

## B. PERSONAL CONTACT AND CHANGE IN ATTITUDES

*Systematic studies of the effects of international contact on individuals are very recent—a sequel to the expanded post-war government programmes of exchange of persons. As these studies are at present developing, one focus of attention is change in international attitudes and stereotypes—we know altogether too little about the general conditions of such change. One class of determinants, however, that has repeatedly emerged as important is interpersonal contact. The papers reproduced hereafter bear on the effects of such contact.*

*The fall into two groups. Attitude change as it takes place in intercultural experience is more than a mere reflex of particular objective contact situations; it is embedded in the complicated process of adjustment and readjustment involved in a person's sojourn in a foreign country and return. Two of the papers, those by Dr. Lysgaard and Dr. Lippitt, have to do primarily with this adjustmental context in which change of attitude occurs. The papers by Dr. Cook and Miss Selltitz and by Dr. James focus directly on the effects of personal contacts. While Dr. Cook draws on American research on 'minority groups' for relevant principles, the symposium is primarily concerned with the effect of contacts between members of different national groups.*

### ADJUSTMENT IN A FOREIGN SOCIETY : NORWEGIAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES VISITING THE UNITED STATES

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This report is based on interviews with 200 Norwegians who had spent some time in the United States.<sup>1</sup> All had received Fulbright travel grants to go to America, and they represented nearly 100 per cent of all Norwegian Fulbright travel grantees who had, by March 1953, returned to Norway after a stay in America.

These persons were from less than 20 to more than 60 years of age (average about 30 years) and included both men and women (about three times as many men as women). They represented all kinds of professions, most of them however being engaged in 'academic' rather than 'practical' work—students, teachers, scientists. Their work in the United States was also largely 'academic'; they went to American universities rather than into American industry. Their stay in America lasted from less than three months to more than three years, the average stay being about a year.

We interviewed these people on the average for about an hour and a half, as to their original reasons for going to America, their adjustment to and

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1. The study was carried out at the Institute for Social Research, Oslo, Norway, and was sponsored by the United States Educational Foundation in Norway.

satisfaction with different aspects of their situations there, their opinions on America and Americans, their readjustment on return, etc.

No attempt will be made here to review this material in its entirety. I shall concentrate on one matter: adjustment in the foreign society. More precisely, the data will be discussed from two points of view: the relationship between adjustment in different areas; adjustment as a process over time.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADJUSTMENT IN DIFFERENT AREAS

A chief part of our interview was concerned with problems of adjustment during the stay in the United States.<sup>1</sup> We asked questions about adjustment in reference to professional-educational matters as well as in reference to personal-social matters.

Thus, on the professional-educational side we probed the grantees for information on the following items:

1. Did they receive proper credits for their previous education; that is, did they get the academic status they deserved according to the qualifications they had when they got to America?
2. Did they like American methods of work and education?
3. Were the American teachers and scientists with whom they had contact qualified to give them the assistance they had hoped for?
4. Did they find the institution at which they worked so satisfactory that they would have returned to that same place 'if they could do the trip over again'; that is, would they have wanted to go to that place if they had known in advance what they now know, after having been there?
5. Were they satisfied with the professional-educational benefit of the stay?

While these questions certainly point to matters that are logically separate, we find that those who had experienced good adjustment in respect of one of these matters also tended to give evidence of good adjustment in the others.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a 'generalization' takes place from one to the other of the items of professional-educational adjustment.

That such a 'generalization' occurs also in the area of personal-social adjustment is evidenced by the responses regarding the following items.<sup>3</sup>

1. Did they feel themselves to be 'different' from Americans, did they, further, imply that this 'difference' pointed themselves out as 'superior' to Americans?
2. Were they accepted among Americans by behaving the way they were used to or did they have to change their ways in order to be accepted?
3. Did they find it easy to get 'really personal contact' with Americans?
4. Did they think that it was easy for Norwegian students, in general, to adjust to American 'manners and morals'?

