

WHO AM I? MIGRANT WORKERS' BICULTURAL IDENTITY INTEGRATION, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT

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I investigated 484 migrant workers' bicultural identity integration, social support, and social maladjustment, to shed light on the cultural conflict they experience and determine whether this differs between men and women. Results revealed that men had significantly higher levels of social support than women did, and women had significantly higher levels of social maladjustment than men did; however, there were no significant gender differences in bicultural identity integration. Furthermore, cultural conflict and social maladjustment were negatively predicted by social support, whereas cultural conflict mediated the effect of social support on social maladjustment. My findings suggest that positive social support for migrant workers could enhance their bicultural identity integration, promote more effective social adaptation, and help eliminate gender differences in social maladjustment.

Keywords: migrant workers, social support, bicultural identity integration, cultural conflict, social adjustment, gender difference.

In China, *migrant workers* are defined as people who come from rural areas and currently work in a city, while still possessing rural household registration (*hukou*; National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2017). They are farmers when they return to their villages; however, they are faced with the double identity of farmer/worker when they work in a city. According to the *2015 Survey Report of National Migrant Workers by the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China* (2016), there are 168.84 million

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migrant workers in China. Such significant social mobility often results in individuals living far away from their original social culture, facing changes in living conditions, and possibly lacking social support (Lin et al., 2011). It has been shown that migrants experience stress arising from the migration process, perceived discrimination, and social exclusion (Wong, He, Leung, Lau, & Chang, 2008), and also need to integrate their cultural identities to cope with challenges associated with adapting to their new urban environment (Yampolsky & Amiot, 2016).

Who am I? This fundamental question of identity is asked in different ways across many academic disciplines (Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011). In Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of psychosocial development, identity integration is an important concept. Syed and McLean (2016) posited that identity integration occurs depending on the specific context and time in which people live, so people may have different identities in different times and contexts. For example, an individual can be simultaneously a young man, a Chinese person, and a college student. Although having multiple social identities is not necessarily problematic (Cheng et al., 2008), if conflicts or contradictions exist between one's various identities, one must effectively manage or integrate the differing identity roles (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Researchers have shown that the failure to integrate identities is linked to severe psychological problems, such as suicidal behavior (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, Hallett, & Marcia, 2003).

In the context of globalization, migrant workers have more than one cultural identity; therefore, bicultural identity integration (BII) has aroused the interest of social psychologists. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) introduced the concept of BII and researched integration strategies. They saw BII as a framework for organizing the different meanings and experiences associated with being bicultural, and consequently developed the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 1 (BIIS-1), which includes two components: *cultural distance*, defined as the perception that the two cultures of an individual are nonoverlapping, dissociated, and distant from one another, and *cultural conflict*, defined as the perception that mainstream cultures clash with one another (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Previous researchers have shown that psychological adjustment is negatively affected by cultural distance (Furukawa, 1997), whereas cultural conflicts are the main cause of social maladjustment when adapting to another cultural standard or norm (Center, 1990; Freedman, Kaplan, & Sadock, 1976).

Social maladjustment is a disorder resulting from difficulties in attempting to adapt to a foreign culture or from having divided loyalties to two different cultures (Freedman et al., 1976). Factors influencing social cultural adaptation include life change (Furnham & Bochner, 1986), cultural distance (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980), and *social support* (Lee & Ciftci, 2014), the latter of which is

defined as the perception or experience that one is cared for, esteemed, and part of a mutually supportive social network (Taylor, 2011). Researchers have found that social support has a significant influence on if and how well bicultural people achieve cross-cultural adaptation (Záleská, Brabcová, & Vacková, 2014) and identity integration (Devi & Jyotsana, 2016; Syed & McLean, 2016). The successful integration of cultural identities helps people to adapt flexibly to dual cultures and reduce social maladjustment. Therefore, I assumed that BII would mediate the relationship between social support and social maladjustment. Specifically, my prediction was that social support would negatively predict both cultural distance and cultural conflict, whereas cultural distance and cultural conflict would positively predict social maladjustment.

Furthermore, scholars have reported that there are significant gender differences in the use of social support (Matud, Ibáñez, Bethencourt, Marrero, & Carballeira, 2003), with males tending to prefer to receive tangible support and females tending to prefer emotional support (Reevy & Maslach, 2001). It is possible that these gender differences result from socialization experiences and social roles, in line with Olson and Shultz's (1994) finding that socialization is gender specific. Male socialization is often focused more on self-reliance and independence, whereas for females the emphasis is on verbal expressiveness, warmth, and intimacy. Moreover, in some cultures there are distinctions between gender roles in family life contexts (Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin, & Frame, 2005). In China, it is customary to accept the "men outside the home, women inside" labor division pattern in family life. Being influenced by this traditional school of thought, men tend to receive more tangible support in a work context, such as opportunities for job advancement and professional development. Conversely, it is generally expected that women in China will take responsibility for housework, and they are less likely to find employment in the city. In some workplaces, women experience greater cultural conflict and social prejudice than men do, resulting in poorer mental health and general health condition (Hecht, 2001). Therefore, I chose to investigate the relationships among social support, BII, and social maladjustment in a sample of migrant workers, and predicted that there would be significant gender differences for each of these variables.

