have paid considerable attention to the relation between demographics, personality, and situational characteristics and the propensity to adopt different acculturation

strategies. These potential predictors include gender, motivation, friendship ties, voluntariness, and the permanency of the move (e.g., Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). From our perspective, what these characteristics have in common is that they all affect the type of accountability pressure a person will feel.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY

People do not operate in a social vacuum; they must interact with others via shared norms and practices. Accountability refers to the need to justify one's thoughts and actions to significant others in accord with these shared norms. Failure to do so can lead to varying degrees of censure (Tetlock, 1992). This pressure to account for their behavior is rooted in people's fundamental need for social approval, whether as an end in itself, as a way to bolster their self-worth, or as a way to procure power over scarce resources (Tetlock, 2002). How people respond to accountability demands will depend, however, on the types of accountability pressure they experience.

Accountability pressures can come from inside or outside the individual. External accountability refers to the matrix of interpersonal accountability relationships in which an individual is engaged with significant others. The accountability matrix can be defined as the set of all relationships in which the individual feels she or he must answer to others for particular beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. But the existence of an external audience is not necessary for the creation of accountability pressures. People will often internalize the voices of those with whom they feel strong affinity (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). This type of audience internalization makes it difficult to escape evaluative scrutiny (Tetlock, 2002).

The audience to whom the individual is accountable need not be uniform. It can represent a single unified set of values or a complex, even flatly contradictory set of values (e.g., Tetlock, 2002). Within the cultural context, a single audience refers to one composed of perspectives with a unified cultural orientation, whereas a mixed audience refers to one composed of at least two distinct cultural perspectives. From this standpoint, an exclusively Chinese audience constitutes a single audience, whereas a combination of Chinese and American individuals constitutes a mixed audience.

#### ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES SHAPE SELECTION OF ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

Many factors affect the accountability pressures a person feels when entering a new culture. People's accountability pressures and, consequently, their choice of acculturation strategy "will depend to a large extent on the nature of the subjects' friendship and acquaintance patterns, and on the psychological functions that these relationships serve" (Bochner, 1982, p. 30). For example, Novakovic (1977) showed that the ethnicity of one's closest friends predicted acculturation patterns of Yugoslavian children living in Australia. With time, children with friends from both cultures became more bicultural than children with friends from only one cultural group. Arguably, having both Australian and Yugoslavian friends made them accountable to both cultural groups, thus increasing the probability that both cultures will be internalized.

The psychological functions that these relationships serve vary. With expatriates, for example, the accountability pressures they will feel may depend on the organization's reward strategy and on the explicit goals for the overseas assignment. Whether the individual is rewarded for getting acquainted with local culture or whether the person's tasks require him or her to act as an intermediary between members of the home and host cultures as opposed

to tasks that require him or her to interact with only one cultural constituency will influence the type of accountability pressure she or he will feel. The organizational structure also plays an important role in the type of audience the individual is likely to encounter. Multinational organizations vary in how much they customize their operations to the local culture. This results in differing degrees of how many locals as opposed to expatriates staff operations abroad and the degree to which policies, procedures, practices, and norms conform to host culture as opposed to the home culture. Additionally, how much a person truly enjoys being with members of each culture is likely to affect felt accountability pressures. What is critical is not objective reality but how the individual interprets that reality (Weick, 1977).

Ultimately, if individuals become accountable to a single audience, composed of only members from their old culture, then they will likely adopt a separated strategy and will maintain only the culture of heritage. Similarly, if individuals become accountable to a single audience composed of only members from their new culture, then they will likely adopt an assimilated strategy and will internalize only the new culture. In contrast, if individuals become accountable to a mixed audience composed of members from both cultures, then they will likely adopt a bicultural strategy and will internalize both cultures.<sup>2</sup> We suggest the following:

