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# Towards a conceptual understanding of acute cultural adaptation: a preliminary examination of ACA in female swimming

Tatiana V. Ryba [a] , Saara Haapanen [b] , Shwiko Mosek [b] & Kwok Ng [b]

[a] Department of Public Health, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

[b] Department of Sport Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

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# Towards a conceptual understanding of acute cultural adaptation: a preliminary examination of ACA in female swimming

Tatiana V. Ryba[a]*[1], Saara Haapanen[b], Shwiko Mosek[b] and Kwok Ng[b]

[a]*Department of Public Health, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; [b]Department of Sport Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland*

This paper considers a novel approach to researching adaptation in transnational athletes. The first part introduces a conceptualisation of acute cultural adaptation (ACA), which extends the current literature in sport psychology by offering original insights into mechanisms underpinning adaptive processes to a new cultural site during an interim relocation. Rereading a self-determination theory through the lens of cultural epistemology, the proposed theorisation suggests that ACA is realised in everyday practices drawing on a range of material and symbolic cultural resources to satisfy basic psychological needs. The second part of the paper engages the conceptualisation of ACA to make sense of the adaptive processes as experienced by female swimmers from Finland during their training camp in Australia. The study's findings highlight relatedness as a discursive cultural space, offering a starting point for examining the role of culture in psychological functions during short-term relocation.

**Keywords:** cultural psychology; adaptation; basic needs; transnational mobility; training camp

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. (Lyotard, as cited in Urry 2010, p. 347)

The sport migration landscape has expanded over the past two decades (see Bale and Maguire 1994, Chiba *et al.* 2001, Magee and Sugden 2002, Maguire and Falcous 2011). An important caveat in this traction is the marketing of sporting nations as expert cultures. For example, it has become common knowledge that China produces unbeatable divers while Australia is a swimming capital of the world. Globalised sporting culture not only markets desire but also creates opportunities for aspiring athletes (at least from industrialised nations) to access first-rate facilities and coaching expertise located almost anywhere in the world. Indeed, globalisation 'has undoubtedly changed the relationship between time and space' (Maguire and Falcous 2011, p. 4) as elite athletes encounter more opportunities to engage in transcultural exchange, albeit within acute periods of time such as international training camps and competitions.

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*Corresponding author. Email: ryba@sport.au.dk

Despite the fact that the growing rate of athlete mobility and talent migration has been an essential aspect of globalised sports development (Bale and Maguire 1994, Maguire and Falcous 2011), sport researchers paid scant attention to the psychological aspects of corporeal transnational mobilities. The systematic study of adaptation of migrant athletes, for example, is a relatively new area of study in sport psychology, based primarily on the research by Schinke and colleagues. To understand the adaptation experience of elite athletes, Schinke *et al.* (2006) employed Fiske's (2004) core motives of social adaptation to examine the adaptation strategies of Canadian Aboriginal athletes who had relocated from their cultural communities to a large urban area to pursue careers in elite sports. The researchers identified two higher order types of adaptation: self-adaptation and adaptation to environment. The latter category referred to the Indigenous athletes' attempts to 'culturally' modify their environment by seeking cross-cultural understanding, peer acceptance and culturally relevant social support. More recently, Schinke *et al.* (2007) considered archival data concerning the National Hockey League (NHL) athletes from different regions and cultures including mainstream Canadian, Canadian Aboriginal and European in an attempt to study the amateur and professional athletes' adjustment strategies during career transitions. Adaptation was inferred based on athletes' quotes in newspaper articles. Though all three groups of athletes employed adaptation strategies that supported the five core motives of belonging, understanding, controlling, self-enhancement and trusting proposed by Fiske (2004), the Canadian Aboriginal and European athletes were also found to employ strategies that reflected cultural adaptations. For instance, the cultural migrants often sought diets unique to their culture and tended to develop close ties with their cultural communities. The capacity to create a daily environment that integrated the athletes' cultural practices facilitated all five core motives concurrently and also long-term sport persistence within North American mainstream sporting contexts. Several studies that followed (e.g. Battochio *et al.* 2010, Schinke *et al.* 2010) used a similar approach and corroborated results obtained in earlier research.

In addition, Campbell and Sonn (2009) examined relocation experiences of Aboriginal footballers who moved from their Indigenous communities to play in the Australian Football League. The identified major themes were culture shock, racism and social support: the first two themes served as barriers to adaptation while the latter one facilitated Indigenous players' adjustment to the new cultural context. These findings are comparable to the experiences of Canadian Aboriginal athletes (Schinke *et al.* 2006, 2007).

The focus of the aforementioned studies was on long-term cultural adaptation, highlighting cognitive-behavioural strategies of adaptation. There is a scarcity of research that examines the psychological underpinnings of short-term adaptation to a new cultural context, termed acute cultural adaptation (ACA). The purpose of this research was to explore ACA in female Finnish swimmers, who took part in a three-week intensive training camp in New South Wales, Australia. Since the athletes' key motive for the short-term relocation was to advance their training, we posited that a motivational, self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci 2000) would offer a more relevant framework for the study than Fiske's (2004) social adaptation theory. SDT focuses on the effects of self-determination on behaviour and well-being. Ryan and Deci proposed that self-determination can be enabled or hindered by environment and is based on the achievement of basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness. Hence, we were interested in

mapping the adaptation process as it had unfolded for the female swimmers to fulfil basic psychological needs. In the process of attaining the needs, swimmers were learning about their new environment as well. By engaging SDT, we attempted to account for both psychological and sociocultural aspects of athletes' adjustment to the cultural site. In the following sections, a conceptual framework for understanding acute adaptive processes in a new cultural context is outlined. Then we explicate the proposed framework via the examination of ACA in female Finnish swimmers.

