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ACCULTURATION ATTITUDES, PERCEPTION OF THE HOST GROUP AND RELATIONAL OUTCOMES : A STUDY OF INDIANS IN PARIS

Jyoti Verma*

Abstract

The study examined the acculturation attitudes of 32 people of Indian origin living in Paris and their perception of the French people. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to highlight : (a) the acculturation orientation of the Indians by examining the importance they gave to *maintaining* their heritage culture and *adapting* to the host culture, (b) their perception of the host group and how French looked at relationships and (c) the perceived friendliness, hostility, inclusive and exclusive tendencies and acceptance shown by the host group to the ethnic group members. The results presented a consistent picture of the acculturation orientation of the Indians inferred through the dimensions of maintenance of heritage culture and adaptation to the host culture respectively. The narratives helped draw a detailed profile of the French people and how they looked at relationships while the Indians rated the French in a rather positive manner on the relational variable of friendliness, inclusive tendencies and acceptability. The descriptive data however, suggested that the host group showed some coldness, ethnocentric and discriminative behaviour towards the minority groups.

Introduction

Acculturation one of the major variables of the study is a culture level phenomenon and refers to culture change resulting from the contact between two autonomous cultural groups (Redfield et al., 1936) while at the individual level, acculturation requires individual members of both the larger society and the various acculturating groups to engage in new behaviours and work out new forms of relationships in their daily lives (Graves, 1967). Acculturation occurs within the societal network of inter-group relations and the nature and evolution of these inter-group relations are essential part of the acculturation process.

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In the earlier researches acculturation as a cultural change process was envisaged as occurring along a single dimension where only the immigrants have to change or assimilate in the host culture. However, for many plural societies, the majority culture group also undergoes changes when the ethnic minority groups become accepted as members of the host society and the expectation that they would eventually assimilate with the mainstream culture doesn't hold true. Lately, the bi-directional models (Berry, 1980; Snauwaert, 2002) have decided to consider two independent dimensions for studying acculturation orientation. For example, Berry's (1980) bi-directional model distinguishes between (a) attitudes towards *maintenance* of the minority culture, and (b) attitudes towards *contact* with the dominant culture in the host society. The *contact* dimension may be referred as *adaptation* since it addresses to the cultural adaptation of the values, norms and customs of the host society.

Most immigrants combine positive attitudes towards *maintenance* and *adaptation* in the so called 'integration' orientation and compared to the alternative 'assimilation' (i.e., adaptation without maintenance), 'separation' (i.e., maintenance without separation) and 'marginalisation' (i.e., neither maintenance nor adaptation), the 'integration' orientation is the most adaptive one for psychological adjustment and competence (Berry & Sam, 1996; Ward). The other models in this tradition are the Culture adoption model of Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal (1997) and the Identification model of acculturation (Hutkin, 1991).

The second important variable namely, 'relational outcomes' refer to the friendly or hostile and inclusive or exclusive nature of

intercultural attitudes and practices. It is argued that due to pervasive ethnocentric bias there is an inbuilt ethnic tension between the immigrants and the host acculturation orientations. The social identity theory contends that both sides will be inclined to favour the in-group culture over that of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and apparently, the intercultural relations between the two groups are likely to be unequal. Often the dominant group is likely to demand some degree of *adaptation* from the immigrants and the acceptance for culture *maintenance* preferred by the immigrants will vary depending upon whether the host group perceives the minority culture as a 'threat' to their dominance (Bobo & Hutchings, 1987; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001).

Conversely, the minority status of the immigrants which is associated with a sense of heightened ethnic self-identification could reinforce *culture maintenance*. However, the immigrants' attitude towards *cross-cultural adaptation* will vary depending upon whether they perceive the dominant culture as a 'threat' to their group survival (Berry et al., 1977). Societal attitudes (i.e., social support, acceptance, prejudices or discrimination) may act as moderating factors during the acculturation process (Berry, 1997, p. 22) and affect the relational outcomes.

In the present study perceived *friendliness* and *hostility* towards the Indian community and having *exclusive* or *inclusive* attitudes and *acceptability* for the said group by the French people were treated as the relational outcome variables.

