

Social Contacts, Language Proficiency, and Belonging amongst International Students

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Abstract

Immigration and acculturation are widely studied phenomena. However, one demographic often neglected and overlooked by the existing literature is that of international students. This demographic is particularly significant within the European Union where porous borders, broadly inexpensive university admission costs facilitate study-related immigration. As such, this paper investigates the effects of several factors including language proficiency, bridging social capital, and bonding social capital, on international students' sense of belonging both to the Netherlands and to Europe. Using a cohort of international students from the University of Groningen who have all lived in Groningen for at least 6 months, and a sample size of N=134, we utilized an online survey. We found significant evidence suggesting that higher Dutch proficiency relates to feelings of belonging in Dutch society, as well as finding significant evidence that higher bridging social capital also increases feelings of belonging in Dutch society (particularly qualitative bridging social capital). We did not however find significant evidence to suggest that bonding social capital decreases feelings of belonging either in Dutch or European society. A post hoc analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between feelings of belonging in Dutch society and feelings of belonging in European society.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Belonging, Bridging, Bonding, Social Capital, International Students,

Social Contacts, Language Proficiency, and Belonging amongst International Students

Recent decades have seen immense movements of people across borders to relocate in foreign nations. Statistics gathered by Eurostat (2020) highlight the scale of this phenomena. 8.4% of European Union (EU) residents were foreign born, with this proportion climbing to 13.8% in the United Kingdom, and 30.1% in Australia. Despite the enormity of this demographic, it is one often neglected and overlooked by the literature. This is not, however, to say it is not a demographic that does not pose unique challenges and obstacles to research. One particular challenge posed is the diversity within foreign-born demographics, one which has in part lead the current research to focus solely on international students, which is still no small demographic. In the Netherlands international students comprise roughly 11% of the total student population, and this number is steadily climbing (European Scale, 2019). Achieving a sense of belonging for these individuals is considered a key goal of acculturation, though the precise factors that shape such a sense of belonging remain unclear in the literature (Andreasson, 2018). A clue may lie in the acculturation literature, wherein language and social contacts are described as primary, though not exclusive, drivers of the acculturation process (Ager & Strang, 2008). Of key interest to this research are the factors which may help and hinder the sense of belonging international students in the Netherlands experience.

Language proficiency holds a key role in the acculturation process, with language barriers hindering access to the bridging social capital so key to successful acculturation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011), a sense of belonging, and in turn psychological well-being (Brunsting et al., 2021). As such, language proficiency may have a key role in the sense of belonging felt by refugees, expats, and of key interest to this research paper, international students. To this end this paper investigates the effects of language proficiency and social capital on international students' sense of belonging both in Dutch society and in a broader European context.

Belonging

Belonging is commonly understood as a fundamental human motivation and can be profitably understood as the feeling of being accepted and approved of by a group, thus playing an important role in the process of acculturation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The importance of feeling a sense of belonging can perhaps best be profitably understood through the adverse effects it can help negate. Amongst students, feelings of belonging have been found to buffer against adverse mental health conditions such as undue stress, depressive symptoms, and learned helplessness. Moreover, feelings of belonging aid students in engaging with their education experience on a more meaningful level (Gopalan, 2021. p. 228). Shanahan and Elder (2002) elaborate on belonging as a manifestation of membership in social convoys, which are conceptualized as social groups, be they large or small, of individuals with similar and/or complimentary life trajectories. In turn, these “social convoys” can assist individuals successfully pursue their own life trajectories.

Evidently, experiencing a sense of belonging is of great importance. Perhaps unsurprisingly, research suggests that individuals’ sense of belonging can be challenged when they immigrate to another country (Lovelock et al. 2011). Though the same research by Lovelock et al. (2011) found that the extent to which individuals’ sense of belonging diminishes (and in turn the extent to which they can replenish it) is dependent on multiple factors. Though not stated directly by name in the research by Lovelock et al. (2011), these factors can largely be surmised as bridging social capital. Should there be any metaphorical barriers to entry to much of what comprises bridging social capital, namely “relationships between members of different social networks” (Murry, 2020. P. 2213), then we could expect that higher language proficiency, as well as social capital, would predict higher senses of belonging.