## Theorising ACA

> The contemporary scientific conception of space-time ... is quite inadequate as an idea to describe human habitation. Human beings inhabit places rather than occupy spaces ... Place is what human beings make of space and time, and it is that making which is of present interest. It is the subjectification of space and time, but a subjectification that has its roots in collective cultural achievements ... (Benson 2001, p. 7)

Following an extensive literature analysis of the multiple meanings of cultural adaptation, which are contextually contained within a certain sociocultural positioning, we reject linear psychological models that claim that all immigrants undergo a universal psychological process of acculturation and adaptation. In cross-cultural psychology, cultural adaptation is often referred to as sociocultural adaptation and is usually studied within the Berry's acculturation model (Berry 1980, 1985). The acculturation model is a fourfold classification of strategies that individuals use in response to stress-inducing new cultural contexts. The acculturation strategies include assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. Adopting the universalist perspective, Berry and colleagues emphasised that the 'psychological processes that operate during acculturation are essentially same' for all individuals (Berry and Sam 1997, p. 296). Adaptation is understood as a successful mastery of the host environment as evident by the two conceptually distinct outcomes: psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation (Ward and Kennedy 1999, Ward 2001). Psychological adaptation refers to the feeling of well-being and mental health while sociocultural adaptation emphasises the ability to 'fit in' and become culturally fluent in a new context (Ward and Kennedy 1999).

Whereas the focus of this theorising is on psychological adaptation, we re-articulate the psychological processes as culturally constituted. The teasing out of the relationship between human psyche and sociocultural context, the way they 'dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up' (Shweder 1990, p. 1), has been a focal point of intellectual explorations for cultural psychologists since the appearance of early works by Lev Vygotsky and Margaret Mead. Conceiving culture as the inherent core of human psychological functions separates cultural psychology from cross-cultural psychology where culture is an external entity, having an effect on emotion, cognition and behaviour. The theorised interdependence of psychological and cultural is also a foundational assumption of the ACA framework that views 'universal' psychological concepts as potentialities or tendencies contingent upon sociocultural context. From an ACA perspective, the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are

'basic' in so far as they support psychological well-being. Yet these constructs are hardly 'universal' (i.e. underpinned by the same processes), as the ways in which need satisfaction is realised are culture specific, reflecting conceptual beliefs about the person and the world – beliefs which are embedded in local practices.

To give an example relevant to this discussion, there is an established relationship between parenting and the development of children's motivation and many related concepts, including self-efficacy, self-determination and self-regulation. In a recent study of parenting among Inuit urban migrants by McShane *et al.* (2009), the themes of autonomy and relatedness emerged as essential constructs. Constructed as polarised universal basic needs in western psychology, however, these constructs could not contribute to the understanding of Inuit's view that humans can act autonomously while being attached to one another. The authors proposed to locate autonomy and relatedness in an inclusive relationship, in which the constructs could be discussed as agency and interpersonal distance, respectively.

Indeed, while the need for relatedness and the need for autonomy might appear to act as mutually exclusive forces in the everlasting struggle between security and freedom, it is the constitutive dynamics of the needs that brings about psychological functioning afforded by a particular context. To understand the process of ACA, we argue, would require transgressing the binary logic of 'either/or' and untangling the cultural meanings inscribed on the embodied psyche, as they enter the dynamic system of a new cultural context. Responding to the call in cultural psychology to shift theorising from causality to the non-linear complexity of the phenomena (see Valsiner 2004, 2009), we approach adaptation as the negotiated process. Rather than framing adaptation as 'achieved' in terms of either psychological well-being or sociocultural proficiency, we propose the understanding of acute adaptation as continuous negotiation between maintaining a psychological homeostasis, predicated on need satisfaction, and engagement in sociocultural everyday practices of the host site.

The training camp was a good site to examine the psychological complexity of short-term cultural adaptation. The camp was also a relevant site to apply SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000), as it was fair to assume that elite Finnish swimmers had been motivated to concentrate on training under expert guidance in Australia. To have a positive training experience, athletes must be active in engaging with a new context (training or other) to make themselves 'feel at home' in their new surroundings. For the reason that a psychologically successful transition to a new environment requires a fairly rapid attainment (or re-attainment) of the basic needs, we theorised that the process of ACA is underpinned by the satisfaction of psychological needs. A short duration of the camp intensifies a dynamic interaction of aspects typically studied within SDT, namely self-regulation, psychological wellbeing and environmental influences. On the one hand, the athletes' focus on training makes the experience of being in another cultural context less important. On the other hand, sports are embedded in the sociocultural structural matrices, which shape playing style, training routine and coach–athlete interaction. These sociocultural underpinnings of sport development can pose unforeseen adaptation challenges for migrant athletes, making the proposed ACA framework promising for understanding mechanisms of short-term cultural adaptation.

