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Acculturation Preferences, Ethnic and Religious Identification and the Socio-Economic Adaptation
of Russian-Speaking Immigrants in Belgium

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Abstract

This study tests a model of the socio-economic adaptation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium. It examines the roles of language skills and length of stay in Belgium, and of ethnic and religious identification in their acculturation preferences in their adaptation. The study showed that language skills were positively related to preferences for integration and assimilation, while length of stay was negatively related to separation. In turn, integration and assimilation predicted higher socio-economic adaptation, and separation predicted lower adaptation. Ethnic and religious identification also played a role. In sum, more orientation toward the host society (integration and assimilation) promoted better adaptation.

Keywords: socio-economic adaptation, acculturation attitudes, ethnic identification, religious identification, acculturation of immigrants, labor market adjustment

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Many countries are becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse. These shifts are due partly to increasing international migration. However, this diversity is also due to individuals and groups with a migrant background seeking to maintain their heritage cultures and identities during the process of acculturation. In order to understand these changes in diversity, the study of acculturation is thus extremely important. The concept of acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that result when people who have developed in one cultural context move to another context, such as following migration (Berry, 1997; Berry & Hou, 2016). It also refers to these kinds of changes when groups and individuals engage in intercultural relations over years and generations following migration (Berry, 2017a; Berry & Hou, in press). This process of acculturation eventually leads to some form of adaptation to living in these diverse societies. Acculturation is a dynamic and complex process that encompasses changes in behaviors such as language, identity, values, and social relations. Acculturation also includes a set of preferences about how to acculturate (called acculturation attitudes or strategies; Berry, 1980). There is often a significant relationship between acculturation attitudes and behaviors (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006), especially between individuals' attitudes and their wellbeing (Berry, 2003; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). The focus in the present study is on socio-economic adaptation (SEA), which can be defined as the outcome that allows immigrants to participate well in the social and economic life of the host society.

In the present study, we examined a sample of first-generation, highly educated, Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium. We used an individual level model of the SEA of immigrants in which their acculturation preferences are used as a key psychological antecedent of SEA. Ethnic and religious identification were also considered as predictors of acculturation preferences. We

propose a model in which immigrant SEA can be predicted at the individual level by their acculturation preferences, the level of host country language skills and the length of stay in the host country.

The Context of the Study

According to the OECD (2008, 2015), Belgium has one of the larger immigrant communities in Europe, with more than 12% foreign-born in the population. Belgium has a high living standard and a stable economy that attracts large numbers of immigrants each year, and few immigrants return to Russia from Belgium (Corluy, Pina, & Verbist 2015; OECD 2008, 2015). Studies of acculturation in Belgium have mostly focused on Moroccan and Turkish migrants (e.g, Güngör, & Perdu, 2017; van Praag, Stevens, & van Houtte, 2016), although nowadays some other groups are also being studied, such as Chinese (e.g, Meng, Zhu, & Cao, 2017), Syrian and Iraqi (e.g, Roblain, Malki, Azzi, & Licata, 2017). Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium are still an unexamined group despite Belgium being one of the most popular destination countries for Russian-speaking immigrants. This preference exists despite considerable difficulties in obtaining visas and work permits and high levels of unemployment among immigrants in general relative to other EU countries (Bisin, Patacchini, Verdier, & Zenou 2011; Corluy et al., 2015; OECD 2008, 2015).

Recent studies have shown that most immigrants move to another country for economic reasons. However, in spite of the desire of immigrants to gain employment and financial security, they generally face serious obstacles, and achieving economic success is much more difficult for them than for non-immigrants (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Moving to a new country can be a difficult and stressful process because it brings on changes in all areas of life — social, cultural and psychological (Benish-Weisman & Shye, 2011; Berry, 2006). Therefore, despite the fact that immigrants move to a new country to improve their quality of life, they often face different problems, such as discrimination and economic challenges, which undermine this goal (Wong,

Chou, & Chow, 2012).

Researchers who work within the framework of human capital theory explain the social and economic situation of immigrants by the limited convertibility of human capital across national borders. This is because immigrants have foreign qualifications, often lack language skills in the host country, or have incomplete information about the local labor market (Esser, 2004). Immigrants are more likely to be unemployed or work part-time, often facing difficulties in getting recognition of their educational qualifications and professional experience (Bisin et al., 2011; Corluy et al., 2015; OECD 2008, 2015; Swan et al., 1991). Particular difficulties are related to poor housing conditions, high unemployment, low income, discrimination, social exclusion, lower socioeconomic status (SES), and a low quality of life (Berry & Hou, 2016; Wong et al., 2012). Even when immigrants manage to find a job, they are usually in an unequal position compared to non-immigrants (Bisin et al., 2011; ENAR, 2013; van Laer & Janssens, 2011; Winter-Ebmer, 1994). The first employment, even for highly educated immigrants, is often in non-prestigious jobs in the so-called “secondary labor market” (e.g. cleaning services, construction work, etc.). Such employment is characterized by low language proficiency requirements, low incomes, fixed-term contracts and limited opportunities for career growth (Forsander, Salmenhaara, Melegh, & Kondrateva, 2007; Haberfeld, Semyonov, & Cohen, 2000).