This brings us necessarily to a brief discussion of groups and societies. Curiously enough, the APA does not provide its own definition of the term group (as it does, for instance, terms such as belonging and social capital). This perhaps speaks to the relative subjectivity of what comprises a coherent group, and the ambiguity surrounding even explanatory terms such as “coherent”. Perhaps, for the sake of our current research, groups can best be described as whatever social organization, however formal or informal, individuals feel they belong to. Three groups are of interest to this research. Namely Dutch society, international students, and European society.

Social Capital

Bridging Social Capital

Another key factor in individuals’ sense of belonging is their social capital. This can broadly be split into two distinct forms of social capital, bridging and bonding, where “bridging social capital characterizes the relationships between members of different social networks” and “bonding social capital characterizes strong, tight-knit relationships within peer networks.” (Murry, 2020. p. 2213). These networks can be thought of as outgroups and ingroups, respectively. Bridging social capital in particular has been demonstrated as a pre-requisite for successful acculturation (Nawny et al., 2012). This form of social capital includes “material resources, information, and social support” (Nawny et al., 2012) and as previously alluded to, language proficiency has been shown to play a key role in acquiring access to such capital.

Language Proficiency The role of native language proficiency has, through much research, been shown to have a significant effect on the acculturation process and on individuals’ sense of belonging. Native language proficiency has been found to facilitate labor market integration and the closing of economic gaps between immigrants and natives (Chiswick, 2002). Moreover, language deficiency can pose a significant structural barrier to

integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Nawny et al. (2012) conceptualize language as a form of social capital wherein linguistically isolated individuals lack the social power, or social tools, necessary to acculturate.

Moreover, research by Valdez et al. (2012) found that language isolated individuals are particularly disadvantaged in regards to both bridging and bonding social capital. The study, which investigated Spanish speaking immigrants in the US, sheds light on the true extent and nature of the relationship between language acquisition and social capital. Their results revealed that individuals who spoke both Spanish and English acculturated and acquired bridging social capital and in turn began socializing more with English speakers and less with Spanish speakers. This left those individuals who only spoke Spanish more isolated and with reduced bonding social capital. It is entirely possible that a similar process may affect international students in the Netherlands. In any case, it seems evident that language proficiency holds a pivotal role in one's access to both bridging and bonding varieties social capital.

Bonding Social Capital

Research on bonding social capital however presents mixed findings. As Valdez et al. (2012) suggests, bonding social capital can assist in acculturation, however research by van der Meer (2016) suggests that bonding social capital is associated with the cementing of self-affirming identities at the expense of acculturating to a new group. Further findings by Bai & Wang (2022) suggest that leveraging social capital can help international students can overcome barriers to acculturation. Evidently, a consensus has not yet been reached on the effects of bonding social capital on individuals' sense of belonging in to a new group.

European Identity

Both Dutch society and international students seem self-explanatory groups, however feeling a sense of belonging in European society is deserving of some explanatory words,

particularly as there is significant evidence to suggest that a more coherent European identity is emerging (de Waele & Kuipers, 2013). What this does not mean, at least for this research, is the degree to which someone feels a sense of belonging to the European Union. Rather, this alludes to the sense of belonging an individual feels to Europe more broadly. It is worth noting here that the twelve yellow stars on a blue field flown outside government buildings, at political rallies, and occasionally protests, is as much the official flag of Council of Europe (which consists of almost every European country with the notable exceptions of Belarus and recent suspension of Russia) as it is the flag of the EU. In turn it has come to represent a more pan-European identity, the very identity this research seeks to explore. As previously mentioned, 11% of the Dutch student population is comprised of internationals (European Scale, 2019). While I could not find precise data of the precise demographics of international portion of the population, it would seem relatively safe to assume that a significant portion of this group is comprised of Europeans. This demographic can be broadly characterized in its purposeful intention to move and live abroad, general intention to immerse themselves in other cultures, and in having largely grown up surrounded by either completely open or at least highly porous borders since signing of the treaty of Maastricht in 1992. As such, nationality may hold a less salient position in these individuals' sense of identity. It is not entirely incomprehensible under these circumstances that European identity may rise in salience in this cohort. The aforementioned ambiguous effects of bonding social capital on belonging as detailed in the literature bring in to question the effects of social contacts on one's sense of belonging as a European. It remains unclear whether socializing primarily with co-nationals may hinder one's sense of belonging as a European.