## Methodology and methods

In this research, ACA was conceptualised as a process of negotiation between maintaining a psychological homeostasis, predicated on need satisfaction, and engagement in sociocultural practices of the host site. Methodologically this study was located within an interpretivist epistemological paradigm. In order not to stifle creativity and to explore 'familiar' concepts and issues in new ways, the methods utilised were driven by non-foundationalism. According to Sparkes and Smith (2009), non-foundational research approaches embrace questions of an epistemological nature in judging the processes and outcomes of research rather than relying solely on the application of methods.

### *Participants and data collection*

The study included six elite female swimmers[2] (*M* age = 20.5 years, SD = 3.09, range = 17–26) from Finland, who train and compete at national and international levels. At the time of interview, the swimmers had recently returned from a distance-training camp. The Finnish coach organised the training trip and travelled with the team to Australia. However, the swimmers were trained by an Australian coach during the training camp. All participants were native Finnish speakers with English as a second language. The participants have been swimming for an average of 12 years, and usually travel outside of Finland for competition and/or training about six times per year.

Support of the head coach was secured who encouraged the athletes to participate in the study. The head coach distributed a sign-up sheet and the willing participants were then contacted via email. All swimmers but one, who went to Australia, agreed to take part in the study. Once athletes accepted the invitation, individual 60 min interviews were set up. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about their rights and asked to sign a consent form. Pseudonyms for each swimmer were used throughout the study to assist confidentiality.

We conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews directed by an interview guide. The interview guide was developed based on the ACA conceptual framework and previous research about adaptation in elite sports (e.g. Schinke *et al.* 2006, 2007). To tap into the negotiated dynamics of the psychological and the sociocultural aspects of acute adaptation, open-ended questions focused on: (a) the training environment; (b) coach–athlete and team relationships; (c) the new cultural context; (d) strategies used by the swimmers to maintain a sense of well-being; (e) strategies used to maintain motivation and (f) potential changes in swimmers. The interview guide provided a framework for the interviewer–participant interaction while remaining porous to topics or factors not necessarily brought up by the interviewer. Probing questions (i.e. detailed, elaboration and clarification probes, Patton 2002) elicited additional description, clarification and explanation of female athletes' experiences.

A pilot interview was conducted to fine-tune the interview guide. It was also important for an interviewer (Saara) to gain confidence in conducting interviews followed by an opportunity to discuss her interviewing experience with Tatiana. The pilot interview was of acceptable quality and was included in data analysis due to the small number of participating athletes. Using feedback from the pilot study, we decided to allow the use of Finnish in the interview process in order to facilitate the expression of the athletes. Interview questions were kept in English; however

participants were free to respond both in English or Finnish. Saara, the only bilingual (i.e. English and Finnish) member of the group, conducted the interviews. Being fluent in both languages, she provided more flexibility in our conduction of the interviews, which allowed us to gain a better understanding of the swimmers' experiences of ACA.

### Data analysis

Following the interviews, Saara translated the Finnish audio recordings into English. The research team then transcribed English audio-recorded files verbatim. Computer software Atlas TI was used to organise the generated data.

The analytic procedure involved a succession of inductive and deductive processes, which may be described as abductive. Abductive reasoning involves a dialectical movement between everyday meanings and theoretical explanations, acknowledging the creative process of interpretation when applying a theoretical framework to participants' experiences (see also Atkinson and Delamont 2005, Taylor *et al.* 2009). Such a procedure was followed because the aims of the study were to understand what processes constituted ACA for the swimmers (inductive) and to establish whether the swimmers' experiences could be understood through the SDT-based psychological needs (deductive). Abductive analysis is also consistent with non-foundationalism that conceives credibility in terms of coherence and plausibility of research findings (Tracy 2010).

As a first step, the transcripts were subjected to a qualitative content analysis in which excerpts from the transcripts were inductively segmented into raw themes. The raw themes were collected as quotes expressing specific subjective experiences (Biddle *et al.* 2001, Patton 2002). During this process, initial coding was made by outlining preliminary connections between the SDT-related theoretical concepts and the lived experience of ACA.

Next, the raw themes were deductively categorised into one of the SDT-based psychological needs. As noted, we purposefully adopted the lens of SDT in our analysis of the athletes' lived experiences. Three researchers individually conducted the content analysis of interview data and presented their emerging findings to the research group on a weekly basis. The purpose of these individual presentations and group discussions, in addition to comparing the codings across researchers, was to explore various interpretations of data. Each member of the group, by virtue of being either an international student or a nomadic scholar, was penetrated by the phenomena we were investigating. Raised in different cultures, moreover, we have different life experiences that shaped our existential understanding of the processes underpinning need satisfaction.

