

Nostalgia and Biculturalism: How Host-Culture Nostalgia Fosters Bicultural Identity Integration

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Abstract

Individuals who have been exposed to and internalized two cultures vary in the degree to which they perceive their cultural identities as compatible (bicultural identity integration; BII). An experiment tested whether nostalgia, an emotion that is prevalent among bicultural individuals, influences BII and does so via acculturation orientation toward the host culture. Participants were originally from Greece, living in other European countries. We instructed them to recall nostalgic or ordinary events either from their host country or home country. We then assessed acculturation orientation and BII. We hypothesized and found that host-nostalgia increased BII both directly and indirectly via a more positive acculturation orientation toward the host culture. The findings extend the literature on factors that facilitate BII, and showcase the potential of nostalgia to improve biculturality.

Keywords

nostalgia, bicultural identity integration, acculturation orientation

How Host-Culture Nostalgia Fosters Bicultural Identity Integration

Globalization has enabled migration and contributed to an increase in bicultural individuals (Arnett, 2002), those who have been exposed to and internalized two cultures (Huynh et al., 2011). Today, more people than ever are living in a country other than the one in which they were born. As an illustration, in 2019 the number of immigrants worldwide reached 272 million, 51 million more than in 2010 (International Organization for Migration, 2019). How bicultural individuals will manage the two pertinent cultures has implications for their psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). It is helpful, then, to identify factors that could help them to navigate their cultural terrains. In this article, we examine the capacity of nostalgia to influence the way bicultural individuals relate to their host (and home) cultures. We experimentally induce nostalgia for one's host (and home) country, and subsequently assess acculturation orientation and bicultural identity integration (BII).

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Bicultural individuals undergo the process of acculturation, which involves adapting to a second culture. Acculturation orientation reflects the balance between valuing the preservation of one's home culture and endorsing one's host culture (Berry, 2005). Successful acculturation conduces to BII (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Boski, 2008), that is, the degree to which individuals perceive their two cultures and identities as overlapping and harmonious versus separate and conflictual (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Prior research has linked the valence of bicultural memories with BII. These studies focused on memories of experiences during which bicultural individuals (e.g., Asian Americans) were highly aware of their bicultural identity. Narrating such bicultural memories with a positive ending predicted higher BII (Lilgendahl et al., 2018), and recalling positive (vs. neutral or negative) bicultural experiences increased BII (Cheng & Lee, 2013). We focused on another antecedent of BII and acculturation orientation: nostalgia. In nostalgic memories, one's bicultural identity need not be salient. Indeed, nostalgia may pertain to experiences when cultural boundaries between individuals no longer exist.

Nostalgia is a sentimental longing about meaningful events from one's past. It is an ambivalent, albeit mostly positive, emotion (Leunissen et al., 2020; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016). On the one hand, it entails contentment, tenderness, and joy for the memories. On the other hand, it is accompanied by a tinge of yearning, as these valued moments are irrevocably gone (Sedikides et al., 2015). Evidence depicts nostalgia as a resource conferring psychological adjustment by serving key psychological functions, such as elevating self-esteem, strengthening perceptions of social connectedness, and augmenting life meaningfulness (Sedikides et al., 2015). Research has delineated nostalgia by comparing and contrasting it with other emotions. For example, multidimensional scaling of the similarities and differences among 11 self-conscious emotions revealed that nostalgia is characterized by high pleasantness and low arousal. In this regard, it is similar to emotions such as pride and gratitude, and distinct from shame and embarrassment (Van Tilburg et al., 2018). Furthermore, notwithstanding its similarities to pride and gratitude, nostalgia can be distinguished from these and other related emotions, including joy, love, and contentment, in terms of its unique appraisal profile. Nostalgia is the only emotion elicited by events which are unique, feel temporally or psychologically distant, and are predominantly pleasant but irretrievable (Van Tilburg et al., 2019).