One could perhaps argue that the term "European" is too incoherent and ambiguous a concept to be usefully employed in any sense that is not geographical. Though as already alluded to, a great and growing body of evidence is suggesting the emergence of a more

coherent European identity (de Waele & Kuipers, 2013) that could in turn provide a meaningful sense of belonging for individuals across the continent, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains.

The Present Study

Moving to a foreign country can evidently challenge one's sense of belonging. Research suggests that linguistic isolation can further hinder one's sense of belonging, while bridging social capital may increase individuals' sense of belonging. The effects of bonding social capital on individuals' sense of belonging to a new group remain relatively ambiguous.

Much of the existing literature however neglects to investigate the demographic of international students, with the aforementioned studies focusing on economic migrants and refugees. This is striking considering that international students comprise a significant demographic. This leaves a curious gap in the existing literature, as research suggests that the exact effects of language proficiency on well-being and identity may differ between immigrant groups (Amit, 2010, 2012b). These differences may be explained by differences in motivations, as suggested by research by Chow (2007) which found that political and cultural motivation (to immigrate) correlated with a stronger sense of belonging. Findings such as this allude to a research gap regarding the effects of language proficiency and social capital on international students' sense of belonging. As such, given the previous findings and research gaps mentioned above, the following hypotheses present themselves for the current research:

- H1: Higher Dutch language proficiency increases feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students
- H2: Higher bridging social capital increases feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students
- H3: Higher bonding social capital decreases feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students

- H4: Lower bonding social capital increases feelings of belonging in European society amongst international students

Methods

Participants

A group of 140 people of different nationalities participated in the study. Each participant was required to have lived in the Netherlands for at least six months. Unfortunately, 6 participants had to be excluded from the data as they did not meet our requirements. As such, two participants were excluded as they indicated being Dutch. While three further participants were excluded as they indicated that had not yet lived in the Netherlands for six months. A final participant was excluded as could not determine with certainty whether they had lived in the Netherlands for 6 months. Our final data set thus consisted of 134 participants. The subjects were all international students studying in the Netherlands. They were from countries all over the world with the largest group hailing from Germany ($N=59$)¹.

The participant pool was in part comprised of convenience sampling, drawing on individuals from our own social networks (these participants did not receive compensation), while additional participants were drawn from a pool of first-year psychology students who were awarded courses credit as compensation. Ages differed between 18 and 30 years old, with the mean age being 21.66 ($SD=2.26$). The mean length of stay in the Netherlands was 3.87 ($SD=1.3$).

Materials and Procedure

¹ Italy (N=8), Romania (8), Greece (5), England (4), Lithuania (4), Poland (4), Indonesia (3), Slovakia (3), Sweden (3), USA (3), Brazil (2), Canada (2), Finland (2), France (2), Hungary (2), India (2), Ireland (2), Albania (1), Austria (1), Bulgaria (1), Croatia (1), Cyprus (1), Hong Kong (1), Jordan (1), Latvia (1), Moldova (1), New Zealand (1), Norway (1), Palestine (1), Russia (1), Singapore (1), Slovenia (1), South Africa (1), South Korea (1), Suriname (1), Syria (1).

Before launching the study, we first received ethics approval from the ethics committee of Psychology in Groningen. The study itself was cross-sectional in design and conducted through an online questionnaire using Qualtrics. Participants were provided with information about the study prior to their participation and were required to provide informed consent.

The questionnaire was structured so as to measure constructs belonging (both in Dutch society and European society), Dutch language proficiency, both qualitative and quantitative forms of bridging and bonding social capital, length and stay in the Netherlands, and proportion of time spent in the Netherlands².