An important aspect of these multivocal dialogic sessions was reaching a sharable language (Ryba 2009), which is different from an attempt to reach a consensus on what interpretation is 'correct' in order to obtain inter-subjective reliability. In a recent criticism of reductionism and the focus on the individual as the source of psychological experiences, Moghaddam (2010, p. 466) proposed inter-subjectivity as an understanding 'that is to some extend shared' and collaboratively constructed in order to communicate with other individuals. Most developmental psychologists pay lip service to the context, treating inter-subjectivity as a problem that 'demands a research solution' (Ibid.). It would appear that by reducing multidimensionalities of the lived experience to a consensual interpretation akin to truth-as-

correspondence (Sparkes 1998), inter-subjective reliability was a positivist solution to inter-subjectivity. Our search for a sharable language during the meetings was a process of bridging diverse psychological worlds that would allow for deepening the dialogue and opening it to new possibilities of meaning.

Throughout the contextual interactions among researchers, data, theory and method, a significant emphasis was made on maintaining an epistemologically reflexive stance. This was especially pertinent to Tatiana's role as the research facilitator. As defined by Schwandt (1997, p. 136), reflexivity includes 'examining one's personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as resources for generating particular data, for behaving in particular ways ... and for developing particular interpretations'. The use of a modernist SDT was in an epistemological antinomy with the basic philosophical assumptions of cultural psychology. Therefore, in the process of connecting the participants' raw experiences with theoretical concepts outlined by SDT, it was crucial to deconstruct 'obvious' expressions of the needs according to the ACA theoretical concerns. To maintain epistemological reflexivity, Tatiana attempted to keep track of two simultaneous research processes: one into construction of a problem (What information warrants further exploration?) and the other into the self (What epistemological and theoretical commitments shape my understanding and interpretation of the problem?). At this phase, it was Tatiana who had to make a defendable case for her analysis of the processes through which psychological need satisfaction was realised for the Finnish swimmers during their acute adaptation period in Australia. While acknowledging that other interpretations are possible and that our analytical insights are not generalisable to all elite female swimmers from Finland, the results that follow can be accepted as credible (see also Taylor *et al.* 2009, Tracy 2010).

## Results and discussion

The results of the qualitative analysis offered novel insights into the negotiated dynamics of ACA in female athletes. Participants maintained their psychological well-being by negotiating everyday practices in such a way that their engagement with the new cultural context was in a synergetic interdependency with the team that gave them a sense of security and reassured stability. The analysis of the lived experience of ACA supported our theory that acute adaptation is a mediated process realised in everyday practices to satisfy the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. In the analytical description of the basic needs that follows, we focused on highlighting specific processes that suggest how adaptation was experienced by the Finnish swimmers. Quotes from the interviews are expressed in single quotes, followed by a pseudonym.

### *Autonomy*

The training camp was very structured, 'everything always happened at the same time ... now we are going to sleep, now we are taking a nap, now we are going to train ... it was like this, so we were very scheduled' (Tarja). When asked about free time, Sinikka was quite sarcastic, 'free time meant sleeping and eating'. Nevertheless, due to the nature of the trip, the swimmers seemed to enjoy the strict structure of the training environment which provided them with the possibility to concentrate on swimming and be both challenged and motivated, '... all we had to

do was swim. We didn't have to think about anything. That was really nice. When you can actually train hard and are pleased with it, you go forth full-heartedly' (Sari). While Maarit felt she quickly adapted to the training schedule, 'I actually fit in there very well', Tarja at the beginning 'wasn't sure whether it suited her'. As the camp progressed, Tarja grew to appreciate the experience, 'I learned I still want to swim, I want to continue learning to swim, and that I can swim … I just need the time to train'.

Finnish team was impressed with the pool facilities in Australia. Aino, Maarit, Sinikka and Tarja gave a detailed description of the spacious pool with 'lots of training tools and all those fancy things' (Aino). As Maarit summarised,

> they had everything there, they had video cameras that went under the water and then on top of the water, and all these things like swimming accessories, such as this thing that has weights on it, you strap it on you and then you can swim with weights for resistance, and all these just swimming tools and accessories, and just huge amounts of room.

Yet the Finnish athletes did not seem to have easy access to the equipment, 'We didn't really have that much space and it was made kind of difficult because of course we didn't have everything along with us, like our fins and accessories we need' (Aino). Although the training environment per se was not supportive of self-determination, the female swimmers were excited about the opportunity to train in the Olympic pool and observe training of some world-class athletes.

Furthermore, the Australian coach appeared to hinder autonomy within the training environment, with no real attempts to adjust his coaching behaviour or style to welcome the new athletes,

> He kind of took us into his group but not really, he did not really care about us that much … we kind of had to decide on ourselves what are we going to swim now, or look around and see what we are doing or ask other people who know what we have to swim. It was kind of like that. (Maarit)

In addition, the Finnish swimmers did not feel they could interact with the host coach. On the one hand, all participants but Sari stated that one of the main obstacles was the language barrier. On the other hand, according to Tarja, in the camp there was a 'separation between swimmers and the coach', while in Finland the situation is 'different because swimmers can interact with the coach, every now and then one can go and talk to the coach'.

The participants were making sense of their experiences through multiple comparisons of 'here' and 'there', 'us' and 'them', 'before' and 'after' the trip and used different approaches to maintain their feelings of self-determination. Aino emphasised agency and common sense attitude in her 'positive self-talk' kind of narrative,

> you need to be active yourself, especially if you're a new person in the group … if you don't understand something, and of course they are going to understand that you don't understand, it's reasonable, you're new, how are you suppose to know everything? You shouldn't think of it as a bad thing, you just need to be active in asking questions if you don't understand something … that's what you have to do … if you're not going to ask, they're not going to come to tell you, just be active yourself and try, even if you're having language difficulties or something like that.