Method

Participants and Procedure

I used stratified random sampling to recruit migrants working in Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province in Northwest China, using the following criteria: (a) they have rural hukou, and their birthplace is not in Lanzhou, (b) they currently live in Lanzhou, and (c) they have a legal place of residence in Lanzhou. Of the 520 migrant workers employed at building sites, department

stores, hotels, and restaurants who participated, 484 returned valid survey forms (response rate = 93.1%). All respondents took part in the study on a voluntary basis and were assured that their data would be kept anonymous. Participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographic Characteristics*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
18–30 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.74, SD = 3.65$)	230	47.5
31–60 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 46.28, SD = 6.37$)	254	52.5
Gender		
Male	242	50.0
Female	242	50.0
Migrant work time		
Fewer than 5 years	246	50.8
5 years or more	238	49.2
Urban work role		
Builder	116	23.9
Shop assistant	128	26.4
Restaurant waiter	120	24.8
Chef	88	18.2
Other	32	6.7

Note. Migrant work time refers to the total number of years that migrant workers have been coming to the city to work every year, comprising no less than 3 months each year.

Measures

The Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS). Originally developed in Chinese by Xiao (1990), the SSRS is a self-rated scale with a 2-month test–retest reliability of .92; additionally, it has been widely used in different Chinese communities and shown to be valid and reliable (Cui, Liu, & Luo, 2014; Liu, Fan, & Shen, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha reliability value for the SSRS in this study was 0.78. The SSRS comprises 10 items to evaluate social support in the following three domains: (a) objective support (three items), (b) subjective support (four items), and (c) support usage (three items). A sample item is "Which category do you and your neighbors fit into?" (a) You do not care for each other, are only acquainted (score: 1 point), (b) They may show some concern for you when difficulties arise, and vice versa (score: 2 points), (c) Some neighbors care about you (score: 3 points), (d) Many neighbors care about you (score: 4 points). Total scores range from 12 to 66, with the objective support domain total ranging from 1 to 22, the subjective support domain total ranging from 8 to 32, and the support usage domain total ranging from 3 to 12. Higher scores indicate stronger social support.

Bicultural Identity Integration Scale-Version 1 (BIIS-1). The BIIS-1 is an eight-item measure comprising two dimensions: cultural conflict (four items,

e.g., "I am conflicted between the urban and rural ways of doing things.") and cultural distance (four items, e.g., "I keep my urban and rural cultures separate."). Respondents rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) reported alpha reliabilities of .74 and .69 for the conflict and distance dimensions, and in the present study these were .81 and .69.

Social Maladjustment Scale (SOC). Wiggins (1966) selected 27 items from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Hathaway & McKinley, 1943) to develop the SOC, which is used to assess individuals' social interaction abilities. "Yes" responses to 13 items (e.g., "It makes me uncomfortable to put on a stunt at a party even when others are doing the same sort of things.") and "No" responses to 14 items (e.g., "I like to go to parties and other affairs where there is lots of loud fun.") indicate the presence of social maladjustment. A higher score suggests that the respondent is lacking in social skills, bashful, overcautious, or taciturn. Conversely, a lower score suggests that the respondent is energetic, optimistic, sociable, voluble, open, and likes to take part in community activities. Ji and Dai (2004) developed the Chinese version of the scale and showed that it has high reliability and validity. In the present study, the alpha reliability was .72.

Data Analysis

SPSS version 18.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, New York, USA) was used for analyzing descriptive statistics and correlations. Structural equation modeling with bias-corrected bootstrapping (2,000 replications) was performed using Amos version 19.0 (IBM Corporation, Armonk, NY, USA) to determine the relationships between social maladjustment, social support, cultural conflict, and cultural distance. I used Amos to model data from multiple groups simultaneously and determine if one model fit different samples. Goodness of fit was determined following Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria that comparative fit indices (CFI) over .95 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values below .06 indicate a good fit between the hypothesized model and observed data.

Results

Gender Comparison for Migrant Workers' Social Maladjustment, Social Support, Cultural Conflict, and Cultural Distance

Table 2 presents the descriptive characteristics of male and female migrant workers' social maladjustment, social support, cultural conflict, and cultural distance. Results of an independent samples *t* test show that female migrant workers' SOC scores were significantly higher than those of male migrant workers, $t(482) = -5.092, p < .05$, and that their SSRS scores were significantly lower than those of male migrant workers, $t(482) = 2.422, p < .05$. There was no

significant difference in cultural conflict and cultural distance between male and female migrant workers.