*Proposition 1:* Different types of accountability pressures will lead to the adoption of different acculturation strategies: A person who is accountable to a single audience composed of members of his or her cultural heritage will adopt a separated strategy; a person who is accountable to a single audience composed of his or her new cultural group will adopt an assimilated strategy; a person who is accountable to a mixed audience composed of both his or her old and new cultural groups, will adopt a bicultural strategy.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, it is important to stress that the individuals are not yet acculturated. They are neither assimilated nor bicultural. The type of accountability pressure they experience merely determines the choice of acculturation strategy. This is just the beginning of the acculturation process. Accordingly, we refer to individuals who are in the process of becoming acculturated as assimilating, separating, and biculturating, depending on the acculturation strategy they follow.

The type of accountability pressure a person feels will determine the strength of the felt dissonance between the value sets of the two cultures, and consequently, the mode of resolution chosen.

### STEP 3: EXPERIENCING DISSONANCE

If culture is defined as the way a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas (Schein, 1985), value differences between cultures will arise from the different solutions that different social groups have devised for dealing with these problems. When there is a meeting of two cultures that choose solutions that are incompatible with each other, conflict will result. This conflict creates stress for the individual (Kim, 1988).

The strain caused by such conflicts is experienced as aversive for three main reasons (see Festinger, 1964; Tetlock et al., 1996). First, people who are confronted with conflicting values find it cognitively difficult to make apples-and-oranges comparisons between them (e.g., how much harmony am I willing to give up to show that I have some of the American individualist in me?). Second, value conflict is emotionally painful. Most people who are faced with a situation in which they must sacrifice one important value for another



experience dissonance. The more important the value, the more painful the experience of dissonance will be. Third, the need to make trade-offs between core values can be embarrassing: If one chooses one culture's values over those of another, one may feel or be made to feel that she or he is letting down the members of the rejected culture. The dissonance experienced, whether low or high, will depend on the exact configuration of accountability demands on the individual (Tetlock et al., 1996).

#### ACCOUNTABILITY EFFECTS ON DISSONANCE STRENGTH

On encountering a new conflicting culture, a person may feel only slight dissonance and perhaps none at all. This can occur under two conditions. First, when a person is confronted with a situation that requires choosing between two value sets that are held with unequal strength, she or he will experience low dissonance (Tetlock et al., 1996). This will occur when a person believes more strongly in either the old or the new cultural identity; when she or he is internally accountable to a single audience. Second, an individual will also experience low dissonance when, unconstrained by prior commitments, she or he is confronted with a single external audience whose views are known, either from Culture A or B (Tetlock, 1992). Under such conditions, when inconsistent cognitions are not accessible simultaneously, dissonance discomfort will be reduced (McGregor, Newby-Clark, & Zanna, 1999).

*Proposition 2:* Accountability to a single audience, either internal or external, will lead to a low level of dissonance.

Given that we have suggested that assimilating and separating individuals will likely be accountable to a single audience (Proposition 1), we suggest the following:

*Proposition 3:* When confronted with a cultural conflict, assimilating and separating individuals will experience a low level of dissonance.

In contrast, dissonance will be high under two conditions. First, dissonance will be high when the person strongly and equally gravitates to both cultural orientations and perceives conflicting values as equally important and strong (Tetlock et al., 1996). This will occur when the person is internally accountable to a mixed audience. Second, when the person is accountable to an external audience of significant others with mixed cultural orientations, the two cultures are simultaneously accessible, and the dissonance discomfort will be maximized.

*Proposition 4:* Accountability to a mixed audience, either internal or external, will lead to a high level of dissonance.

Given that we have suggested that biculturating individuals will likely be accountable to a mixed audience, we further suggest the following:

*Proposition 5:* When confronted with a cultural conflict, a biculturating individual will experience a high level of dissonance.

