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"Believing is adapting": Belief in a Just World and Emigrants' Identification and Satisfaction with the Host Country

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Abstract

In an era in which Europe experiences a new wave of emigration as a result of the economic crisis, it seems socially relevant to study the processes that underlie emigrants' adjustment to their new place of living. Research has thoroughly supported the assumption that believing in a just world is an adaptive mechanism that helps people to deal with uncertainty and harsh realities in life. We propose that the endorsement of such beliefs might also contribute to a positive identification with the host country. Using a sample of Portuguese emigrants ($N = 144$), we demonstrate in a cross-sectional design that belief in a just world predicts a positive identification with the host country. In addition, positive levels of identification with the host country predicted higher levels of satisfaction with the emigrant life. Theoretical and applied implications are discussed.

[138 words]

Keywords: belief in a just world, emigration, migration, identification with the host country, social identity

"Believing is Adapting": Belief in a Just World and Emigrants' Identification and Satisfaction with the Host Country.

The new wave of emigration from Southern Europe targeting other, wealthier, European countries has been exhaustively described in the news (e.g., Ottaviani, J., 2014, October 2). In fact, the current economic global crisis has shifted the emigration patterns in Europe (International Organization for Migration, 2010). As southern European countries economies stagnate, citizens are leaving their countries to pursue the new “European dream” in more favorable economies. For example, about 110 thousand Portuguese left their country in 2013 (Pires, Pereira, Azevedo, & Ribeiro, 2014). With such high numbers, it is socially relevant to study emigrants' processes of adjustment, especially with the growing support for extremist parties and the opposition to immigration in Europe (Palmer, 2013, November), often leading to negative attitudes towards immigrants (European Humanist Federation, 2013). Research has established that believing in a just world might have a functional role in helping people to adjust to uncertainty (Furnham, 2003). We suggest that belief in a just world (BJW) might have an adaptive function for emigrants, by enabling the achievement of a positive identification with their host country.

Social Identification and Emigrants' Integration

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) seeks to understand the impact that group memberships have on individuals' self-concept and self-esteem. It assumes that when individuals categorize themselves and others as members of a group, their behavior is guided by the part of their self-concept associated with their group memberships, that is, their social identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1978; Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2001). Thus, individuals are motivated to obtain a positive value for their social groups and,

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consequently, for their social identity (Tajfel, 1978). Research supporting the positive consequences that social identity has on individuals is abundant (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009) showing, for example, that social identification predicts well-being (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005; Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, & Moltzen, 2006) and life satisfaction (Haslam et al., 2005).

More important for the present research, social identification also plays a key role in emigrants' integration. Integration, which can be understood as an interactive process between migrants and their host country, has been related to psychological adaptation and low levels of stress (e.g., Heckmann, 2005). Identification with the host country is one of the spheres of migrants' integration (Heckmann, 2005). Indeed, feelings of belongingness to the host country and feelings of being at "home" can be considered the final step in the integration process, as they capture the sense of being tied to a certain group or place (e.g., Black, 2002). In this process, emigrants participate in and are accepted by the new group (Heckmann, 2005; Nesdale & Mak, 2000). In support of this idea, Nesdale and Mak (2000) showed that identification with the host country is positively affected by the degree to which emigrants feel accepted by the host country.

Identification with the host country can help emigrants to adjust successfully to their new lives in different ways. First of all, belonging to a group provides a sense of security, validates beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about social reality, whilst facilitating goal achievement (Festinger, 1950). Second, a strong attachment to the host country is positively associated with educational achievements (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokuro, 2002; Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001), social adaptation, and well-being (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Finally, a positive identification with the host country is associated with a positive self-esteem (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997), life satisfaction

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(Angelini, Casi, & Corazzini, 2014), and positive conditions of life (Nesdale, 2002; Walters, Phythian, & Anisef, 2007).

These insights suggest that identification with the host country might contribute to emigrants' satisfaction with their new lives. We suggest that a positive social identification with the host country might also play a key role in emigrants' adjustment to their host country. In this sense, a positive social identification with the host country should strongly predict emigrants' satisfaction with their emigrant life.