Nostalgia is a prevalent emotion among bicultural individuals (Ritivoi, 2002), but does it also serve as a resource for them (Sedikides et al., 2009)? Bicultural individuals accumulate meaningful experiences from their host culture (Benet-Martínez, 2012). Such experiences, which might include interactions with new friends and colleagues, exploration of a different natural environment, and enjoyment of unique cultural rituals and traditions, constitute the fodder of host nostalgia (Abeyta et al., 2015; Wildschut et al., 2006). These experiences are arguably more central to their current lives than experiences related to the home cultures. As such, host nostalgia will be more likely than home nostalgia to promote successful acculturation and BII. Consistent with the notion of host nostalgia as a resource, host nostalgia among repatriated international teachers predicted greater psychological adjustment (Zou et al., 2018). We tested the hypothesis that host nostalgia strengthens BII, and does so by heightening acculturation orientation toward the host culture.

Method

Participants and Design

The experiment was hosted on the online platform Qualtrics. We recruited participants using a snowballing method, via email and social media. We also advertised the experiment on websites targeted to members of the Greek diaspora. Participation was voluntary. We tested 238 participants and excluded 84 for failure to complete the measures. The final sample comprised 154 bicultural individuals (118 women, 36 men; $M_{age} = 38.66$ years, $SD = 10.50$ years), originally from

Greece and residing in: Germany: 69.50%; United Kingdom: 14.30%; Belgium: 6.50%; France: 2.60%; Italy: 2.60%; Austria 1.90%; Spain: 1.90%; Switzerland: 0.60%. The mean length of host country residence was 11.32 years ($SD=12.62$). We randomly assigned participants to the conditions of a 2 (reflection: nostalgia vs. control) \times 2 (country: home vs. host) between-subjects design. Degrees of freedom vary due to missing values.

Procedure and Nostalgia Manipulation

All materials were translated into Greek and then back-translated into English to check for accuracy (Brislin, 1980). We administered all materials in Greek (Supplemental Material S1). We manipulated nostalgia by adapting the Event Reflection Task (Sedikides et al., 2015). Participants in the nostalgia conditions recalled and described in writing a nostalgic event in their lives either from their home country or their host country. Participants in the control conditions recalled and described in writing an ordinary event in their lives either from their home or host country. Next, all participants responded to the manipulation check and dependent measures.

Measures¹

Manipulation check. Participants in the home-country condition answered three questions (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) in reference to felt home-country nostalgia (e.g., “Right now I am feeling quite nostalgic about my life in Greece”; $\alpha=.94$). Those in the host-country condition answered these questions in reference to felt host-country nostalgia (e.g., “Right now I am feeling quite nostalgic about my life in [host country]”; $\alpha=.96$).

Acculturation orientation. Participants completed the brief acculturation orientation scale (Demes & Geeraert, 2013). They responded to the four items twice, separately for the host and home country. Sample item: “It is important for me to . . . take part in [host country/Greek] traditions” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha_{host}=.73$; $\alpha_{home}=.84$). Higher scores indicated a more positive orientation toward the host country or home country, respectively.

Bicultural identity integration. Participants completed the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 2 (Huynh, 2009; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Ten items measure cultural harmony, that is, the perception of compatibility between two cultures. Sample item: “I find it easy to balance both Greek and [host] cultures” ($\alpha=.86$). The remaining nine items measure cultural blendedness, that is, the perceived overlap between two cultures. Sample item: “I feel Greek and [host culture] at the same time” ($\alpha=.80$). Higher scores indicated greater BII. The two subscales were weakly correlated ($r=.20$, $p=.013$), but, as per established practice (Lilgendahl et al., 2018), we present analyses based on the combined score ($\alpha=.83$). Separate analyses produced similar results (Supplemental Material S2).²

Results

We analyzed the data with a series of 2 (reflection: nostalgia vs. control) \times 2 (country: home vs. host) Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs).³

Manipulation Check

A reflection main effect, $F(1, 152)=8.53$, $p=.004$, $\eta_p^2=.053$, revealed that participants in the nostalgia condition ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.47$) reported feeling more nostalgic than controls ($M=3.12$, $SD=1.53$). No other effect was significant. The manipulation was effective.