Table 2. Descriptive Characteristics of Male and Female Migrant Workers' SOC, SSRS, and BIIS-1 Scores

Gender	SOC		SSRS		Cultural conflict		Cultural distance	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	12.59	3.54	38.70	7.42	11.67	2.04	12.35	4.19
Female	14.39	4.17	37.08	7.29	11.79	1.83	12.14	3.88

Note. SOC = Social Maladjustment Scale, SSRS = Social Support Rating Scale.

The Relationships Among Social Maladjustment, Social Support, Cultural Conflict, and Cultural Distance

Pearson correlation analysis results showed that social maladjustment was negatively correlated with social support ($r = -.35, p < .05$), and positively correlated with cultural distance ($r = .19, p < .05$) and cultural conflict ($r = .22, p < .05$). Social support was negatively correlated with cultural distance ($r = -.25, p < .05$) and cultural conflict ($r = -.21, p < .05$). Moreover, a significant positive correlation was found between cultural conflict and cultural distance ($r = .17, p < .05$).

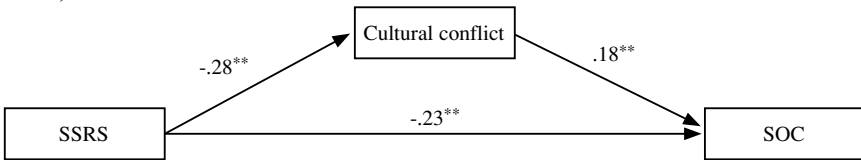


Figure 1. Mediation model for male migrant workers. SOC = Social Maladjustment Scale, SSRS = Social Support Rating Scale. Standardized path coefficients are presented. ** $p < .01$.

Analysis of the unconstrained model for male migrant workers showed that social support negatively predicted cultural conflict ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$) and cultural distance ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$). Cultural conflict positively predicted SOC ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), whereas social support negatively predicted social maladjustment ($\beta = -.21, p < .01$). However, cultural distance was not significantly predictive of social maladjustment. This indicates that cultural distance did not mediate the relationship between social support and social maladjustment. The pathway that cultural distance predicts for social maladjustment was deleted from the unconstrained model for male migrant workers, and the modified model yielded a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 4.307, df = 2, \chi^2/df = 2.154, p > .05, CFI = .964, Akaike$

information criterion (AIC) = 20.307, expected cross-validation index (ECVI) = .084, RMSEA = .069 (see Figure 1). The size of the indirect effect of social support on social maladjustment via cultural conflict was -0.051 ($p < .05$), 95% confidence interval (CI) $[-0.087, -0.015]$.

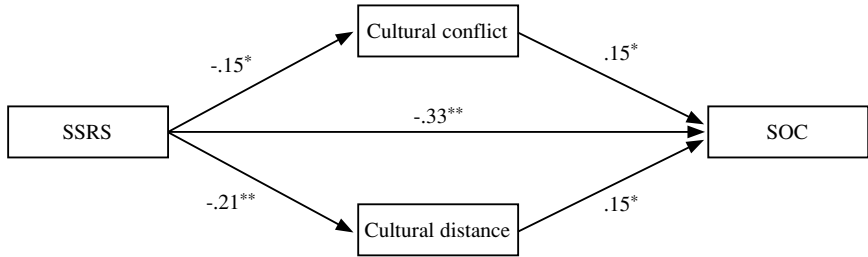


Figure 2. Parallel mediation model for female migrant workers. SOC = Social Maladjustment Scale, SSRS = Social Support Rating Scale. Standardized path coefficients are presented. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The unconstrained model for female migrant workers shows that social support negatively predicted cultural distance and cultural conflict. In addition, social support negatively predicted social maladjustment, whereas cultural distance and cultural conflict positively predicted social maladjustment (see Figure 2). There was also a parallel mediator model with cultural conflict and cultural distance for female migrant workers ($\chi^2 = 2.099$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2/df = 2.099$, $p > .05$, CFI = .968, AIC = 27.099, ECVI = .121, RMSEA = .093). The size of the indirect effect of SSRS \rightarrow cultural conflict \rightarrow SOC was -0.023 ($p < .05$), 95% CI $[-0.043, -0.003]$, and the size of the indirect effect of SSRS \rightarrow cultural distance \rightarrow SOC was -0.032 ($p < .05$), 95% CI $[-0.054, -0.008]$.