The Role of BJW on Identification with the Host Country

Other research highlights the importance of individual differences on the identification with the host country. According to Bastian and Haslam (2008), essentialist beliefs amongst emigrants moderate the extent to which they identify with their host country. Incidentally, BJW has a functional value in threatening situations (e.g., Correia, Vala, & Aguiar, 2007) by protecting individuals from negative psychological consequences when they face unjust, harsh realities in life or when they face uncertainty (Correia & Dalbert, 2007; Furnham, 2003; Lerner, 1980). Moreover, BJW are particularly vital when individuals need to pursue long-term goals since it increases the individuals' belief that they will get what they deserve, while seeing their efforts not go to waste, but rather as having real purpose (Hafer, 2000). In this sense, we reason that BJW might be an important predictor of the process of integration to the host country.

According to the just world theory (Lerner & Simmons, 1966), individuals have the basic need of believing that the world is a fair, predictable place, where people get what they deserve. Lerner (1980) argued that such assumptions are a natural and functional motivation that guides individuals towards their goals. In fact, living in unpredictable environments seems to have a negative impact on individuals' well-being (Lefcourt, 1976).

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BJW is understood as a crucial belief that helps individuals to deal with the harsh realities in life, by providing a sense of control over life (Furnham, 2003) and it has been positively associated with self-esteem, well-being (Dalbert, 1999), and life satisfaction (Lipkus, Dalbert, & Siegler, 1996), and negatively correlated with depression (Ritter, Benson, & Snyder, 1990). In sum, studies consistently support the idea that BJW is functional to individuals since it acts as a coping mechanism (Furnham, 2003) and plays a key role in psychological adjustment (Sutton et al., 2008). In a similar line of reasoning, we further suggest that, due to its general importance on self-esteem and well-being (Dalbert, 1999), BJW might also help migrants cope with the many challenges of emigration. Specifically, we suggest that the attachment to the host country (as measured by social identification), might be a consequence of the coping mechanism, which then allows individuals to increase satisfaction with emigration. Therefore, we hypothesize that a stronger BJW increases social identification, which then increases satisfaction with emigration. Research has distinguished between BJW-self and BJW-others (Lipkus et al., 1996; Sutton & Douglas, 2005), which are associated with different outcomes. Whereas BJW-self is related to positive general well-being, BJW-others is associated with social outcomes (Sutton & Douglas, 2005). In the present study, we address a research question that relates to individuals' social intergroup context, namely, identification and satisfaction with living in an outgroup country. Even though we are studying individuals' satisfaction with emigration, our goal is to study it from the perspective of social identification (which we found to be the psychological mechanism that links BJW and satisfaction with emigration). Therefore, we considered the use of BJW-others scale as appropriate, given that it is more applicable for social outcomes (Sutton & Douglas, 2005).

Overview and Hypotheses

In the present study we investigate the role of BJW on emigrants' identification with the host country and, consequently, on satisfaction with emigration. Specifically, we suggest that BJW might work as a functional mechanism in helping emigrants to adjust to their new culture, by increasing emigrants' identification with their host country. Based on recent developments of the social identification approach (Haslam et al., 2005), we further suggest that the strength of identification with the host country predicts emigrants' satisfaction with emigration. Therefore, we expected higher scores of identification with the host country to be predicted by higher levels of BJW. Furthermore, given the role social identity is known to have on life satisfaction, we expected identification with the host country to predict satisfaction with emigration.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 144 Portuguese emigrants (97 female) with ages ranging from 20 to 58 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 32.25$, $SD = 9.47$), living in European countries¹. The majority of participants (55.1%) moved to a new country less than 6 years ago and 85.4% of the participants were employed at the time. Participants' level of education ranged from Primary Education (9.2%), Secondary Education (44.3%) to Higher Education (46.5%). All participants were recruited online, via Facebook, and participated voluntarily after reading the informed consent sheet.²