Raili and Maarit felt they did not have to do anything special because they are good in adapting and do not stress out when going into a new environment. Similarly, Sari had no difficulties adjusting to the site crediting her experience of living one year in an English-speaking country prior to the trip to Australia. While Tarja also suggested that she had not used any strategies to make herself feel more at home in the pool, in our analysis Tarja's self-regulation focused on not comparing herself with others and internalising own reasons for training,

> I swim at my own pace, and do my own thing, with that comes the feeling of being at home. I don't try too hard to stay too close to the other swimmers. I gave myself the permission not to keep up with them. (Tarja)

The swimmers often reflected on differences in the training environments and coaching. 'It is individual coaching (in Finland) and in Australia, you're put in a group of people who are swimming the same thing' (Sinikka). By taking part in new training practices, Sinikka learned to take her teammates 'more into consideration, because I am spending time with them all the time, and not only concentrate on (her)self'. Team relatedness as a means of attaining the need of autonomy was expressed by all swimmers and will be addressed separately.

While female athletes within the Finnish team negotiated attainment and re-attainment of autonomy throughout their training, the host team seemed to have a deficient for the need. The Australian swimmers were not able to have free expression and choice in what they were doing, which was perceived by the Finnish swimmers as external motives for participation, including fears of being dropped to a lower training group, and the feeling of being controlled, '... in their group, if you don't keep up, you drop to a lower group, so I think everyone there just keeps up because they don't want to get dropped' (Aino). For the Finnish swimmers, the lack of autonomy within the Australian team was not seen as a negative aspect of the training camp. Rather it seemed to drive the female swimmers towards a stronger connection as a group. This rekindled team dynamic provided the opportunity to reflect as a group on their own training they receive back home. The camp environment was controlled and less autonomous, but the swimmers were still driven towards autonomy by being able to: (1) realise the differences, (2) accept the difference and (3) adapt through integration. Integration was attained by developing their own personal resources for taking on adaptive and autonomous regulations of their behaviour (Deci and Ryan 2000) through internalising their *own* reasons for being there to swim (and not comparing themselves to the Australians). In so doing, the female athletes maintained high levels of motivation and did not allow the unsupportive camp environment have a negative impact on their adaptation process.

Despite some setbacks, the swimmers thrived in the new cultural context. Through internalising the experience and making it an individual challenge, the swimmers kept their levels of autonomy high, which in turn aided in their overall positive experience. Since the female athletes prevailed with their feelings of autonomy in an environment that was so unsupportive of the need, we suggest that this is indicative of the ACA process. In the context of an interim training camp, due to awareness of the trip's short span and the motivation to move forward positively with training, ACA appeared to be facilitated by the ability to either ignore or swiftly overcome negative aspects that would normally thwart feelings of autonomy.

### *Competence*

Adaptation to the new environment was a process that became easier for the swimmers as their perceived competence of social and training norms improved,

> you start to adapt, and it starts to get easier once you understood how they were swimming and the ways they would swim. At the beginning it went totally wrong . . . but then you get the hang of it and you try to do what they're doing so . . . it helps you to get motivated. (Aino)

Through learning how things were done in the new training environment, the swimmers were overcoming competence difficulties – 'really quickly we get to learn' even though 'at the beginning it was hard' (Raili).

   It was through the acute adaptation process that the need for competence, in and out of the pool, became more established. Aino reflected, for example, that the host coach 'was very systematic but one-sided in giving directions . . . he didn't really explain individual little things . . . he just wrote the programme or the schedule on the board, and you were expected to do it'. The Finnish swimmers did not know abbreviations the coach used nor the training routine, and had to create mechanisms to help them deal with competence difficulties. By 'just asking, what's this, what's that . . . and then we understand' (Sinikka), by permitting themselves to make mistakes (for example, in their English or in daily training customs) or by mobilising collective 'know how' of the teammates, the participants gained better understanding of the way things were different through first-hand experiences and engaged more freely in daily practices.

   Initially it may seem that the needs, especially competence and relatedness, would be thwarted due to the lack of integration with the Australian swimmers.

> If you try and say to them, 'oh this is a hard training', they don't really answer . . . that was a little difficult. There, the culture is more sticking to the schedule and training, school and that's it, no time for anything else. (Tarja)

Acknowledging that the Australian swimmers *trained very hard* allowed the Finnish team to 'train hard with them . . . they are on a higher level and you just have to try and keep up with them' (Sari). Of course, as Maarit confessed, at times it felt like 'we were swimming kind of behind them because they train so hard . . . I mean some people didn't get to swim everything because they couldn't keep up with the Australians'. Training with the Australian team permitted the female swimmers 'to actually see how hard the training is in Australia' (Sinikka) and 'to understand that some of the swimming is not always at the same level' (Sari). The participants admitted that the training was difficult, but were not discouraged and their competence was not jeopardised because the learning process played a large role in the attainment of the need.