Discussion

Researchers of social support and social relationships have implicated gender as an important moderator affecting social integration (Jones-Johnson, DeLisi, Hochstetler, Johnson, & Frishman, 2013; Olson & Shultz, 1994). I found that female migrant workers' SOC scores were higher and their SSRS scores were lower than those of male migrant workers. This might be because Chinese values are still influenced to some extent by the traditional lifestyle of men working outside the home and women looking after the home. Men are more likely to be socially supported when going to the city as migrant workers, whereas the societal preference for women is that they remain in their rural homes; therefore, female migrant workers receive less social support. In another study regarding migrant workers' social support, Xiang (2013) found that the strength of the

social support network for female migrant workers was less than that of their male counterparts, and that women's social support mainly came from their families. It was also reported that women have few means of obtaining other sources of social support, for example from friends, classmates, or colleagues (Xiang, 2013). This could explain my finding that the level of female migrant workers' social maladjustment was significantly higher than that of male migrant workers. Although women migrate to cities in search of work, their employment opportunities are fewer, and their living conditions are relatively more difficult; consequently, they tend to suffer more from employment pressure, loneliness, and social maladjustment (Xiang, 2013).

Notably, I did not find a significant difference in cultural conflict and cultural distance between male and female migrant workers. Moreover, cultural distance significantly mediated the effect of poor social support on maladjustment for female migrant workers, but the path coefficient between cultural distance and social maladjustment was not significant for males. These results indicate that cultural distance mediated the relationship between social support and social maladjustment for female, but not male, migrant workers. Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) believed that cultural distance might reflect the difference between two cultures. Therefore, when female migrant workers leave their rural homes they are isolated from their original social support system. This, in turn, makes them aware of the differences and distance between urban and rural cultures, and thereby increases their social maladjustment. In contrast, although male migrant workers may struggle to adapt to a new urban culture, they tend to be more independent and more likely to believe themselves capable of finding work (Cross & Madson, 1997).

I predicted that if bicultural individuals were able to obtain more social support, they might integrate with their new migrant cultural identity more easily and experience less social maladjustment associated with urban living. Results of the Pearson correlation analysis were generally concordant with my hypothesis. Additionally, I found that cultural conflict mediated the effect of social support on social maladjustment for both male and female migrant workers, and that positive social support played a direct role in reducing social maladjustment among migrant workers of both genders. Previous researchers (e.g., Holahan, Moos, Holahan, & Brennan, 1997) have suggested that social support could promote psychological adjustment, and indirectly affect social maladjustment via elimination of cultural conflict. That is to say, cultural conflict has been found to mediate the relationship between social support and social maladjustment. According to Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005), cultural conflict is related to feelings of being rejected, mistreated, and/or pressured by people of other cultures; however, if migrant workers experience acceptance, support, and feel

included by the urban culture, then they may more easily accept their migrant worker identity and avoid cultural conflicts. Researchers have suggested that positive social support for migrant workers during their intercultural adaptation period could help to increase confidence in their own abilities, activate the need to develop social contacts and partnerships, build a feeling of belonging to the city community (Berekbussunova, 2014), and promote the integration of bicultural identities (Ng, Wang, & Chan, 2017). In the absence of positive social support, a migrant worker is likely to experience conflict from urban–rural cultural differences.

According to the cultural conflict theory, there may be difficulties in the acculturation process when there is disparity between traditional and modern attitudes (Anand & Cochrane, 2005). Increasingly, migrant workers in China are pursuing financial and social status; however, they are not completely disentangled from the hukou and culture of rural areas. Therefore, they face a dual identity dilemma as they are considered both a farmer and an urban worker because of the implementation of the hukou system of strict management of urban and rural household registration. If a migrant worker cannot effectively manage their dual identity or tries to replace their farmer identity with their worker identity, they may experience social maladjustment (Kasongo, 2010). Therefore, improving migrant workers' social adjustment depends on increasing social support and reducing cultural conflict. It is essential that migrant workers receive guidance and training to understand urban cultures and social regulation.

My findings contribute to understanding of the gender differences in migrant workers' social support, BII, and social maladjustment; however, there are several limitations to my study that should be addressed in future research. First, I used a cross-sectional design but there may be other differences among migrant workers from previous generations or different times. Therefore, it would be advantageous to explore the generational differences in migrant workers from a longitudinal perspective. Second, although the research instruments I used have been well validated, their external validity might be influenced by the differences in the level of education of migrant workers. Future researchers should pay attention to the effect of educational level differences on migrant workers' social adjustment. Moreover, there are other factors that influence a person's social adjustment, including language skills, use of social media, and family conflicts (Pan & Yeh, 2015). On the other hand, migrant workers' knowledge, skills, job competencies, and work environment continue to change with the development of society and globalization. Therefore, another important area for future research would be to dynamically explore migrant workers' social adaption and mental health.

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