Objectives

Indian immigrants in Europe and USA are exposed to both collectivist and individualist cultures and one practical concern

is to study how they navigate between two cultures and whether they ignore, blend or transcend the conflicts between them and the host group. One would also like to ask whether the minority ethnic groups feel accepted, and treated with friendliness and therefore think positively about the host culture or contrarily face rejection, hostility and discrimination leading to conflicts in inter-cultural relations. The present study was pursued under this conceptual frame and had the following objectives :

1. To examine the acculturation orientation of a sample of Indians by asking how important it was for them to *maintain* their heritage culture and how important it was for them to *adapt* to the host culture.
2. To examine how a sample of Indians in Paris perceived the host group with the help of descriptive data.
3. To infer the state of relational outcomes of *friendliness*, *hostility*, *inclusive or exclusive tendencies* and *acceptance* shown to the ethnic group, from the respondents' ratings of the same.

METHOD

Sample

The sample included students, professionals and their wives, businesspersons and one Expatriate. With the exception of seven persons perhaps no one qualified as an immigrant therefore, it was decided to address the sample as 'Indians in France.' The sample comprised of 32 persons, 12 females and 20 males, living in Paris, France (range of stay in France = 1 to 23 years, $M = 5.37$, $S.D. = 5.88$). The average age of the sample was 32.03 years ($S.D. = 8.53$) therefore, the sample showed

much variation as regards to the age and years spent in France. The respondents came from at least 10 States of India namely, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chandigarh and Chennai.

Instruments

The following instruments were used for measuring the major variables of the study:

1. The Immigrant Acculturation Scale (IAS)

Drawing from Phalet and Swyngedouw (2003), The Immigrant Acculturation Scale was used with some moderation for assessing how important it was for the Indian ethnic community to *maintain* the Indian culture and to *adapt* to the host culture in general, at home and at the work place respectively.

2. The Interview Schedule (Measures for the Immigrants' Perception of the French People)

The questions of the Interview Schedule aimed at looking into the respondents' significant acculturation experiences and impressions about the French people and also aimed at generating data on relationship issues such as, the fears and cautions in relationship with the French and whether the host group was friendly and helpful, etc.

3. The Perceived Relational Outcomes Scale

A 5 points Perceived Relational Outcomes Scale comprising of five subscales was used to examine how the Indian respondents rated the French people on the variables of *friendliness*,

hostility, having *inclusive* or *exclusive* tendencies and *acceptability* for the ethnic group.

Procedure

The respondents were approached for data collection after taking an appointment and it took an hour and a half to complete the interview and the questionnaires.

Analysis

1. Interco-relationships were computed between the *maintenance* and *adaptation* dimensions of the acculturation attitudes of the Indians.
2. How the mainstream French population was represented in the observations of the Indians and how the French people looked at relationships were studied with the help of the narrative data from the interviews.
3. A descriptive analysis was undertaken for the relational outcome variables

Observations and Discussion

The observations are presented and discussed under the following heads:

1. Indians' orientations to acculturate and adapt
2. Indians perception of the French people including how the French looked at relationships
3. The relational outcomes (Perceived friendliness, hostility, inclusive and exclusive tendencies and acceptance for the minority group people)

1. Indians Orientations to Acculturate and Adapt

The paired sample t test did not show any significant difference between the

maintenance and *adaptation* domains of the acculturation attitudes and it appeared that the Indian respondents gave equal importance to both of them. Nevertheless at the correlational level it was evident that the respondents who gave importance to maintaining Indian culture in general, believed in maintaining Indian culture at home and at work place ($r = 0.39$ and 0.33 respectively $p = <.01$ in both the cases) and were against adapting to the host culture at home ($r = 0.37$, $p = <.01$). Further, those who believed that it was important to maintain Indian culture at home were averse to adapting to the host culture at home ($r = 0.42$, $p = <.01$). Similarly, those who considered maintaining Indian culture at the work place as important, did not favour adapting to the host culture at the work place ($r = 0.38$, $p = <.01$).