   Just as ACA was comprised of processes that were unfolding on and off the sporting field, the need for competence was realised both in training and mundane everyday. Outside of the training situation, when swimmers 'didn't know where we were going, we just stood there with our map' (Aino), no fear or lack of competence seemed to be present on the surface when analysing their experience. The participants did express both autonomy and competence and used the people around them as resources, 'you could approach anyone in the street and ask for directions

right away' (Maarit). Similarly, Raili felt she had no communication problem in everyday life due to people's 'kindness ... when I was walking in the morning to swimming pool, almost every person who I saw said good morning and even though I did not know them'.

It should be stated nevertheless that to 'show no fear' and to be strong and stubborn instead ('sisu' in Finnish) is at the core of Finnishness. Asking for directions may seem rather minor to someone who is not familiar with the Finnish culture. All female athletes reflected that they would never talk to strangers in Finland, but in Australia it was the societal norm so they were more inclined to take part and actually engage in 'hellos' or share smiles with strangers on the street. It can be assumed that the swimmers experienced anxiety about their social norms and language competencies because when reflecting upon what they would do differently if they returned, most replied, *be braver*, suggesting that they held back somewhat in their exchanges with the new site, although they did not want to show it.

The attainment of sports competence as well as sociocultural competence was evolving throughout the training trip while the learning process in itself was part of the adaptation experience. The unfolding sociocultural dynamic was exemplified by Sari,

> I got to be translator a lot of times. When we went to Subway, I always had to stand there with them (teammates) and say 'cucumber, salad and all that' ... one of my friends at the beginning, one that I hang out with all the time, she didn't really want to go up to a cashier or do anything by herself, but in the end, she did way better and didn't ask me to go with her.

Moreover, the athletes admitted they got in better physical shape and became more motivated to swim due to training in Australia.

Given that the swimmers felt their other needs were satisfied, they had the ability to allow their competence to develop throughout the training trip. Similar to Fiske's (2004) adaptation strategy of understanding, reported by Schinke and colleagues (2006, 2007), learning and understanding both the training tasks and the social norms of the new cultural site enhanced feelings of competence that, in turn, supported self-determination in the group of female swimmers.

### *Relatedness*

As discussed, the needs of autonomy and competence were negotiated throughout the training trip. The attainment of the needs for the female swimmers was facilitated through the team relatedness. The ACA process seemed to be driven by the Finnish swimmers' strong team dynamic, which carried and enhanced their overall positive training experience.

Within this sample of female athletes, relatedness evolved in two different directions. A recharged team dynamic was created as well as a 'lack of relatedness' feeling with the Australian natives. As an example of the latter, communication difficulties existed between the Finnish swimmers and their host coach, as athletes felt they were 'just left to see what the other swimmers were doing' (Raili) in an attempt to understand the coach's instructions. Finnish swimmers found it difficult 'to understand the (training) programme and the coaching ... the coach kept speaking very quickly, and he didn't consider that maybe he should slow down for us, he just kept speaking ... as if he were speaking to his athletes' which made the Finn-

ish athletes feel 'a little taken aback, that he wasn't willing to change the way he was coaching for us' (Sari). On the other hand, the Australian coach treated the Finnish team 'very differently' from his team.

> He gave us sweet coaching ... he would tell us 'good, good, you're doing good' and to his own swimmers he would scream and yell at them 'go harder, train harder, and you guys don't know how to swim, do it again' ... we were kinda lost. (Tarja)

This lack of relatedness did not only exist with the coach, it was also present among the host swimmers, 'at the beginning they didn't talk at all' ... 'then it (was) kind of fake friendliness ... they didn't really accepted us or invited us anywhere' (Maarit). Reflecting on their experiences during the interview, the female athletes acknowledged that 'if they (the host team) would have been more willing and open to talk to us ... we would have been more relaxed ourselves, it would have been easier' (Aino).

The lack of integration and relatedness with the Australian group facilitated the development of stronger connection within the Finnish team. It required the Finnish athletes to rely more on each other, which resulted in 'really getting to know each other better' (Sari). The athletes believed that 'having my team there made it a lot easier' (Maarit). Many barriers were overcome due to having supportive teammates. 'It was much easier (with my team there) because I still have the language barrier so I don't think I would have got alone anywhere' with 'more opportunities if the team is there with you' (Aino). Through their strong relatedness the team developed a very solid base to express the needs of autonomy and competence in a rather unsupportive training environment.

Many of the swimmers felt that the closeness of the team contributed to their feelings of being comfortable in the new context. 'It makes you feel safer to be there with them', making the transition, 'easier to train just because you know these people and you are close to them' (Sinikka). Having a safe environment within their own team enabled female athletes to branch out more than they would have if they were alone, allowing them to engage in behaviours out of their own choice. When the swimmers referred to their teammates, it was made clear that everyone relied on each other for support, 'I would have never made it by myself' (Maarit).