On the surface, this claim may appear to contradict existing theories on biculturalism such as Hong et al.'s (2000) frame-switching theory. This theory suggests that biculturals can have two cultural networks, even if contradictory, because at any given time, they are

guided by only one network, and therefore no dissonance will result. Predicated on this assumption of mutual exclusiveness, researchers within the frame-switching framework have relied on experiments in which bicultural individuals are primed with specific cultural constructs of either Culture A or Culture B, but never both. Indeed, by not priming both cultures simultaneously, these researchers have artificially limited the possibility of biculturals experiencing dissonance. A notable exception is the work of Benet-Martinez and colleagues who have argued that not all biculturals are quite so unencumbered by their dual cultural identities and have suggested that less integrated biculturals are more likely to experience greater tension and respond in culturally incongruent ways when primed (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002).

Importantly, frame-switching researchers are describing a point in time at which the person is already bicultural, when the new cultural network has already been internalized. They explain how information about cultures is cognitively represented, but they do not elucidate the process of internalization. In contrast, our focus is on the process of becoming bicultural when the new cultural network has not yet been internalized and therefore the values of the two cultures can be activated simultaneously and conflict can result. It is possible that the biculturals referred to by Benet-Martinez as low on integration, are people who are still in the process of becoming bicultural and who have not yet resolved the tension between the two cultures.

Some indirect evidence that biculturals can indeed experience sharp conflict during the acculturation process comes from research on adjustment which shows that the process of becoming bicultural can be highly stressful (e.g., Bochner, 1982; Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). This stress is suggested to stem from the exposure to cultural conflicts and from the challenges that stem from internalization of different sets of cultural demands, interpersonal expectations, and negative stereotypes (e.g., Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991). Perhaps it is only once internalization is complete that the two cultures can remain separated and without conflict.

Once dissonance is experienced, the individual is prompted to adjust his or her behavior and/or cognition to restore alignment with the environment (Festinger, 1964). Proximally, the motivation to reduce cognitive discrepancy stems from the need to reduce negative emotion, but distally, the motivation stems from the requirement for effective action (Harmon-Jones, 1999). The individual must choose which path to follow. Depending on the strength of the dissonance experienced, different levels of mental effort are required for its resolution (Abelson, 1959).

#### **STEP 4: RESOLVING DISSONANCE THROUGH INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY**

According to the revised value pluralism model (Tetlock et al., 1996), when a person feels only low dissonance, cognitively simple solutions will alleviate the negative emotions created by the cultural differences. When the felt dissonance is high, more cognitively complex solutions must be used. We discuss these in turn.

##### **LOW DISSONANCE BETWEEN TWO CULTURES AND COGNITIVE SIMPLICITY**

When dissonance is low, people will prefer information that supports their opinion and will ignore information that favors a different opinion (Mills, 1999). They will be “unwilling

to entertain the veracity of alternative beliefs. . . [and this is] likely to manifest [itself in] less complex thinking” (Conway, Schaller, Tweed, & Hallett, 2001, p. 245). In the hierarchy of resolution attempts, the simple solution of denying one element while bolstering the other—a process that Festinger (1964) termed the *spreading of alternatives*—will suffice to resolve the dissonant reaction (Abelson, 1959). This is the situation confronting a separating or assimilating individual.

#### HIGH DISSONANCE BETWEEN TWO CULTURES AND COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY

When strong dissonance is experienced, the simple solution of bolstering one culture’s values and denying the other culture’s values will not alleviate the conflict. In a culturally mixed audience, each constituency possesses strong arguments in defense of its own position, and counterarguments cannot simply be ignored. In such a situation, the person will most likely have to choose preemptive self-criticism, carefully weighing the merits of the alternative perspectives and forming connections and reasonable trade-offs among them (Tetlock, 2002). This more effortful route requires the individual to acknowledge the legitimacy of both sides and respond to criticism from both sides. It requires the use of more effort-intensive solutions such as differentiation and integration, which are the two components of integrative complexity (for empirical support, Green, Visser, & Tetlock, 2000; Tetlock, 1986). Under such circumstances, “people will turn to ‘conceptually integrated’ strategies that specify when, why, and to what degree, one value should prevail over another” (Tetlock et al., 1996, p. 28). This is the situation the biculturating individual is faced with.