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1. 'Adjustment' is here not defined in any precise way; the concept is used as a convenient reference to the respondent's subjective reports on their feelings of satisfaction with different aspects of the stay.

2. All association coefficients between the above five items were positive and all were statistically significant at the 5 per cent level of confidence or better (except one, which was significant at the 10 per cent level).

3. In general it is self-evident what is 'good' or 'bad' adjustment in reference to these items of personal-social adjustment (as was also the case for the previously listed items of professional-educational adjustment). The only item which may need some clarification is the one about the feeling of 'difference' between self and Americans (item 1 of the personal-social topics). 'Bad' adjustment does here mean that some difference is actually perceived between self and Americans and that this difference implies a negative evaluation of Americans.

5. Did they 'like it' in America, that is, did they have a good time there? Again, positive association exists between all these items, those who achieve good adjustment in respect of one of them also tend to do so in respect of the others.<sup>1</sup>

We have thus observed that adjustment within the personal-social area as well as within the professional-educational area 'is generalized' from one item to the other.

Within each of these broad areas of adjustment some items appear to be dominant in the pattern of 'generalization'. Thus, in the professional-educational area, the largest association coefficients exist in reference to items 4 and 5, that is, whether or not one found the institution so satisfactory that one would have chosen it 'over again' and the extent to which one was satisfied with the professional benefit of the stay. In the personal-social area, one item was clearly dominant in the 'generalization' pattern, namely that, referring to the ease with which one could get 'really personal contact' with Americans.

If we now relate items from the one area to items of the other, we find that strong association also exists between items from different areas. In general, however, these associations are not so pronounced as were those within each of the two areas. 'Generalization' to items of the other area is most marked in reference to those same items that were 'dominant' within their own area. Thus item 3 in the personal-social area, ease of getting 'really personal contact' with Americans, is positively and significantly related<sup>2</sup> to all items of professional adjustment. Those who found it easy to achieve such contact were more likely to say they received proper credits for their previous education; they were also more likely to say that they liked American methods of work and education; more likely to say they were, without qualifications, satisfied with American teachers and scientists; more likely to say that they would, without doubt, have wanted to return to the same place if they should make the trip over again; and finally, more likely to say they were fully satisfied with the professional benefits of the stay—than were those who did not find it so easy to get 'really personal contact' with Americans.

Similarly item 5 of the professional area—reported satisfaction with the benefits of the stay—is associated, more markedly than the other items in this area, with all items of the personal-social area.<sup>3</sup>

We have seen, then, that though there is a tendency for adjustment to be 'generalized', it is not specific to any given item of adjustment. We have noted, that this generalization tendency is most pronounced between items of the same 'area' (professional-educational or personal-social), but that it also exists between items of different areas even though the tendency is more marked for some items than for others.<sup>4</sup>

What does this 'generalization' tendency mean? How should all this be interpreted? A number of possible explanations suggest themselves.

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1. All but two of these association coefficients are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level of confidence or better.
  2. At the 5 per cent level of confidence or better.
  3. In one instance, the association is significant at the 10 per cent level, in all other cases, at the 5 per cent level of confidence.
  4. In this discussion we have been interested in relationships between adjustment responses and not in the general success of adjustment to American life among Norwegian Fulbright grantees. It might be mentioned, however, that adjustment seems to have been easy and unproblematic for most of these grantees. In fact, the responses were at times so unanimously favourable that we had difficulties, in the 'less than perfect'-adjustment categories in getting frequencies sufficient for statistical treatment.

We do not think that the 'generalization' is due to any peculiarities of the various American situations in which the different Fulbright grantees found themselves. Nothing in our data indicates broad situational differences as regards the relative difficulty of adjusting to these situations.

It is also quite evident that the 'generalization' may not be due to any simple overlapping of the questions used. Thus there is no reason why, for example, those who find it easy to get really personal contact with Americans should also be more likely to say they had received proper credits for their previous education.