Outside of the pool in situations dealing with the public, the relatedness within the team served as a proficiency check, '... we could check with our teammates first to make sure we were going to ask the proper question' (Tarja), aiding to their feelings of competence. This also reinforced swimmers' confidence to 'be brave enough to go and actually say it like that to someone' (Tarja), which also functioned as a fulfilment of the need for autonomy. In many instances, all three needs were satisfied in a dynamic synergy through the sociocultural engagements, 'if I had a question, they (teammates) could tell me if I got it right or not' (relatedness as a competence check) while exhibiting autonomous thoughts 'often I have it in my head, I know what I want to ask or say', which were followed by conscious decisions to go and 'say it'. Thus, relatedness supplied the team members with boosts of self-confidence and aided in their overall competence, leading them to acquire vital skills to function in the Australian society, which in turn supported individual autonomy.

The training trip evolved into more than just training, 'I think we have a better team dynamic, we know each other better' (Sari). Relatedness not only served as the base for ACA but allowed for an even stronger team dynamic to develop, through more daily out of pool contact, 'we spend more time together' (Sinikka), and shared experiences. When the participants were asked whether they noticed any changes in themselves and/or their teammates, it seemed that throughout their camp experience, 'the biggest change (was) I got to know people that I really didn't know before' (Raili) and her teammates are 'like new people for me now'. In addition, the 'communication has gotten better, it's like new communication that was never there before after this trip, the team environment is a lot better' (Aino). Although the goal for the training trip was to increase swimming performance, the female athletes have developed valuable other factors as well.

The majority of previous self-determination research (e.g. Ryan *et al.* 1997, Chirkov *et al.* 2003) suggested that the needs for autonomy and competence serve as the primary function to predict social circumstances and task characteristics that will enhance intrinsic motivation and maintain feelings of well-being. This did not seem to be the case in the current study as relatedness was the driving force, which allowed the other basic psychological needs to be met. The swimmers expressed that their overall experience in the training camp was very positive, suggesting smooth transitioning into their new surroundings. It was through relatedness that the athletes began the process of need integration in the new cultural context. Relatedness with non-Finnish swimmers may have been thwarted because the feelings of autonomy and competence were not leading the process. This is an interesting finding which seemed to occur as an adaptation strategy due to the specific circumstances of the situation.

## Empirical insights into ACA

From the discursive psychological perspective, culture is a resource that enables psychological functioning (Murakami in press). Hence, it was proposed that acute adaptation is realised in everyday practices drawing on a range of material and symbolic cultural resources to satisfy the basic psychological needs to maintain psychological well-being. In light of this proposition, team relatedness emerged as a discursive cultural space that played a mediating role in ACA. In this research, we conceptualised cultural space as a discursive site in and through which intercultural experiences acquired meaning. Cultural space is discursive as it is produced through language and practices. The swimmers constructed their cultural space largely (but not exclusively) by means of relatedness. The discursive cultural space played an important role in providing pre-constituted 'experiencings' of the new cultural context and reconstructing meanings by highlighting what practices were to be negotiated.

In our analysis, ACA was mediated on two levels. First, team relatedness was the mediating space between individual swimmer and new cultural context, which meant that there was no absolute immersion with the context. The swimmers negotiated the extent of their sociocultural engagements and appeared to use their cultural space to retreat to Finnishness when dealings with the host environment became overwhelming. Significantly, the female athletes maintained a sense of belonging to Finnish society extending their discursive connections to the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) through shared cultural practices. This was especially

evident when they produced a Finnish Christmas in Australia. The participants engaged in the 'subjectification of space and time' (Benson 2001, p. 7) by implementing traditional Finnish Christmas customs, such as making 'Joulutorttu' (Christmas tarts) and rice pudding without the proper ingredients. 'We made joulutorttu and ginger bread cookies, and decorated them ... We had our own Finnish Christmas there and tried to make it feel like home Christmas. Then we bought presents for each other' (Maarit). Aino also emphasised the importance of 'Finnish Christmas traditions' as she stated,

> it was good to be with the girls and remember what we'd be doing right now if we were at home for Christmas so then we would share experiences and make it feel like all the stuff was like Christmas, but of course you want to be at home for Christmas.

Invoking cultural meanings seemed to reinforce their 'belongingness' to Finnish culture in general and the Finnish team in particular, and likely reminded swimmers about the interim nature of their relocation.

Second, team relatedness created a system that regulated exchanges between swimmer and context. The needs for autonomy and competence were primarily attained through the web of team relatedness. In line with the study by McShane *et al.* (2009), autonomy and relatedness in this sample of athletes constituted an inclusive relationship in so far as team security afforded individual agency in the new cultural context, expressed in autonomous acts. This research supported our conceptualisation of ACA as a negotiated process realised in a non-linear, sometimes messy, manner.

This study has also highlighted the subtle fluidity of adaptive processes. The female participants were certain their subjectivity was not shaped by the lived experience of ACA. Yet, the swimmers expressed confidence that they would be prepared for the culture when asked what it would be like if they returned to Australia. 'It would be easier of course' (Raili). In the following extract, Maarit exemplifies this contradiction:

> Saara: Have you seen any changes in yourself? Or what kind of changes have you seen in yourself?
> Maarit: I do not really know. I don't think I changed at all.
> Saara: If you go back again, do you think it would be easy?
> Maarit: Yeah, you already know what to expect. Especially now if I would go to the same group to train, I would know, because they swim often the same thing, so you know what to expect, what to swim.