Empirical support for biculturals’ increased complexity comes from research that suggests that increased cultural learning is reflected in the development of more complex cognitive structures for perceiving the host environment (Kim, 1988). The internalization of new cultural knowledge is expected to lead to greater differentiation of stimuli within that cultural domain and, therefore, will lead to increases in complexity (Davidson, 1975; Kim, 1995; Triandis, 1975). Arguably, the more cultures one is exposed to, the greater differentiation and integration that is possible. Indeed, Antonio et al. (2004) found that participants who reported having more diverse racial contacts showed higher integrative complexity in reasoning about policy issues.

Following the predictions of the value pluralism model (Tetlock, 1986), we suggest that when dissonance is low, individuals will choose cognitively simpler solutions than when dissonance is high. Within the context of acculturation, given that we have suggested that separating and assimilating individuals will experience a low level of dissonance (Proposition 3) and that biculturating will experience a high level of dissonance (Proposition 5), we hypothesize the following for when one is confronted with a cultural conflict that arises from cultural discrepancies between the old and new cultures:

*Proposition 6:* Assimilating and separating individuals will reach less cognitively complex solutions than will biculturating individuals.<sup>4</sup>

But internalizing a cultural identity is not an instantaneous process in which a person confronted by a new culture experiences dissonance, resolves it, and internalizes a new identity. Learning the ropes of a new culture involves exposure to diverse forms of conflict with time. As acculturation proceeds and more facets of the new culture become known, more conflicts will be experienced, each demanding resolution (Stryker & Statham, 1985).

In Step 5, we argue that with repeated exposure to cultural conflicts, people begin to develop automatic coping responses to such conflicts.

### **STEP 5: GENERALIZING INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY-REPEATED EXPERIENCES OF DISSONANCE**

Little is known about the phenomenon of repeated encounters with dissonance-provoking problems and its possible effects on automatic response tendencies. However, learning research suggests that individuals will tend to employ a mode of resolution that has worked well in the past, even if removed from the original context in which the resolution mode was learned (Strickler & Bonnefil, 1974). If a mode of resolution is positively reinforced, it becomes validated as a useful coping mechanism in similar situations as well (Schwartz & Robbins, 1995). Therefore, when confronted with a similar dissonance-inducing situation in the future, an individual is likely to use the same level of integrative complexity that has worked in the past to resolve it. It becomes a learned-adaptive technique for conflict resolution. We suggest that the specific conflict-resolution style, simple or complex, that is repeatedly and positively reinforced will become the dominant response style of an individual confronted with a new dissonance-evoking situation.

Some may argue that people often fail to use analogies spontaneously and that they often attempt to solve a problem using general knowledge (e.g., Gick & Holyoak, 1983). However, there is evidence that people do often base their decisions on the level of similarity between their present situation and specific previous events (Abelson, 1976). Moreover, some evidence suggests that if a person possesses a certain level of complexity in one domain, it is likely to transfer to another domain, particularly if the two domains share certain components (Streufert & Swezey, 1986). The key is that there must be some functional equivalence between the original context in which a certain response was reinforced and the new context (Markman & Gentner, 1993). The more shared features past and present situations have in common, a minimal threshold of activation will be exceeded, and the person will more likely spontaneously use the past experiences as clues for solving the new situation (Holyoak & Koh, 1987).