A more serious possibility is that our measures of 'adjustment' really do not refer to adjustment at all—what we have called 'adjustment' responses may perhaps largely reflect some 'personality' trait (or, at least, 'verbal habit') in the respondents, manifesting itself in a general tendency to express 'good' adjustment or 'bad' adjustment, irrespective of the concrete experiences to which the different 'adjustment' questions refer. We cannot rule out this possibility altogether. If such a tendency is at work, however, we should not expect it to operate with uniform strength in respect of all the different items here considered. We should expect it to manifest itself more clearly in respect of the more general and vague questions and less clearly in respect of the more specific and concrete questions. Judging from the content of the responses and from the very logic of the questions, it would seem that the question whether or not one received proper credits for one's Norwegian education does elicit responses that are in fact based on concrete experiences during the stay in America. This particular item, however, shows no less clear association with other items than do most of the other, more 'general' items. There is thus some reason to believe that the responses are in general based on concrete experiences, and that there is something in these concrete experiences that may account for the 'generalization' tendency noted above.

To test the specific possibility that 'adjustment' may largely reflect the respondent's general like or dislike for Americans, we have related the adjustment responses to a stereotype index running from 'very favourable' to 'very unfavourable' stereotypes about the 'typical' American. No significant relationships were found.

We have thus far suggested that the reason for the 'generalization' tendency is not to be found solely in certain peculiarities in the American situations, nor is the reason to be found solely in certain peculiarities in the persons whose adjustment we were asking for. The generalization, then, seems to be due to characteristics of the person in the situation, that is, to the way in which the person does indeed adjust to the situation.

We cannot refute for certain the possibility that it is really not 'adjustment' that is generalized, but the memory or perception of this adjustment: one may not remember, or perhaps, one did not at the time perceive, failures in one instance if success was achieved in some others. There may be a tendency to register only the 'good things'. Or, if certain failures were especially prominent, one may have forgotten, or one did not even at the time perceive, successes that one really had in other instances.

It may be, however, that the generalization tendency points to more substantial features of the 'adjustment process': success in one respect may increase one's general feeling of security in the foreign milieu and make one better prepared to engage successfully in other respects as well; or, failures in one respect may make one less prepared to engage successfully in other respects.

Such an 'adjustment process' may thus perhaps be interpreted as a 'principle of cumulation': the adjustment process will start moving in one direction if it is given a push in that direction somewhere along the chain of inter-connected items.

#### ADJUSTMENT AS A PROCESS OVER TIME

Thus far I have talked about adjustment as a process involving only the properties of person and situation. Adjustment is, however, also a time process.

Our interviews were taken after the grantees had returned to Norway. We have therefore no direct information on the eventual adjustment 'stages' the different persons have passed through. In order to study the impact of time, therefore, we will have to look to variations in duration of the stay in America. For that purpose we have divided our respondents in three groups: those who had stayed in America six months or less, those who had stayed there from six to eighteen months, and those who had stayed there for more than eighteen months.

When the respondents are thus classed in duration categories, we find that they do in fact differ noticeably in respect of their responses to adjustment items.<sup>1</sup> Very generally, adjustment seems to have been 'good' among those who stayed in America less than six months, also 'good' among those who stayed there more than eighteen months, while those who left America after a stay from six to eighteen months seem to have been 'less well' adjusted.

This particular form of the relationship between duration and adjustment does not appear to be brought about by other important factors, themselves related to duration. Thus, the relatively poor adjustment manifested at the intermediary duration period seems to occur within all different age groups, within all different academic status groups, within the groups following different study programmes in the United States, etc. More importantly, the typical 'U-shaped' relationship between duration and adjustment exists among those who did not, as well as among those who did, change their original plans for the stay in consequence of unanticipated experiences during the stay. This last observation makes it clear that the improvement in adjustment that takes place, when those of long duration are compared to those of intermediary duration, does not occur as a result of the former's arbitrary decision to stay longer because they feel especially well adjusted in America. The relationship between duration and adjustment is therefore not an effect of time selection of persons differently adjusted, but refers to a genuine time process that every grantee must be assumed to have passed through or would have passed through if he had only stayed longer.