Similarly, Aino offered an interesting insight by stating,

> well of course you know how things work there ... but the language, here I don't like to speak English at all, but there you don't even think about it, you just do it, you just try and you do it, and it seems there you don't even think about it while here I feel like everyone is listening to me carefully so, it's weird because there you don't stress about it, speaking.

Furthermore, Sinikka suggested adaptation was a process of 'getting used to it' but she could not say what she had to do to adapt.

> At the beginning it was weird and it was different but then you quickly get used to it
> ... when you get to swim with the other team and finally you get used to it, you
> switch to another pool and then it is the same thing – you need to get used to it. You
> adapt to it very quickly but I don't know what I did to adapt.

Refocusing the study of adaptation on processes rather than outcomes is a starting point for developing a more nuanced understanding of cultural adaption and will require an array of qualitative methodologies to further this area of study. Nevertheless, difficult questions remain. The methodological challenge of developing rigorous research methods for the study of adaptation is certainly closely tied to the conceptual one. Using the ACA framework as a theoretical reference, this study extends the current adaptation literature by presenting an extensive account of the role of relatedness, which is clearly an emotionally charged need, in acute adaptive processes. Previous research emphasised cognitive-behavioural aspects of adaptation associated more or less with the learning outcomes in new cultural environment. Premising our argument on the idea that 'social relations are lived through the emotions' (Anderson and Smith 2001, p. 9), we suggest developing an understanding of adaptation through 'felt sense' in addition to 'know how' in the process of untangling the mutually constitutive dynamics of subjective psychological worlds and cultural contexts.

A metaphorical expression of ACA as the 'subjectification (of space and time) that has its roots in collective cultural achievements' (Benson 2001, p. 7) certainly reminds about the anthropological notion of cultural adaptation. Culture in that sense is the main mechanism of human adaptation to natural habitats. From the point of view of cultural anthropology, cultural adaptations are achieved by the social group. The group constructs the culture; and it is the culture that serves as a vehicle of evolutionary change in humans (Cohen 1974). It is quite remarkable, but perhaps not surprising in the afterthought that team relatedness as the discursive cultural space mediated adaptive processes in Finnish swimmers during the training camp in Australia.

## Conclusion and future research

In this paper, a conceptual framework for understanding the psychological underpinnings of cultural adaptation has been developed. Within the ACA framework, adaptation is viewed as a dynamic process of negotiation between maintaining a psychological homeostasis and engagement in sociocultural practices of the host site. By shifting our focus from fixed stages towards processes, we problematise the universalist approach to cultural adaptation and highlight the role of discursive culture in adaptive processes. While our exploratory analysis of ACA is based on limited data, this research has important theoretical implications for future research in this area.

First, the proposed view of cultural adaptation as negotiation encourages researchers to account for the psychological and the sociocultural aspects of adaptive processes. In relation to previous research, it would appear that there are differences in lived experiences of athletes who move to a new culture for an extended period of time (e.g. Schinke *et al.*'s studies) vs. those who spend only a few weeks in the new culture (i.e. this study). While it is possible that acute adaptation is primarily driven by affective processes and long-term adaptation by cognitive processes, it is also clear that both psychological and sociocultural

adjustments play a constitutive role in the lived experience of adaptation. Further research is needed to understand these dynamics in relation to time spent in new cultural context. An international competition, as an intensified site of transcultural exchange, might be the preferred site for testing and developing further the ACA framework.

Second, this study has offered a notion of discursive cultural space as an important mechanism of cultural adaptation. An extensive and multifaceted further research is needed to shed light on specific issues concerning the regulating role of culture in psychological well-being during the engagement with new context. The specific issues might include the consideration of gendered and culture-specific meanings of ACA as well as the focus on an individual vs. group construction of cultural space in the transcultural exchange.

Third, the focus of this study was on one-way cultural adaptation of Finnish athletes to the Australian context. While it appeared that the host team and coach did not make any adjustments to facilitate adaptive processes of the Finnish swimmers, it would have been interesting to examine cultural adaptation as a two-way synergetic process, unfolding for both visiting and hosting teams. The concept of discursive cultural space might be essential in developing a framework for future research examining the two-way dynamics of ACA. In addition, more research across variety of cultures is needed.

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## Notes

1. The research was conducted as part of a research-training module at the University of Jyväskylä. The students participated, to a varying degree, in data collection and analysis. All of them were required to practise applying analytical procedures to the interview data. I assume full responsibility for the study's theoretical and methodological frameworks.
2. One male swimmer was also interviewed, but his data were omitted from the study to avoid generalisation across genders. This decision was due to noticeable differences in the experience of ACA between the male and females that may be addressed in future studies.

## Notes on contributors

Tatiana V. Ryba is an associate professor of sport psychology at Aarhus University, Denmark and a docent of cultural sport and exercise psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her current research focuses on issues of transnationality, mobile identity, career transitions and cultural adaptation in and through sport. She is an editor (with Robert Schinke and Gershon Tenenbaum) of a book entitled '*The cultural turn in sport psychology*' and the forthcoming book with Routledge '*Athletes' careers across cultures*' (with Natalia Stambulova).

Saara Haapanen, Shwiko Mosek and Kwok Ng are former students of the International Master's in Sport and Exercise Psychology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

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