Ethnic niche employment reflects the tendency of members of an ethnic group to focus on particular occupations and industry sectors (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Horenczyk, & Kinunen 2011; Waldinger, 1996). Wages of workers in ethnic enclaves and ethnic niches of employment, as a rule, are lower than wages in the open labor market (Logan, Richard, Alba, & Stults, 2003). In addition, such an ethnic niche labor market does not always give immigrants adequate opportunities for the development of sociocultural skills (e.g. the acquisition of the language of the host country) necessary for social and economic upward mobility, because social interaction at work may be limited to their co-ethnic network. Immigrants tend to use their own ethnic social capital where they

can get only limited assistance that may be useful only in the first years after immigration (Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008; Levanon, 2011).

This research has shown that the socio-economic adaptation (SEA) of immigrants to a new environment is a problem in many societies. An increasing number of studies aim to help facilitate the adaptation of immigrants and to improve their quality of life (van der Zee & Sandal, 2016; Wong et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the subject of SEA in general has been little studied (Hayfron, 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008).

Indicators of Socio-Economic Adaptation

Previous studies often focused on employment as the only socio-economic adaptation outcome, which is a poor rendering of all possibly relevant socio-economic indicators and limits our understanding of the process. SEA enables immigrants to completely participate in the social and economic life of the host society, and should therefore involve multiple indicators. Some indicators of SEA assess the extent to which immigrants are involved in the social and economic life of the larger society. Researchers have identified various indicators of SEA: achieving a certain level of correspondence between actual income and planned and achieved financial goals (Aycan & Berry, 1996); high occupational status; having a steady job, with monthly savings, economic benefits, professional development, and improved financial and occupational status (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008; Grigoryev & van de Vijver, 2017); the unavailability of social support (Potocky-Tripodi, 2001; 2003); the level of professional achievement and well-being in the new culture (Lebedeva, 2009); and ownership of housing (Constant & Zimmermann, 2008).

Of particular interest as an indicator of SEA is having a steady job. Researchers have found that better adapted immigrants were those who had satisfactory working conditions (Starr & Roberts, 1982). Immigrants may experience a significant decrease in their status in the new country compared to their status in their country of origin (Berry & Kim, 1988; Bisin et al., 2011). It is often difficult for immigrants to return to their original position and secure any upward mobility (Aycan

& Berry, 1996; Thomas, 1992).

Alienation from the social environment is a negative state that immigrants frequently experience. Some authors have described such estrangement as the inability to achieve satisfaction in their social or personal activities, as well as other forms of mismatch between their situation and the expectations of the majority of other citizens (Guthrie & Tanco, 1980). Estrangement is likely to occur when this mismatch between the desired state (e.g., having a decent job) and the real situation (e.g., unemployment or part-time work), which is characterized as a failure to comply with social norms and expectations (Kanungo, 1979). The difficulty in getting access to a normal working life postpones the adaptation of immigrants (Thomas, 1990). That is, the longer the length of residence, the more likely is better adaptation.

Aycan and Berry (1996) examined the acculturation of immigrants from Turkey in Canada with a particular emphasis on the changing structure of employment and its impact on psychological well-being and adaptation. The authors note that employment provides a certain purpose in life, determines status and identity, and allows immigrants to establish relationships with other people in the larger society. This last function is especially crucial for immigrants, since the more immigrants interact with groups in society in general, the faster they learn the skills of everyday life in the host country. Unemployed immigrants will suffer not only a decrease in psychological well-being but also a delay in their sociocultural adaptation (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Overall, the findings of this study suggest that employment for immigrants performs many other important functions in addition to generating income.

Acculturation Preferences of Immigrants

According to Berry (1997), the role of acculturation preferences in the process of acculturation is substantial. Acculturation preferences of immigrants are a combination of: (1) orientation of immigrants to their heritage culture; and (2) orientation to the society of settlement. The combination of positive and/or negative responses of these options gives four acculturation

preferences (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization). The integration preference (orientation to both cultures) was proposed by Berry (1997) to be the most adaptive strategy. Indeed, the majority of studies on the relationship between acculturation strategies and adaptation have been carried out in multicultural societies, and have indeed shown integration to be most adaptive (Berry, 1997; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013).

Vinokurov, Trickett and Birman (2017) argued that most studies suggest that increasing acculturation to the mainstream culture over time is associated with greater occupational success, whereas the relationship between attachment with the heritage culture and employment status is ambiguous depending on the immigrant groups studied. They (Vinokurov, Birman & Trickett 2000) earlier reported that work status of Russian-speaking refugees living in the United States was related to both the level of mainstream and heritage culture involvement. The refugees who were employed in the same field as in the former Soviet Union, and who had been in the United States the longest, reported the highest levels of income, level of mainstream involvement, and comfort in speaking English. In contrast, unemployed refugees were lowest on each of these variables.