Measures

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Belief in a just world. BJW was measured with seven items adapted from Sutton and Douglas's (2005) BJW-others scale: "I believe that people have what they are entitled to", "I believe that people's commitment is recognized", "I believe that people deserve the rewards and punishments that they receive", "I believe that people attract their own misfortunes", "I believe that people have what they deserve", "I believe that the rewards and punishments that people receive are fair", and "I feel that the world is a fair place" ($1=I$ strongly disagree; $7=I$ strongly agree). Participants' responses were averaged to a BJW score (Cronbach's alpha = .85).

Identification with the host country. To assess the extent to which participants identified with their host country, they indicated their agreement with the following items: "I identify with my host country's citizens" and "I appreciate the culture and values of the country I live in" ($1=I$ strongly disagree; $7=I$ strongly agree). We averaged participants' responses to create an Identification with the Host Country score ($r = .604, p < .001$).

Satisfaction with emigration. Participants rated their agreement with the following statements "I feel happy living abroad" and "I feel good living in this country" ($1=I$ strongly disagree; $7=I$ strongly agree). We averaged participants' responses to create a Satisfaction with Emigration score ($r = .647, p < .001$).

Results

We proposed that a higher endorsement of BJW would predict stronger identification with the host country, which would lead to a higher satisfaction with emigration. We conducted a mediation analysis, using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 4; 5000 bootstraps) with satisfaction with emigration as the outcome, BJW as the

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predictor and Identification with the Host Country as the mediator. The means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table 1. This model was significant (mediator included), $F(2, 141) = 65.63, p < .001$, and accounted for 48.21% of the variance; indirect effect regarding Identification with the Host Country: $b = 0.21, SE = 0.07, 95\% CI [0.08, 0.36]$; total effect: $b = 0.38, SE = 0.10, t = 3.90, p < .001; 95\% CI [0.19, 0.57]$; direct effect: $b = 0.17, SE = 0.08, t = 2.25, p = .026; 95\% CI [0.02, 0.32]$. In line with our prediction, the effect of BJW on satisfaction with emigration was mediated by identification with the host country (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Discussion

In this paper, we extended previous research on identification with the host country by showing that (1) identification with the host country predicts satisfaction with emigration, and (2) BJW plays a key role in predicting emigrants' identification with their host countries. The present results support our reasoning regarding the important role of BJW as an adaptive function for identification with the host country and satisfaction with emigrant life. As Lerner and Miller (1978) stated, "without such a belief it would be difficult for the individual to commit himself to the pursuit of long range goals or even to the socially regulated behavior of day to day life" (pp. 1030–1031). Indeed, considering that migrating to a different context (with all the changes that comprises – culture, values, and relationships) implies significant and challenging differences, BJW can provide a crucial adaptive function. Our results suggest that emigrants who endorse just world beliefs more strongly are more positively identified with their host countries. On the contrary, this

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study provides evidence in support of the assumption that people who believe more strongly that the world acts on a different (unjust) manner may increase the struggle for social adaptation, and thus, hinder the individual's identification with the host country.

Additionally, satisfaction with emigration is also influenced positively by their positive social identification. This result is consistent with previous research has been highlighting the important role of social identification as a predictor of well-being and life satisfaction (Haslam et al., 2005; Wegge et al., 2006).

The present research might have important implications for countries' migration policy-making. Taking into account emigrant's relationship with the host country may help to solve some of the issues highlighted by the Council of Europe (2012), namely the ones related to society fragmentation, which are still one of the major obstacles to emigrants' integration in the host country. Our study shows the importance of social identification as the psychological mechanism that links (to some extent) BJW and satisfaction with emigration. Similarly, others have shown that social identification is associated with general life satisfaction (Haslam et al., 2005). This leads us to believe that interventions that focus on improving emigrants' identification with the host country could be beneficial in the process of integration and in improving satisfaction with emigration.