Acculturation Orientation

We first conducted an ANOVA on participants' acculturation orientation toward the host country. The reflection, $F(1, 149)=0.03, p=.873, \eta_p^2=.000$, and country, $F(1, 149)=2.27, p=.134, \eta_p^2=.015$, main effects were not significant. However, the crucial interaction was so, $F(1, 149)=10.44, p=.002, \eta_p^2=.065$. Host country nostalgia ($M=2.97, SD=0.78$) led to heightened acculturation orientation for the host country in comparison to the control condition ($M=2.55, SD=0.92$), $F(1, 149)=4.41, p=.037, \eta_p^2=.029$. In contrast, home country nostalgia ($M=2.32, SD=0.85$) led to lower acculturation orientation for the host country relative to the control condition ($M=2.79, SD=0.80$), $F(1, 149)=6.17, p=.014, \eta_p^2=.040$.⁴ An ANOVA on participants' acculturation orientation toward their home country revealed no significant main effect of reflection, $F(1, 150)=0.37, p=.545, \eta_p^2=.002$, or country, $F(1, 150)=0.45, p=.504, \eta_p^2=.003$, and no significant interaction effect, $F(1, 150)=0.00, p=.973, \eta_p^2=.000$.

Bicultural Identity Integration

The ANOVA on BII revealed no reflection main effect, $F(1, 150)=1.19, p=.277, \eta_p^2=.008$. The country main effect was significant: Participants who recalled an event from their host country ($M=3.28, SD=0.63$) reported higher BII than those who recalled an event from their home country ($M=3.00, SD=0.75$), $F(1, 150)=5.72, p=.018, \eta_p^2=.037$. This main effect was qualified by the crucial interaction, $F(1, 150)=10.75, p=.001, \eta_p^2=.067$. Participants nostalgic for their host country ($M=3.52, SD=0.56$) reported higher BII than controls ($M=3.04, SD=0.61$), $F(1, 150)=8.99, p=.003, \eta_p^2=.057$. However, participants nostalgic for their home country ($M=2.90, SD=0.69$) did not differ significantly from controls ($M=3.14, SD=0.81$), $F(1, 150)=2.55, p=.113, \eta_p^2=.017$.⁵

Moderated Mediation Analysis

We conducted a moderated mediation analysis using the Process macro for SPSS (Model 8; 10,000 resamples and 95% confidence interval; Hayes, 2013). We tested the indirect effect of reflection on BII through acculturation orientation toward the host culture, moderated by (i.e., contingent on) the country (home country vs. host country) in which the recalled event occurred.⁶ This analysis revealed moderated mediation (moderated mediation index = $-0.25, SE=0.09, 95\% CI=[-0.472, -0.081]$). When participants recalled an event from the host culture, there was a significant positive indirect effect (denoted as ab) of nostalgia (vs. control) on BII through a more positive orientation toward the host culture, $ab=0.12, SE=0.06, 95\% CI=[0.004, 0.255]$ (see Figure 1). However, when participants recalled an event from the home culture, there was a significant negative indirect effect of nostalgia (vs. control) on BII through lowered orientation toward the host culture, $ab=-0.13, SE=0.06, 95\% CI=[-0.275, -0.024]$.⁷ The residual direct effect of nostalgia (vs. control) on BII was significant for participants in the host-country condition, $B=0.36, SE=0.15, 95\% CI=[0.053, 0.664]$, but was null for participants in the home-country condition, $B=-0.11, SE=0.15, 95\% CI=[-0.395, 0.178]$.

Discussion

Promoting successful acculturation is one of the most important challenges of today's globalized and multicultural societies. We showcased the role of nostalgia in the process. Nostalgia for the host country increased BII directly, but also indirectly by strengthening host acculturation orientation. In contrast, nostalgia for the home country decreased BII by weakening acculturation orientation toward the host culture.

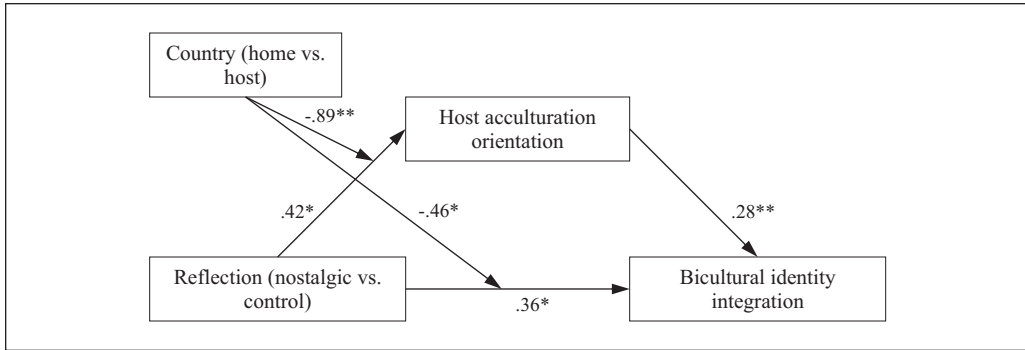


Figure 1. Moderated mediation model.