In the European context, research with the German Socio-Economic Panel on the impact of acculturation strategies¹ on economic behavior (the probability of being employed, income, ownership of housing), noted that this effect in various studies is statistically significant and economically strong: assimilation and integration have a positive effect on economic performance, while separation and marginalization do not (Constant & Zimmermann, 2008). In a study conducted on a sample of immigrants (including Russian-speaking) in Greece, acculturation strategies² were compared using Berry's approach and SEA. As expected, SEA is positively associated with orientation toward the host society and negatively associated with orientation toward their own ethnic group. Integration and assimilation strategies had the most favorable results, whereas the separation strategy was associated with low levels of SEA, regardless of the country of origin and length of stay in the host country. In addition, assimilation and integration strategies, although they

differ in the frequency of contacts with their own ethnic group, gave the same positive results (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008). Later Drydakakis (2013) also found that assimilation and integration strategies are positively associated with employment and wages of Russian-speaking immigrants in Greece, whereas separation was negatively associated. In another study of Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland, Jasinskaja-Lahti, Horenczyk and Kinunen (2011) found a similar pattern. A study of socio-economic outcomes of Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium also showed that a more positive orientation towards the mainstream society was associated with more socio-economic adaptation regardless of length of stay (Grigoryev, 2015; Grigoryev, & van de Vijver, 2017).

Thus, taking into account this evidence about Russian-speaking immigrants in the European context, we propose that there is a common pattern: the integration and assimilation preferences likely have more positive results for SEA than the separation or marginalisation preferences.

Ethnic and Religious Identity of Immigrants

The question of the psychological reasons for choosing one or another acculturation preferences has been insufficiently studied (Tartakovsky, 2012). Some researchers stress the characteristics of social identity (see Georgas & Papastylianou, 1998; Grigoryev, 2015; Samnani, Boekhorst, & Harrison, 2012), while others stress the influence of individual values (see Ryabichenko, 2016). The relationship, and distinction, between acculturation and identity is complex. According to Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2006), acculturation attitudes refer to preferences given to the cultures involved in the process, whereas ethnic identity refers to the subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group or culture. Also changes in attitudes and identity are likely to occur at different rates: acculturation preferences change easier than ethnic or religious identity. Many authors seem to agree that they have different connotations, although there is disagreement about their relationship. Mere ethnic/cultural identification or categorization fails to tell us what attitudes the individuals hold toward their heritage culture or how much they actually

identify with the group, yet the strength and nature of actual identification with their own ethnic group will determine much of the individual's response to acculturation (Liebkind, 2006).

Using the theory of cognitive dissonance, Samnani, Boekhorst and Harrison (2012) suggested that due to cultural differences, immigrants in a new society will experience some discomfort because their original cultural values and norms are usually not appropriate for the new cultural context of the host society, including the conditions in the workplace or norms of social relations (see also Grigoryev, 2015). As a result, immigrants attempt to reduce this discomfort (Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2010). Studies have shown that people who try to minimize this cognitive dissonance to maintain their self-construction may either (1) avoid certain behaviors (Pugh et al., 2010); (2) or adapt their own values and behavioral norms to the cultural context of the host society (Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009). Based on this assumption, immigrants can deal with this cognitive dissonance in four ways by selecting the appropriate acculturation preference: (1) by trying to completely accept the different values and norms through adopting the assimilation preference; (2) by taking some of the new values and norms, while retaining some of their original own values and norms through the integration strategy; (3) by trying to distance themselves from the new values and norms, rejecting them, and at the same time adhering strictly to their original culture by the separation strategy; (4) by rejecting the values and norms of the new culture, and at the same time, giving up their own, using the marginalization strategy (Samnani et al., 2012). The greater the gap between the perceived identity and cultural values and norms of immigrants and those typical for the host country, the harder it will be for immigrants to integrate into these new circumstances (Wong, Yik, & Kwong, 2006). For immigrants for whom their culture is less important, it will be easier and more effective to reduce dissonance through the assimilation preference or integration preference than for those whose original culture is central to their self-identity.

Social identity theory may assist in further explaining the role of characteristics of social

identity of immigrants. It is assumed that people categorize themselves as members of social groups and some social roles have priority over others (Samnani et al., 2012). A strong ethnic identification refers to the extent to which this identity appears to be an essential part of their self-construction (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000), and vice versa for the immigrant with weak ethnic identification. Accordingly, immigrants with weak ethnic identification will tend to experience less discomfort from an assimilation preference, as they will not feel that it has affected any important part of their self-construction, and can therefore also focus on other aspects of their social identity (e.g., professional, gender, parent, etc.; Samnani et al., 2012). It has been found that strong ethnic identification is negatively associated with the assimilation preference (Inguglia & Musso, 2015; Naumann, Benet-Martínez, & Espinoza, 2017). Moreover, immigrants and minority ethnic groups with strong ethnic identification are characterized by a preference for separation (Dimitrova, Bender, Chasiotis, & van de Vijver, 2013; Musso, Inguglia, & Lo Coco, 2016; Naumann et al., 2017).