#### **THE CASE OF ACCULTURATION**

Within the context of acculturation, the resolution style is learned in situations that evoke cultural dissonance. Therefore, generalizability should be expected only in domains that evoke underlying culturally laden values. When the person is confronted with another conflict that deals with cultural differences, there are likely to be enough shared characteristics between this new and the previous conflict situations to reach the minimal level of activation that will make the old situation a reliable analog. For example, if a biculturalizing Chinese American solves a conflict between face saving and honesty through an integratively complex solution and this is positively reinforced, she or he is more likely to treat this conflict situation and mode of resolution as a relevant analog when she or he is confronted with a conflict between expressing emotions and remaining professional with colleagues (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Through successive encounters with dissonance-evoking situations, repeated enactments and positive reinforcement of the resolution style will evoke an automatic dominant response in a person's repertoire of coping mechanisms. As long as the individual interprets situations similarly, they will activate similar appraisals,

expectations, values and goals, and, consequently, will elicit similar solutions (Shoda, Tiernan, & Mischel, 2002). We, therefore, hypothesize the following:

*Proposition 7:* When confronted with any culturally related dissonance-evoking situation, biculturating individuals are more likely to resolve it in more complex ways than are assimilating or separating individuals.

Moreover, we argue that it is through the resolution of multiple instances of dissonance that acculturation takes place. Every cultural conflict that is resolved in a complex manner leads to the internalization of both sides. The more conflicts that are so resolved, the more bicultural the individual becomes. Second-culture exposure should, therefore, be considered a situational variable that will increase complexity if the individual is held accountable to both cultures and if the mode of resolution is consistently reinforced.<sup>5</sup>

As presented, the temporal sequencing suggested in the model is that the steps logically follow one another. Thus, for a person to experience dissonance and solve it, one first has to be confronted by a conflict and then be held accountable by a relevant audience. With time, with every completed cycle, the individual increases the probability of developing an automatic response tendency to culturally relevant conflict situations.

The sharp distinctions made between each step of the model are, however, for illustration purposes. In reality, steps may be intertwined, and an individual may iterate back and forth between the different steps. For example, once a person resolves a conflict, she or he may return to a more automatic attention mode until confronted with something novel that requires conscious attention and causes the cycle to begin again. However, once acculturation is complete, assimilated and separated individuals may revert to a narrower scope of attention in which they view the environment according to the prescriptions of the culture they choose to adhere to. In contrast, biculturals, by virtue of internalizing both cultural systems, are likely to sustain a wider attention scope.

Moreover, relaxing the assumptions on which the model is based allows us to better approximate real-life situations. Indeed, the accountability pressures people encounter during acculturation are not likely to be as stable as we have suggested but rather are likely to shift and waver depending on both situational and dispositional factors. For example, at work, the individual can be accountable to a different audience than when at home, or a more extraverted and open-minded individual may be more susceptible to accountability pressures exerted by members of the new culture than individuals lower on these traits (e.g., Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Ryder et al., 2000).<sup>6</sup> Taken together, the varying intensities and focus of accountability pressures may ultimately be able to account for intermediate levels of acculturation and explain variations in levels of biculturalism.<sup>7</sup> Finally, accountability pressures need not always precede acculturation choice, but rather their relationship may be bidirectional such as when an individual makes a conscious choice to adopt the host culture and thereby becomes internally accountable to it, regardless of the existence of external pressures.

It is also worth mentioning that in the model, we have treated the process of assimilating and separating as if they were interchangeable, both expected to lead to lower complexity than the process of biculturating. However, some may argue that assimilation and separation are not equivalent and often lead to distinct psychological outcomes. Whereas separation involves adherence to known values, assumptions, and codes of behavior, assimilation requires more than “wiping out the data on one’s hard drive”; rather, it requires an active cognitive restructuring of the world. This active effort may, in turn, lead to intermittent levels of complexity—higher than those of separated individuals yet lower

than those of biculturals. Nevertheless, it is also possible that in the absence of a sense of accountability to members of the old culture, assimilating individuals are likely to be influenced by a relatively strong consensus regarding accepted practices in the new culture, which may reduce the dissonance they are likely to experience and thus minimize the cognitive effort they must exert. They may have to restructure the way they process information, but they ultimately will continue to view the world through a single cultural perspective and remain integratively simple.