The narratives seemed to support the results at this point. For example, it was told that Indian Associations emerged as the venues for reinforcing Indian culture and tradition at the community level in Paris and acted as platforms for bringing together the people of Indian origin. In their personal lives, Indians often continued their food habit, maintained the tradition of hospitality, helped sick friends and moved within their community. Similarly, young students kept a cautious distance in hetero-sexual relations and rarely thought of marrying internationally. Further, like other ethnic groups Indians too were less inclined to identify with the host group but adapted a lot behaviourally (Hutnik, 1991).

2. Indians Perception of the French People and the Relationship Issue

The descriptive data was the main source for the Indian respondents' perception of the host group and how the French looked at relationships. It became evident from the narratives that French were culturally quite different from the Indians. They were not that close to their parents, their friendship could lack depth and they were individualist. French relied on historical culture, were keen on learning, were curious and respected other's feelings, and religious beliefs. It was true, that they felt happy if others integrated with their culture and learnt their language. French were also observant and according to one observation, one needed to adapt to the typical mind set of the French as they looked at things differently, had fascination for ratio and did "mental gymnastics" for small things. A lone comment was: "French were more depressed than Indians".

As regards to the **likings** of the French people it was often heard that French liked old things, uniqueness and style but were also attracted towards new experimentations and cared for details and in-depth knowledge as they wished to get into analysis. Moreover, French loved discussing history, culture and reading. Outdoor scenery and sports interested them and were good topics for initiating conversation. French "loved to live life happily". Normally, French social life moved around food activity and it appeared that they "were working between vacations, living in a heaven, and their world, engagements and

pastimes lay between good and exciting events." France was perceived as a "weekend culture" and French seemed to care more for present and future.

On the other hand, French avoided discussing Second World War or racism and normally **didn't like** to listen about poverty, casteism, lack of organization and cleanliness. They didn't like to gossip much and kept away from asking impolite and personal questions. French were straight forward, didn't like to entertain impertinently or be persuaded. They wished to make their own decisions. At different instances the narratives indicated that French were **diplomatic, unpredictable** and **hypocrites** who used polite expressions habitually. A few respondents chose to make their individual interpretations of hypocritical behaviour of the French (i.e., the French complained about the strong smell of Indian cooking but loved the spicy Indian food or French lived in an imaginary world ignoring the mundane world which appeared rather hypocritical). Moreover, the narratives impressed that the French showed habitual politeness but appeared cold and closed.

Despite the observations that the French society accepted contradictions, it was considered to be an intellectual society and there was "no obvious discrimination" or racism in France, it was shared that minority groups experienced discrimination in Paris and French were "**ethnocentric**". Accordingly, French believed in hierarchy, did not interact with the out-group members and there wasn't a real chance of interfering in their culture or getting into their circle.

Additionally, mixing with them became difficult without adapting to their food and wine culture and some French purposely avoided the non-French. Normally, French or French speaking persons were preferred in jobs and French stayed closed in their culture.

The descriptions impressed that minorities had little help, came across administrative problems and the process of acquiring stay papers in France was complicated. Not knowing the French language was always a disadvantage plus there was no security for foreigners who often experienced stress and “non-citizens had to struggle to prove themselves as equals or avoid trouble.” A few said categorically that French showed discrimination and chances of non-acceptance was more in small towns, with the middle aged French and for non French speaking. The present author in her earlier study on acculturation experiences of Indian immigrants in Paris reported similar impressions of the French people from a different sample of Indian origin people (Verma J., 2000, Report).

Coming to the question as to how the Indians quantitatively place the French people on the relational out come variables of ‘hostility’ and ‘exclusive tendencies’, the impressions were some what different. Accordingly, either it was ‘not true’ or the Indians were ‘not sure’ if the French were ‘hostile’ or ‘held exclusive tendencies’ towards them. Moreover, the respondents believed that Indians were not the ‘disliked’ community in France. However, taking the picture, in totality it seemed that

French were watchful, showed streaks of ethnocentrism and some degree of non-acceptance for the outsiders.