Religion is a form of social and cultural identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Nevertheless, the study of the role of identity in acculturation has often ignored the religious factor (Gattino, Miglietta, Rizzo, & Testa, 2016; Phalet & Kosic, 2006). However, for immigrants, life in new society, religion could have a significant influence on adaptation (Gattino et al., 2016; Güngör et al., 2013). Religiosity may help overcome social isolation (Kwon, 2000). Religious identity can support personal and social distinctiveness in a multicultural context (Rayaprol, 1997); that is, it can preserve identity, maintain group cohesion, and ethnic and national heritage. Secularization is a current general downward trend in the importance and influence of religion among the majority of the European population (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). Religion is often seen as a sign of cultural distance and as an obstacle to the integration of immigrants (Ward, 2013). On the other hand, from the point of view of immigrants, religious traditions and ties are an important source of self-esteem, social support and cultural continuity (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000).

Thus we consider that ethnic and religious identification may both be considered as aspects of Russian cultural identity and be the source of maintenance of heritage culture of immigrants, including sharing common values, customs, and norms, as well as the sense of belonging to the heritage group.

The Present Study

In this study, we propose an individual level model of the socio-economic adaptation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium. We included psychological antecedents of ethnic and religious identity, and of three acculturation preferences (integration, assimilation and separation), but not marginalization. Some researchers skip this preference since marginalization occurs so infrequently that its viability as an acculturation strategy has been questioned (Ward & Geeraert 2016).

We also included some sociodemographic predictors that may affect the process of adaptation of immigrants (see, e.g, Aycan & Berry, 1996; Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008; Drydakis, 2013; Grigoryev & van de Vijver, 2017; Kuhlman, 1991; Potocky-Tripodi, 2003). These are length of stay and knowledge of three official languages (Dutch, French, German), and English (which was also considered because being fluent in English is a necessary requirement for a job at numerous international companies in Belgium). Age, gender, and education were added as additional control variables in case they showed significance in first step analysis.

Hypotheses

As Grigoryev and van de Vijver (2017) noted, Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium, in contrast to immigrants from other regions, do not have the penalties associated with having a dark complexion and non-European phenotype. Therefore, in the case of an orientation toward the host society, there is less a risk of discrimination in the labor market. Also, they do not have a developed ethnic enclave economy to use a support of cultural ties in case of separation preference.

Furthermore, most of the studies of acculturation of Russian-speaking immigrants in EU-countries

and USA have shown that the orientations toward the host society (integration and assimilation), better host language proficiency, and longer length of stay in the host country are associated with more SEA (see, e.g., Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008; Drydakis, 2013; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Horenczyk, & Kinunen, 2011; Vinokurov, Birman, & Trickett, 2000). This evidence is consistent with the immigrant assimilation hypothesis, human capital theory (Drydakis 2013; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2011) and the theory of ethnic enclaves (Portes & Bach, 1985). Also, in an aspect of acculturation, the ethnic and religious identification may have consequences to acculturation preference (Gattino et al., 2016; Samnani et al., 2012), for Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium it may be the source of maintenance of heritage culture. Thus, we used a model of the socio-economic adaptation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium, advancing the following hypotheses:

(H1) Acculturation preferences involving orientations toward the host group (integration and assimilation) are positively associated with high levels of SEA.

(H2) An acculturation preference involving separation from the host group is negatively associated with SEA.

(H3) Immigrants with higher levels of host country language skills and a longer time spent in the host country have higher levels of SEA.

(H4) Strong ethnic and religious identification prevents the assimilation of immigrants and promotes the choice of the separation preference.

(H5) Better language skills contribute to preferences that are oriented to the host society (integration preference and assimilation preference).

(H6) The longer immigrants reside in the host country, the more they are inclined to focus on integration and less on their ethnic group.

Method

Sample

A sample of 132 Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium was surveyed in 2014. They were aged 19 to 65 years ($M = 35.9$; $SD = 9.3$); all of them arrived from Russia to Belgium and had the length of stay in Belgium from 2 months to 18 years ($M = 7.1$; $SD = 5.0$). The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are shown in more detail in Table 1.

Procedure

The data were collected at a cultural event organized by the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Brussels. Participants were given a questionnaire and asked to read the instructions, which included information about the main topics discussed in the study, confidentiality policy, and how to contact the researchers supervising the project. The questionnaires were administered individually in the presence of one of the researchers and collected by the researchers upon completion.