Our data, then, seem to give evidence of certain stages of adjustment, characterized by good initial adjustment, followed by an adjustment 'crisis', after which good adjustment is again achieved.

We may try to impart some meaning into these adjustment stages by placing them in the broader context of the grantee's situation, as that situation is implied in the interview materials.

r. It is not necessary here to list all the items analysed in the present context. All the 'personal-social' items discussed above were included and so was item 2 of the professional-educational area in addition to items not discussed above. In the analysis of the impact of duration upon adjustment, items referring to satisfaction with the 'benefit of the stay' are not included, the analysis includes only such items as refer directly to modes of adjustment to specific problem areas rather than to evaluations of the gains of the study.

In the introductory stage, one's energy is gratifyingly spent in registering available facilities for work and pleasure, in observing American patterns of living, in familiarizing oneself with the routines of everyday life in work and leisure. One is happy making acquaintances among the personnel at the institution in which one works and making the first 'social contacts' in America. One is gratified by the adventure of being 'abroad', seeing new things. One is impressed by the material facilities available and pleased with the apparent ease with which 'contacts' are made in America.

During the introductory stage, social contacts are still somewhat accidental, superficial and segmental, concerned with specific and limited situations which do not involve the total personality. One is not yet deeply involved in any special friendship group.

After some time, however, the 'adventurous' pleasures of the introductory stage lose their appeal and a need makes itself felt for more intimate personal contact and integration into groups. It may not be so easy to satisfy this new need right away. The busy study programme may disturb that restful and relaxed attitude which to some extent is required for personal involvement with friends, the grantees may be somewhat reserved and hesitant as to such personal involvement in the still only superficially known milieu, and it may also be that American 'social life' does not provide the grantees with such opportunities for personal involvement as they immediately know how to utilize. Furthermore, most grantees would not have the opportunity to see people in their homes under relaxed circumstances; social life will have to take place in crowded student rooms, in cars, in restaurants.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the need for personal involvement in friendship groups is not satisfied and a feeling of loneliness may develop. They may feel somewhat out of place and tend to blame the society they visit for this unhappy state of affairs; it is difficult, they say, to achieve really personal contact with Americans, they would not like to settle down in the United States, they feel different and superior to Americans, etc.

In this context should also be considered the language problem. To begin with, the grantees may receive a great deal of satisfaction from their success in merely being 'understood' by Americans in accidental and superficial situations. When more profound personal involvement is desired, quite new demands will be placed on the language proficiency. Grantees, who in the introductory stage thought that they had really no 'language problem', may now find that their knowledge of American does not at all satisfy their new needs for more intimate conversation.<sup>2</sup> This, of course, tends to exaggerate the feeling of 'loneliness' in this adjustment stage.<sup>3</sup>

After some time most of the grantees may learn to overcome the adjustment

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1. In the present exposition of the adjustment 'stages', we have intentionally considered mainly properties of the adjusting person. Properties of the particular situation to which the person adjusts have largely been neglected. If the 'loneliness' stage is due to lack of intimate and warm friendships, and if there is some validity to the notion about the relative superficiality of the level at which contacts are readily achievable in American culture, we might expect that the 'loneliness' stage may be somewhat delayed and especially pronounced among visitors to that particular country.
  2. Our data support this notion: there is a clear tendency for those who stayed longer in America, more often than those who stayed there for a shorter time, to report experiencing language difficulties during the stay.
  3. As a curiosity of some importance, it may be mentioned that the Fulbright grantees, on the average, stayed in America for about one year, that is, a period corresponding to that in which occurs the adjustment 'crisis'. This does not mean that Norwegian Fulbright grantees return home literally heartbroken and desperately unsatisfied (as the term 'crisis' may appear to suggest); but it does mean that they returned with a certain feeling of not having achieved as full an integration into American life as they might have desired.