It is important to note that this study employed a correlational design, and therefore causality cannot be established. In this paper, we demonstrate that stronger BJW predict stronger satisfaction with emigration, a process partially mediated by identification with the host country. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, it is also plausible that the more satisfied migrants are with their lives, the more identified they become with their host countries for example. Here, we established the direction of this path on previous research that has successfully demonstrated the relation between social identification and

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life satisfaction (e.g., Haslam et al., 2005). Similarly, drawing on BJW literature, we propose that BJW might be a powerful mechanism through which migrants' integration is facilitated and, thus, we hypothesized the order here presented. However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that relates both concepts and future. Research using experimental and longitudinal data is necessary to provide further support for these findings. Additionally, in this study we focus on a specific sample, and, therefore, our results do not allow us presently to discuss the applicability of our model to different cultural contexts. Future research should investigate whether the pattern of results apply to other samples. Another potential limitation refers to the scales used to measure identification with the host country and satisfaction with emigration. These scales were strongly correlated in this study and, therefore, future research should use stronger measures in order to effectively empirically separate the two constructs.

To conclude, this study offers preliminary evidence on the relation between emigrants' just world beliefs and their identification with their host country and, consequently, satisfaction with emigration. Results suggest that satisfaction with emigration is not a simple process; rather it seems to occur in the interplay of individual beliefs and identification with the host country. In fact, we observed that believing in a just world might have important consequences on the psychological process of identification with the host country and also play a key role on satisfaction with emigration.

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Endnotes

¹ France ($n = 53$), Switzerland ($n = 24$), UK ($n = 22$), Germany ($n = 16$), Austria ($n = 7$), Belgium ($n = 7$), Ireland ($n = 5$), Luxembourg ($n = 5$), Spain ($n = 2$), Norway ($n = 1$), Sweden ($n = 1$), undefined ($n = 1$).

² This study was part of a larger-scale investigation including measures that form part of a separate project.

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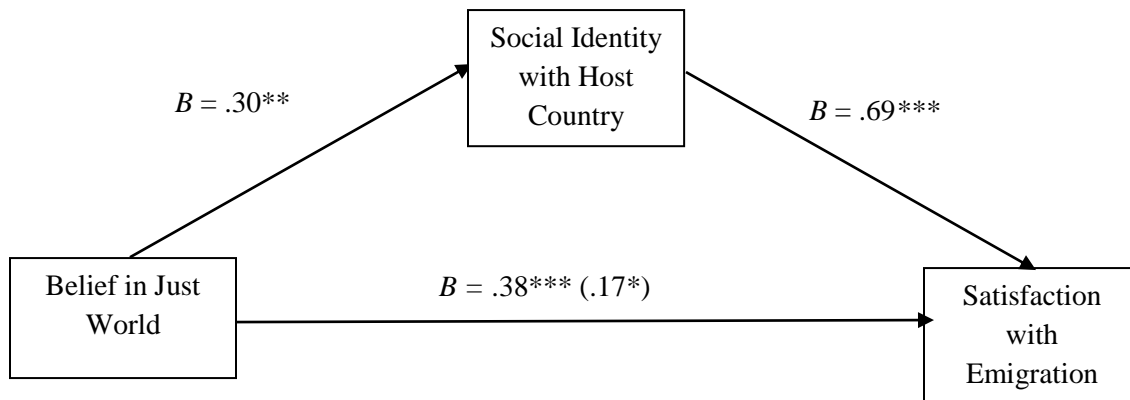
Table 1. *Correlations between Measures, Means and Standard Deviations*

| | <i>M(SD)</i> | 2 | 3 |
|--|--------------|--------|---------|
| 1. BJW | 3.73(1.25) | .264** | .311*** |
| 2. Identification with the Host Country | 4.81(1.42) | | .681*** |
| 3. Satisfaction with Emigration | 5.32(1.52) | | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .005$, *** $p \leq .001$

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Figure 1. Model testing hypothesis that Belief in Just World predicts Satisfaction with Emigration through Social Identity with Host Country.



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