Measures

Sociodemographic Variables

The questionnaire contained items for gender, age, ethnicity, education (number of years and level), religious affiliation, the region of Belgium, language skills and length of stay in the country. An open-ended question was used for measuring the time of stay in Belgium. We measured language skills using the 5-point scale containing questions about the level language skills of the host country (understand, speak, write, read: Dutch, French, German, English) (Degree of proficiency: from 5 = *Fluent* to 1 = *No*) and then had addition to calculate the sum;

Psychological Antecedent Variables

Ethnic identification. Three items were used to measure ethnic identification (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007) in Russian, with sample questions: "I consider myself a Russian", "I feel part of Russian culture", (5 = *Strongly agree*, 1 = *Strongly disagree*);

Religious identification. Three items were used to measure religious identification

(Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007) in Russian, with sample questions: "I consider myself a representative of my religion", "My religious affiliation is an important part of myself", (5 = *Strongly agree*, 1 = *Strongly disagree*);

Acculturation preferences. Twelve items were used to measure acculturation preferences (4 items for each preference) from the questionnaire (Berry, 2011) in Russian (Tatarko & Lebedeva, 2011), with sample questions: "It is important to me to be fluent in both Russian and the in languages that are represented in Belgium" (integration); "I prefer to have only Belgians friends" (assimilation); "I feel that Russians should maintain their own cultural traditions and not adapt to those of Belgians" (separation), (5 = *Strongly agree*, 1 = *Strongly disagree*);

Outcome Variable

Index of socio-economic adaptation. Respondents answered questions to determine their position along the scale of the World Bank survey in Russian for the index of socioeconomic adaptation. (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008), Indicators were: professional status, full-time work at present, monthly savings, professional development, prospects for improving financial position, prospects for improving professional status). Sample items were: "Do you work at this time?" and "Do you have a permanent job?". Questions were coded into dichotomous variables: 0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*; positive answers to the questions with negative content, such as decreased occupational status and loss of skills, produce an answer of -1, with answers aggregated. As the items make up a formative scale, answers were summed to form the adaptation index.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis was used SPSS v.24 (IBM Corp. Released, 2016). Data screening including checking for outliers and missing values was conducted. Also, the reliability (internal consistency) of measures was checked. Finally, to tested the conceptual model path analysis was applied; for the construction of the path model the program AMOS was used (Arbuckle, 2014) which had settings during testing to evaluate of the links of model with bootstrapping (2000

bootstrap samples) and Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator.

Results

Data had no outliers or missing values. Descriptive statistics and reliability of the scales are shown in Table 2. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 3. Almost all the antecedents in the theoretical model were significantly associated with the outcomes; gender and education were used as additional control variables because the correlation analysis showed significant correlations with them. We decided to test an additional model based on results of the correlation analysis. Two models were tested: one model contains all paths that we were going to check, but with the previously detected not significant correlations; in the additional model, coefficients for these links were considered to be 0. These two models are insignificantly different from each other. However, the additional model produced smaller values of Akaike information criterion (94.41 and 92.29 respectively); therefore, this model can be considered the final version of our model. The variances and covariances were successfully estimated and the global fit indices of the final path model corresponded to recommended values (Kline, 2016), $\chi^2 = 34.29$; $df = 26$; $p = .13$; $\chi^2/df = 1.32$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .07. The resulting final path model of SEA of immigrants is shown in Figure 1. The estimated path coefficients of the final path model and total, direct, and indirect effects are shown in Table 4. The results of the final path analysis showed that the empirical model almost completely reflects the suggested theoretical model, except for the negative relationship between religious identification and assimilation preference, and the expected positive direct effect of the length of stay for integration preference. Acculturation preferences involving the orientation toward the host society (integration preference and assimilation preference) were positively associated with high levels of SEA (H1), and separation preference (a preference for their ethnic group) was negatively associated (H2). Immigrants with higher levels of language skills and a longer time spent in the host country had higher levels of SEA (H3). Better

language skills contributed to preferences associated with an orientation toward the host society (integration and assimilation preference), and vice versa (H5). However, strong ethnic and religious identification promoted the choice of the separation preference, but only strong ethnic identification prevented the assimilation preference (H4). Longer length of residence in the host country did not lead to the integration preference, although it led to a lower preference of for separation (H6).

The indirect effects of ethnic and religious identification, language skills, length of stay and education for SEA were significant. The indirect effect of length of stay and education for three acculturation preference was also significant. The proportion of explained variance in the dependent was 55%. The influence of acculturation preferences on the SEA had a large effect size (f^2 -Cohen = .38 for excluded $R^2 = .379$).

[Fig. 1 Path diagram of socio-economic adaptation of immigrants with direct and standardized coefficients]

Notes. All path coefficients shown are significant ($p < .05$); the dotted lines show the links that were considered to be 0.

Discussion

In this study, an individual level model of the socio-economic adaptation of first-generation, highly educated, Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium was proposed and evaluated. The results showed that a number of psychological factors impacted SEA. Most important is the finding that acculturation preferences of immigrants, regardless of their length of stay in the host country, were associated with the level of their SEA: integration and assimilation strategies were associated with higher SEA, while separation was associated with lower SEA. This finding is consistent with a study on a sample of immigrants in Greece (Besevegis & Pavlopoulos, 2008; Drydak, 2013) and in Germany (Constant & Zimmermann, 2008). In addition to the role of acculturation preferences in SEA, ethnic and religious identification were a source of maintenance of heritage culture of

immigrants, which in turn impact the acculturation preference of assimilation (negatively) and separation (positively). This finding is consistent with other studies on the relationship between acculturation and identity (reviewed by Berry, 2017b).