Of course, boundary conditions on the model should be noted. The model should work best when the two cultures are different enough to be challenging but not so different as to be overwhelming. Researchers have long known that acculturation is a function of the size of the differences between the old and new culture (Smither, 1982). When the two cultures are very similar to each other, and individuals who cross over can function effectively by relying on their old cultural identity, they will not be motivated to expend mental effort in resolving minor discrepancies (Tetlock, 1986). When the two cultures are very different, the process of acculturation becomes correspondingly more difficult (Berry et al., 1987; Smither, 1982). Integrative solutions may be just too hard to figure out. Extreme value discrepancies may fall within an individual's latitude of rejection (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) or be perceived as incommensurable (Tetlock et al., 1996). In such cases, people will prefer decision evasion tactics, such as buckpassing and procrastinating (Tetlock et al., 1996). Alternatively, the high stress may cause people to lock into rigid coping responses (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). It may also lead to hostile feelings toward the new country's values and customs (Kim, 1988).

Taken together, the above suggests that differences between two cultures need to be sufficiently large for people to experience conflict, but not overwhelmingly large. As Streufert and Swezey (1986) suggest, "As an individual is stressed, either by excessive or noxious stimulation or by stimulus deprivation, his or her capacity to differentiate and integrate may be diminished" (p. 81). Thus there appears to be an inverted U-shaped relationship between the size of the cultural differences experienced and the amount of cognitive change that could be expected (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The optimal range of difference, however, must be determined empirically. Perhaps, one useful method of gauging whether differences between two cultures falls within this range is to develop measures of cultural distance, such as those developed by Schwartz and colleagues (e.g., Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Location in multidimensional cultural space can then be used as a good approximation of how difficult integrating cultural differences can be.

## DISCUSSION

This article is aimed at increasing our understanding of internal processes of acculturation and its effects on cognition. Our main proposition is that accountability pressures affect choice of acculturation strategy and that biculturating individuals will be more integratively complex than assimilating or separating individuals because of the greater dissonance they experience during acculturation. Complexity, in turn, will determine the end result of acculturation.

The underlying assumption of the model is that biculturating individuals' greater complexity is a consequence of second-culture internalization and that social structure, viewed here as the accountability matrix confronting the individual, has lingering effects on cognitive development. It is useful, however, to distinguish between extreme situationalist and dispositionalist forms of our model. An extreme situationalist form would suggest that

high value conflict coupled with accountability to mixed audiences will lead all individuals to develop bicultural complexity, assuming they have the requisite ability for complex thinking and that the values can be feasibly combined. By contrast, an extreme dispositionalist model would reverse the flow of causality, so only those disposed to be integratively complex become bicultural (Kosic, Kruglanski, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2004).<sup>8</sup> Because complex individuals are more tolerant of dissonant or unbalanced cognitions (Crockett, 1965), they are more likely during acculturation to internalize the contradictory aspects of both old and new cultural perspectives. Of course, as is now widely conceded, both the situation and the personality interact to shape individual functioning (e.g., Mischel, 2004) so there is almost surely a reciprocal relationship between the two (Kohn & Schooler, 1978). Testing the strong reciprocal-determinism form of our model (the version we prefer) will require extensive longitudinal designs.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless, biculturating individuals' higher integrative complexity may have important implications for work performance and job placement. For example, high complexity may be particularly important for successful performance in managerial tasks that require an ability to be more open to disconfirming information, engage in more effective information search, and be comfortable with uncertainty (Streufert & Swezey, 1986). Streufert and Swezey (1986) suggest that integrative complexity will become more crucial "as a manager's responsibilities increase, as more complicated and contradictory information is encountered, as immediate and particularly long-term outcomes of decisions are less predictable and as strategy and tentative planning increase in importance" (p. 222). Nowhere may this be truer than in the case of managing across cultural borders in which contradictory information and unpredictability abound.