Note. Indirect effects of nostalgia for the home country and nostalgia for the host country on BII through positive acculturation orientation toward the host culture. Path coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. Indirect effect in the host country condition: $ab = 0.12$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI = [0.004, 0.255]. Indirect effect in the home country condition: $ab = -0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI = [-0.275, -0.024].

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Prior research indicated that recalling bicultural memories with positive endings (Lilgendahl et al., 2018) or positive content (Cheng & Lee, 2013) increases BII. We showed that nostalgia does the same, controlling for positive affect. Importantly, host nostalgic memories differ from positive bicultural events in terms of content. Nostalgic memories are personally relevant (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018; Wildschut et al., 2006). They might include, but are not limited to, culturally-pertinent events and intercultural interactions. For instance, host nostalgic experiences reported by participants included momentous events from their life in the host country, such as births and family reunions, a specific period of their life (e.g., the period of exploration of a new country or one's university years), and interactions with new friends. These personally meaningful memories enable bicultural nostalgizers to recount their life in the host country through rose-tinted glasses. Consequently, they adopt a more positive acculturation orientation toward the host culture, which, in turn, contributes to a well-integrated bicultural identity. Exploring the specific function of host nostalgia that accounts for these effects, as well as comparing nostalgia with other positive emotions that might be experienced by bicultural individuals (e.g., pride) is an interesting avenue for future research.

Nostalgia for the home country seemed to undermine BII. This finding highlights a boundary condition of nostalgia in the context of biculturalism (Wildschut et al., 2019), as feeling nostalgic for "a life that has been left behind" (Iyer & Jetten, 2011, p. 96) might have a cost. Alternatively, home nostalgia might have increased identification with one's country of origin and reduced host identification (Dimitriadou et al., 2019; Smeekes & Jetten, 2019). Future research could address this issue. Relatedly, it could examine other kinds of biculturals, such as sojourners (e.g., expats and international students), who plan to return to their home country upon completing their stay abroad. For them, home nostalgia might be psychologically beneficial, rather than a possible reminder of a past life that has been lost.

To conclude, our research advanced theory about the antecedents of biculturalism, deepened understanding of the benefits and limits of nostalgia, and pointed to the potential of host nostalgia for reducing perceptions of incompatibility between bicultural individuals' cultural identities and promoting successful acculturation. We hope that the findings prove generative.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. We included a few other measures that were unrelated to the purposes of this research.
2. We also measured positive affect and length of residence. Additional analyses using these variables as controls yielded similar results.
3. The results generalized across gender and age.
4. A post-hoc power analysis ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed) revealed that achieved power for the Reflection \times Country interaction on acculturation orientation toward the host country was .89. The Reflection \times Country interaction remained significant, $F(1, 138) = 9.67$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .065$, when including as covariates positive affect, length of residence, age, and gender.
5. A post-hoc power analysis ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed) revealed that achieved power for the Reflection \times Country interaction on BII was .91. The Reflection \times Country interaction remained significant, $F(1, 139) = 7.95$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .054$, when including as covariates positive affect, length of residence, age, and gender.
6. We did not include acculturation toward the home country as mediator, given that the relevant Reflection \times Country interaction effect was not significant. Nonetheless, we carried out an exploratory moderated mediation analysis with acculturation orientation toward the home country as a simultaneous mediator. The results were essentially identical to the reported ones.
7. The indirect effects of host nostalgia ($ab = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI = [0.004, 0.249]) and home nostalgia ($ab = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI = [-0.285, -0.028]) on BII through acculturation orientation toward the host country held when controlling for positive affect, length of residence, age, and gender (moderated mediation index = -0.25, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI = [-0.479, -0.084]).

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