In addition to these psychological factors, two other variables served as predictors of SEA, both directly, and through acculturation preferences. Language skills in the languages used in work settings in Belgium impacted SEA positively in two ways: directly (better language skills predicted better SEA); and indirectly through the promotion of integration preference. Length of residence also played a role in promoting higher SEA. There was a direct relationship: longer residence was associated with higher SEA; and longer residence was negatively related to a preference for separation, which in turn was negatively related to SEA. The role of length of residence in promoting two other forms of adaptation (psychological and sociocultural) has been shown in many previous studies (Berry & Hou, 2016; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

Overall, we can say that the socioeconomic adaptation of the sample of Russian immigrants in Belgium is influenced by all the factors that were included in model proposed in this study. Looking at the interpretation of these relationships, with respect to the role of acculturation preferences, we interpret the relationship between their separation preference and low SEA as being primarily due to a high proportion of unemployed among those who had this acculturation preference. This interpretation is related to gender, which was a significant predictor of SEA because more women in the sample were unemployed. This finding is consistent with the fact that in the EU, only one third of immigrant women from non-EU countries are in employment (Grigoryev & van de Vijver, 2017; OECD, 2008). In addition, immigrants with a preference for separation face difficulties in their attempts to make contact with members of the host society and to acquire basic social skills, such as learning the language of the country or obtaining employment (Nesdale & Mak, 2003). With respect to those preferring integration, we propose that the high level of SEA among them is due to their having access to resources of their own ethnic group and to those of the host society (Besevegis &

Pavlopoulos, 2008). That is, they possess two forms of social capital: bonding with their own group; and bridging to the larger society. Those with the assimilation preference also had high SEA; we propose that this preference was adaptive primarily because it facilitates contact with the host society to which SEA is directed (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). On the basis of these findings and interpretations, we conclude that it can be useful to encourage Russian-speaking immigrants in Belgium to change their acculturation preferences to be more integrative or assimilative. This, of course takes time (witness the important role of length of residence in reducing the preference for separation). However, rather than waiting for time by itself to bring about more integrative preferences, migrants can be encouraged to begin to actively and independently seek contacts within the host society, and to improve their language skills, which are mainly acquired in the interaction with native speakers (Grigoryev, 2015; Grigoryev & van de Vijver, 2017).

Understanding the acculturation preferences of immigrants needs to be supplemented by similar research on the preferences of the host society. While the meta-analysis by Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013) confirmed that the relationship between the integration preference of immigrants and their psychological adaptation, it is known that the society of settlement also plays a role in the adaptation process. For example, the cultural diversity of the country of settlement (measured as a combined index of percentage of immigrants, cultural homogeneity and ethnic diversity indices) may moderate the relationship. Stronger ethnic orientation and weaker host orientation have been found to be more conducive to better adaptation in countries with higher cultural diversity than in those with lower diversity. Thus, the role of acculturation preferences in immigrant adaptation is context-specific (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2011). This issue has been discussed in detail previously (see Birman et al., 2014; Salo & Birman, 2015; Titzmann & Fuligni, 2015; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). That is, it takes both sides to provide a basis for integration: mutual adaptation is necessary, so that double engagement and acceptance are possible (Berry, 2017b).

Researchers have suggested that a low level of language skills is one of the main obstacles

to employment upon arrival in a country (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2008). In support of this assertion are findings from studies of a relationship between language skills and employment opportunities of refugees (Hou & Beiser, 2006). If immigrants initially have a good level of knowledge of the language of the host country, it is much easier for them either to obtain the necessary qualifications to work or to directly get a job. Otherwise, immigrants must either rely on work in the secondary labor market, or in extreme cases immigrants can remain unemployed for a long time (Grigoryev, 2015). Also, the initial language skills contribute to the amount of contact with members of the host society, leading to the choice of more integrative preferences. However, in the future, the impact of acculturation strategies on language skills should also be considered; a preference for assimilation of integration may motivate host society language acquisition.

The choice of acculturation preferences by immigrants was associated with both characteristics of social identity; this is consistent with the finding that acculturation preferences and parameters of identity should correspond to each other (Georgas & Papastylianou, 1998). In the present study, a strong ethnic identification was negatively associated with the assimilation preference and positively associated with the separation preference. Strong religious identification was positively associated with the separation preference. A strong religious identification, along with a strong ethnic identity, reflects a commitment to the preservation of cultural values, and together more strongly affects the separation preference of immigrants. A significant negative association between religious identification and a preference for assimilation was not found, perhaps because in a secular country like Belgium, that guarantees freedom of religion, giving up one's religious views is not so important for acculturation or adaptation.