Biculturating individuals' complexity may be necessary to deal with the ambiguity and conflicts linked to overseas assignments or to cultural boundary-spanning jobs (Davidson, 1975; McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Tadmor, 2006). Biculturating individuals' broader cultural knowledge and higher integrative complexity may allow them to act as intermediaries, alleviating the difficulties associated with cross-cultural communication (Tadmor, 2004). It is possible, however, that in jobs that require newcomers to work mainly with individuals from a single culture, high complexity may become a liability because it causes biculturating individuals to get bogged down in insignificant details (e.g., Tetlock & Boettger 1989). And yet, integratively complex managers may be able to avoid these potential pitfalls if they cultivate a metacognitive capacity to switch between more complex and simpler ways of reasoning depending on what is more appropriate for a given situation (Streufert & Swezey, 1986). From a policy perspective, organizations may be able to explicitly espouse the specific types of acculturation strategies that are best suited for a role by deliberately catering the accountability pressures they create through, for example, tailored reward systems. What is more, when attempting to promote biculturalism, policy makers can also provide specialized training programs to help stimulate complexity for individuals who find it more challenging to reach such solutions on their own (Streufert, Nogami, Swezey, Pogash, & Piasecki, 1988). Although they may not reach complete integration, it is hoped that they will be able to achieve sufficient differentiation that will allow them to succeed (Gardiner, 1972).

## CONCLUSION

Intercultural contact is on a steep upward trajectory which makes understanding strategies of coping with second-culture exposure all the more critical. We have put forth a

model that specifies the processes via which cognitive changes are likely to occur. Building on previous work on the cross-pressures exerted by host and home communities during acculturation (Kim, 1988), we have highlighted the various types of intrapsychic restructuring likely to be triggered by various types of accountability pressures, with special focus on a pattern of adaptation, biculturalism, widely hypothesized to underlie successful adjustment.

## NOTES

1. We use the word *choice* throughout to describe the process of selecting an acculturation strategy, but we do not mean to imply that this choice is necessarily under conscious control.
2. Because marginalization involves nonadherence to either the old or the new culture, marginalized individuals are not likely to feel accountable to either cultural group, and therefore we do not discuss them further.
3. The heavy-handedness of external pressures from members of the new culture to conform versus feelings of personal volition to choose how to act may moderate how much the individual takes the new culture to heart (Lepper & Greene, 1978). For example, reactance theory suggests that too strong of an external pressure to conform may cause a person to shift away from the advocated view in exactly the opposite direction (Brehm, 1966).
4. An internal locus of accountability is likely to raise the individual's level of scrutiny and self-involvement leading to even more effortful resolutions than when the locus is external (e.g., Leippe & Eisenstadt, 1999).
5. The question remains whether the greater complexity of biculturating individuals is specific to the cultural domain or part of a broader cognitive style. Work on integrative complexity in laboratory and archival settings suggest that the answer is itself domain specific (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 2001).
6. Of course, it is also possible that accountability pressures ultimately shape personality through acculturation. For example, McCrae, Yik, Tranpennell, Bond, and Paulhus (1998) found that, with time, personality profiles of Chinese immigrants increasingly resembled those of members of mainstream Canadian culture.
7. For example, two people may be externally accountable to a mixed audience and in the process of biculturating, but for one of them, elements of the old cultural identity may be so central to his or her self-identity that contrasting elements will never be internalized (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). This person may attempt to reduce dissonance by placing much greater weight on accountability to the traditional audience and ultimately become less bicultural than the other person.
8. Although Konic, Kruglanski, Pierro, and Mannetti (2004) make no assumptions about biculturals, they suggest that people with high need for cognitive closure are more likely to become assimilated or separated because of their need for certainty. Need for closure is negatively correlated with integrative complexity (Tetlock, 1998).
9. Some could argue, for example, that because of their inherent dialectical way of thinking, East Asians may be more likely to become bicultural than will Americans because they may be equipped to negotiate intelligently in complex social interactions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). However, whether they will ultimately become bicultural will depend on the pattern of accountability pressures they experience when exposed to a second culture.

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