The impressions from the **work life** added another dimension to the French profile. It was told that French were not as busy as they seemed to tell, they took one thing at a time and though punctual, they spent substantial time in cafes and eating out. It was still important that one proved one’s merit to get a job and it was expected that one did the job with perfection and continued to work hard.

French and Relationships

The descriptions suggested that although French seemed to “take time in discovering relationships” a shared feeling was that there was “little place for emotionality”, feelings were not likely to be reciprocated in the same magnitude and relationships were often superficial and short. On their part, French hardly made efforts to mingle, and therefore, the first step of “ice breaking” had to come from others. Normally, the outsiders had to adapt to their culture and at best one could get “just close” or “little close” to them. However, after the ice breaking, closeness and getting help became feasible. Personal matters (i.e., financial, love, family life, illness, etc.) couldn’t be shared with the French and they didn’t prefer to ask personal questions. On the other hand Indians too, didn’t like to share negative things about India with the French.

The first **caution** in relationships was, not to make the French feel threatened. Sikh men and Muslim women who dressed in accordance to their religious norms appeared as cultural threat to the French. Similarly,

one was not supposed to criticize, talk politics or get into arguments. Further, one was not expected to say negative things about the French culture, (i.e., smell of some of cheese) or criticize their pets. Learning their language and adapting to the host culture always facilitated relationships. Other cautions included : respecting the host's privacy, being lively and accepting, not refusing something bluntly, being diplomatic, avoiding being obstinate or miser and not interrupting conversations, etc. French planned things ahead in time so one shouldn't expect time readily from them. In work, hard work, perfection and honesty were expected and one had to prove one's worth through skill and performance.

Professionalism, efficiency, being disciplined, structured and appearing balanced were the expectations for professional relations and promotion. For being **accepted** by the host group it was important to be polite, go slow, maintain a distance, be watchful before expressing opinion about the French culture, and try to be at par with the French in one's behaviour. It was desirable to remain original and not to make a show of one's affluence and status. Talking of **fears** in relationships, some Indians were afraid that they lacked sophistication and might offend the French. People living in apartments were afraid of their loud children as neighbours demanded "no noise children." Some were afraid of being mocked, compartmentalized, ignored or rejected by the host.

4. **Observations from the Relational Outcome Variable (Perceived Friendliness, Hostility, Inclusive and Exclusive Tendencies and Acceptance for the Minority Group People)**

The paired sampled T test did not show any significant difference between the different relational outcome variables but the coefficients of correlation showed meaningful associations among the same. The findings presented a consistent picture and impressed that those who perceived the host group as 'accepting' of the ethnic groups also perceived them as having 'inclusive attitudes' and showing 'friendly' behaviours towards them ($r = .36$, and $.51$, $p = < .05$ and $< .01$ respectively). Similarly, perceiving the host group as hostile came along with the perception that this group held excluding beliefs and non-accepting behaviours towards the minority communities ($r = .50$, $p = < .05$).

Putting together the quantitative and descriptive observations together it appeared that the Parisians were located midway on the scale of 'friendliness' and described as friendly in a special way. The correlations suggested that those who perceived the French as friendly people also perceived them as having 'acceptability' for the Indian community and the narratives impressed that the Indian community enjoyed relatively more acceptability in Paris.

It appeared that **helpfulness** and **friendliness** of the French had to be seen within some contextual 'ifs' and 'buts'. The narratives helped understand as to when the French would be helpful and when they wouldn't, whom they could help and whom perhaps they couldn't and also that one should not expect financial help from them. It was some revelation to know that French helped "differently and partially" and there was a range of possibilities for receiving help from the French people.

Similarly, one could get a glimpse of the extent and limits of the French **friendliness** and realize the importance of “breaking the ice” while trying to make friends with them. It became clear that the first step towards friendship had to be taken by the foreigner as the French didn’t care to interfere in the lives of others. Similarly, one shouldn’t expect the French to be in a stand by in times of sickness and trouble. However, this did not make their friendship inferior or impossible. Still the punch line seemed to be: “French could help in times of trouble but making friendship with them was not easy.”