Limitation and Further Research

The present study was carried out in only one society, with only one immigrant group. Thus, the generalizability of the findings is limited. However, this study adds to the growing literature on these issues across societies, which all together may lead to some broad generalisations

about acculturation and adaptation. The phenomenology of immigration and economic adaptation is likely to vary depending on a variety of cultural, social, political and historical factors (Kogan, 2006; Ward et al., 2001). In trying to identify which features of the host society matter, some researchers have studied the impact of local conditions, such as characteristics of the destination city. These case studies of the effect of local context on socio-economic adaptation provide valuable information about the experience of particular ethnic groups (Levanon, 2009).

Several attempts to generalize these findings on acculturation have been proposed in the literature. Many researchers have realized that a major limitation for the further study of acculturation is that the majority of published studies are based on the consideration of a sample consisting of a single ethnic group, taken from one particular national context, which of course limits the external validity of our theories and research (Ward, 2013). Today, some researchers are already working in this direction, such as the 17-country study of acculturation and intercultural relations by Berry (2017b). Despite this limitation, we believe that our results can be generalized perhaps only for Russian-speaking immigrants in most of the Western countries; this suggestion was supported by the study Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel (see Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2011).

Since much of the current concern about immigrant acculturation and adaptation has focused on the second generation, future studies need to take into account their experience, and the development of a research model that is based on their experience. Finally, since the sample was drawn from participants at a Russian cultural event, those in the sample may have been more ‘Russian oriented’ than Russian immigrants who do not attend such events. Most participants of the event were there with family members and we cannot assess to what extent they participated because they have a strong orientation toward the ethnic group.

Conclusions and Practical Significance

The pattern of relationships between demographic and psychological variables and the socio-economic adaptation of immigrants from Russia living in Belgium corresponds to much of

the research findings from other societies with other immigrant groups. Hence, we may claim some degree of convergent validity for our findings. We may also claim that this study provides further evidence to the accumulating findings that being engaged in both cultures (by way of integration), which is promoted by language acquisition and length of residence, is the most useful basis for promoting adaptation.

Footnotes:

1. Constant and Zimmermann (2008) used the two-dimensional ethnosizer that was very similar to Berry's approach.
2. Acculturation strategies were measured on the basis of answers to 4 items rated on a 5-point scale: frequency of contact with ethnic group, frequency of contact with the host society, frequency of use of ethnic language, and frequency of use of the Greek language.

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Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 132)

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Women	62	47.0
Men	70	53.0
Length of stay		
0-5 years	51	38.6
6-10 years	43	32.6
11+ years	38	28.8
Region of Belgium		
Brussels-Capital Region	85	64.4
Walloon Region	15	11.4
Flemish Region	32	24.2
Work status		
Unemployed	35	26.5
Women	26	74.3
Men	9	25.7
Employed	97	73.5
Underemployed	40	41.2
Overemployed	22	22.7
Education		
Higher education	113	85.6
Vocational education	16	12.1
Secondary education	3	2.3
Religion		
None	30	22.7
Orthodox Christianity	95	72.0
Other (Islam, Judaism, Catholicism)	7	5.3
Ethnicity		
Russian	122	92.4
Other (Ingushs, Chechens, Jews etc.)	10	7.6

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Scales (N = 132)

	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	α
Ethnic identification	1.00	5.00	4.05	.94	-1,14	.95	.81
Religious identification	1.00	5.00	3.49	1.08	-.53	-.21	.90
Language skills	20.00	70.00	43.04	11.52	.16	-.70	.84
Integration	2.00	5.00	4.40	.62	-1.21	.43	.70
Assimilation	1.00	4.75	2.01	.89	1.00	.74	.83
Separation	1.00	4.75	2.07	.87	.68	.44	.74
Socio-economic adaptation	-4.00	7.00	2.34	2.53	-.13	-.89	.74

Table 3

Pearson's Correlations of Variables (N = 132)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Socio-economic adaptation	-									
2. Language skills	.52***	-								
3. Length of stay	.38***	.25**	-							
4. Ethnic identification	-.40***	-.06	-.16	-						
5. Religious identification	-.13	.00	-.03	.41***	-					
6. Integration	.42***	.36***	.24**	-.02	.00	-				
7. Assimilation	.43***	.29**	.06	-.68***	-.26*	-.04	-			
8. Separation	-.57***	-.45***	-.33***	.39***	.39***	-.32***	-.48***	-		
9. Gender (1 = man / 0 = woman)	.35***	.13	.02	-.15	-.05	.02	.15	.06	-	
10. Age	.12	-.11	.59***	-.05	.01	.10	-.00	-.02	-.03	-
11. Education (number of years)	.19*	.23**	-.08	-.02	.06	.23**	.18*	.19*	.17	-.13

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 4

Bootstrapping Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients of the Path Model (N = 132)