None of the demographic variables of age, gender and years of stay in the host country showed any significant relationship with the relational outcome variables or the acculturation attitudes. Perhaps, small sample size and large variability in the years spent in the host culture, had affected the findings.

Major Observations

Indians gave equal importance to both the *maintenance* and *adaptation* domains of the acculturation attitudes. The correlational findings suggested that those who gave importance to maintaining Indian culture in general also believed in maintaining the same at home and at work place. It became evident from the narratives that French were basically individualists and culturally different from the Indians. Their **likings** included old things, uniqueness and style but also new experimentations, getting in-depth knowledge and going into analysis. French relied on historical culture, were keen on learning and were curious. They felt happy if others integrated with their culture and learnt their

language. It was heard that French were observant and one needed to adapt to their mind set as they looked at things differently. Moreover, French **loved** discussing history, culture, reading, going out doors and sports. In a major way French “loved to live life happily” socially engaged themselves in food activity, vacations and exciting events. Interestingly French were not as busy with their work life as they indicated, did one thing at a time and spent substantial time of the day in cafes and eating out. French **disliked** dwelling into the dark side of life like poverty, casteism, racism, war, lack of organization and cleanliness, etc. Their **social etiquette** included not asking impolite and personal questions and respecting other’s feelings, and religious beliefs.

Further, French were straight forward, didn’t like to gossip or entertain impertinently. They wished to make their own decisions and didn’t want to be persuaded. French were perceived as **diplomatic, unpredictable** and **hypocrites** who showed “habitual politeness” but appeared cold and closed. A shared feeling was that despite “no obvious discrimination” or racism in France, the minority groups experienced discrimination in Paris and French were perceived “**ethnocentric**”, who believed in hierarchy and did not interact in-depth with the out-group members. It was difficult to mix with them without adapting to their food, language and culture and normally, French and French speaking persons were preferred in jobs. The message came through that there was no security for foreigners and “non-citizens had to struggle to prove themselves as equals or to avoid trouble”. However, quantitatively speaking it was ‘not true’ or the Indians were ‘not sure’ if the French were ‘hostile’ or ‘held

exclusive tendencies' towards them. Moreover, the respondents believed that Indians were not the 'disliked' community in France. Taking the picture, in totality it seemed that French were watchful, showed streaks of ethnocentrism and some degree of non-acceptance for the outsiders.

In **relationships**, French "took time in discovering relationships" and left "little place for emotionality" or reciprocation. Relationships were often 'superficial' and 'short' and French were not that close even to their parents. Normally, an outsider at best could get "just close" or "little close" to them and that too after making the initial step towards 'breaking the ice'. However, after the ice breaking, closeness and getting help became feasible. Personal matters couldn't be shared with them and they didn't prefer to ask personal questions.

The first **caution** in relationships was, not to make the French feel threatened. Similarly, one was not supposed to criticize, talk politics or get into arguments. Further, one was not expected to say negative things about the French culture, while learning their language and adapting to the host culture always facilitated relationships. Other cautions included : respecting the host's privacy, being diplomatic, avoiding being obstinate, unaccepting or miser and not interrupting conversations, etc. French planned things ahead in time so one couldn't claim their time. Moreover, being polite, going slow, maintaining a distance, being watchful before expressing opinion about the French culture, and trying to be at par with the French in one's behavior were expected for being accepted. French didn't expect others to 'show off'. Lastly, in work relationships professionalism, honesty, efficiency and skill,

discipline, being structured and appearing balanced were the desirable qualities.

As regards to the **relational outcome variables**, it appeared that Parisians were described as 'friendly' in a special way and those who perceived them as friendly people also perceived them as having 'acceptability' for the Indian community. It appeared that 'helpfulness' and 'friendliness' of the French had to be seen within some contextual 'ifs' and 'buts' as French helped "differently and partially" and the punch line seemed to be: "French could help in times of trouble but making friendship with them was not easy. "Finally, those who perceived the host group as 'accepting' of the ethnic groups also perceived them as having 'inclusive attitudes' and showing 'friendly' behaviours towards them.

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