Outcomes	Predictors	Total effect			Direct effect			Indirect effect			
		B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	BC 95% CI
Socio-economic adaptation (R ² = .55)											
	Gender	1.205	.356	.245***	1.205	.356	.245***				
	Education	.610	.270	.107*				.610	.270	.107*	[.026, .210]
	Ethnic identification	-.526	.157	-.200***				-.526	.157	-.200***	[-.323, -.084]
	Religious identification	-.189	.078	-.083**				-.189	.078	-.083**	[-.167, -.030]
	Language skills	.092	.017	.434***	.040	.018	.190*	.052	.012	.244***	[.078, .354]
	Length of stay	.173	.042	.352***	.091	.037	.185*	.082	.027	.167***	[.150, .276]
	Integration	.948	.316	.238*	.948	.316	.238*				
	Assimilation	.597	.239	.213*	.597	.239	.213*				
	Separation	-.772	.261	-.269**	-.772	.261	-.269**				
Integration (R ² = .13)											
	Education	.126	.065	.088**				.126	.065	.088**	[.019, .193]
	Language skills	.012	.005	.358***	.019	.005	.358***				
	Length of stay	.019	.006	.094**				.012	.006	.094**	[.022, .204]
Assimilation (R ² = .51)											
	Education	.127	.065	.062**				.127	.065	.062**	[.013, .143]
	Ethnic identification	-.630	.068	-.669***	-.630	.068	-.669***				
	Language skills	.019	.005	.253***	.019	.005	.253***				
	Length of stay	.012	.005	.066**				.012	.005	.066**	[.020, .139]
Separation (R ² = .43)											
	Education	-.192	.090	-.096*				-.192	.090	-.096*	[-.196, -.024]
	Ethnic identification	.195	.079	.212*	.195	.079	.212*				
	Religious identification	.245	.062	.309**	.245	.062	.309**				
	Language skills	-.029	.006	-.391***	-.029	.006	-.391***				
	Length of stay	-.052	.015	-.300***	-.034	.013	-.197*	-.018	.008	-.103**	[-.201, -.033]
Language skills (R ² = .13)											
	Education	6.600	2.574	.246*	6.600	2.574	.246*				
	Length of stay	.609	.226	.263**	.609	.226	.263**				

Note. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

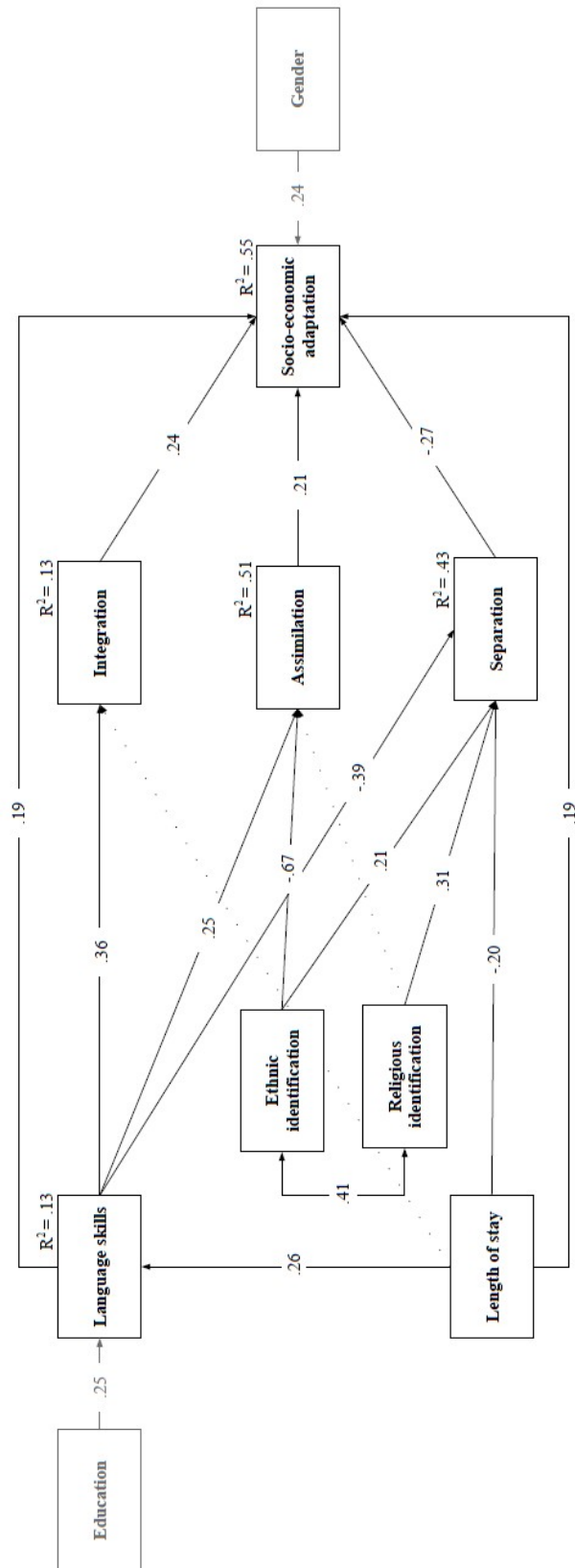


Figure 1. Path diagram of socio-economic adaptation of immigrants with direct and standardized coefficients.
 notes: all path coefficients shown are significant ($p < .05$); the dotted lines show the links that were considered to be 0.