Control Variables

We used length of stay in the Netherlands and proportion of time spent in the Netherlands as out control variables. These were used to control for temporal effects, ensuring that all eligible participants had spent at least 6 months living in the Netherlands. Additionally, this accounted for the potential effects of COVID, namely students not having spent all of their time at university in the Netherlands during the pandemic. These measures were tested with the use of an open question and a Likert scale, respectively.

Language Proficiency

Dutch language proficiency was measured through a 5-point Likert scale, where in response options to the question “How well do you speak Dutch?” ranged from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely well).

Social Capital

Six measures were made to operationalise social capital; for qualitative bridging and bonding social capital/support (Haslam et al., 2005), participants were asked to indicate to what extent they experienced “emotional support from x “the help you need from x”, and “the

² On account of this being a collaborative bachelor thesis, the questionnaire included other measures that will not be discussed in this paper

resources you need from x”, with X standing in for Dutch people, other co-nationals, or other internationals, depending on the measure. Participants answered on a seven-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), to 7 (strongly agree). For each of the three groups, these measures were then combined to form a measure of qualitative social capital. Quantitative social capital (frequency) for each group was measured on a five-point Likert scale in response to the question “How often do you talk to several x in one day?” (with x once more standing in for the group in question). Possible responses ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). For qualitative bridging social capital, we found Cronbach’s alpha to be 0.876. While for qualitative bonding social capital with other internationals we found Cronbach’s alpha to be 0.927, and with other co-nationals 0.953.

Belonging

For both Dutch and European society, belonging was measured through five questions asking participants to indicate to what degree they agreed with a statement such as “I feel a sense of closeness with X”, each utilising a seven-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). For belonging in Dutch society, we found Cronbach’s alpha to be 0.900, and 0.914 for belonging in European society.

The questionnaire was estimated to take ten to twenty minutes to complete and was concluded with a seriousness check. Finally, they had the possibility to leave their contact information if they wished to receive more information about the study results when the thesis was completed.

Results

After combining all of the collected data and filtering out ineligible participants, JASP was used for analysis. We conducted both correlational analyses and multiple regression in order to analyze our data. In regards to the assumptions for linearity and multiple regression,

we utilized random sampling and independent observations. Scatter plots can be found in Appendix A.

Correlational Analysis

For each hypothesis the proportion of time spent in the Netherlands was used as control variable ($M= 4.045$, $SD= 0.745$). Hypothesis 1 tested the relationships between Dutch language proficiency ($M= 1.873$, $SD= 0.945$) and feelings of belonging in Dutch society ($M= 3.921$, $SD= 1.333$) amongst international students. We found the correlation between these two measures to be $r = .308$ (with a 2-tailed significance of $p < .001$), supporting our hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 tested the relationship between bridging social capital and feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students. Bridging social capital was operationalized both quantitatively (frequency of bridging contact) ($M= 2.261$, $SD= 0.996$) and qualitatively (Social Support) ($M= 4.164$, $SD= 1.426$). As such, we found the correlation between these frequencies of social capital and belonging in Dutch society to be $r = .424$ ($p < .001$). In regards to qualitative bridging social capital, we found its correlation with belonging to be $r = .496$ ($p < .001$). The correlation between qualitative and quantitative measures of bridging social capital was $r = .429$ ($p < .001$). These findings supported our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 tested whether higher bonding social capital would decrease feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students. Similarly, to bridging social capital, bonding social capital was operationalized both qualitatively and quantitatively, and for both internationals and co-nationals. With other co-nationals, we found the correlation between the quantity of bonding social capital (frequency) ($M=3.097$, $SD= 1.408$) and belonging to be $r = -0.029$ ($p = 0.742$). The correlation between qualitative bonding social capital ($M=5.062$, $SD= 1.535$) and belonging was $r = .014$ ($p = 0.871$). With other

internationals, we found the correlation between the quantity of bonding social capital ($M=3.970$, $SD=0.925$) and belonging to be $r = 0.054$ ($p = 0.534$). The correlation between qualitative bonding social capital with internationals ($M= 5.596$, $SD= 1.082$) was $r = 0.041$ ($p = 0.642$). Given these findings, we can surmise that the relation between bonding social capital and belonging, at least in this case, is negligible. These findings failed to support our hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4 tested whether lower bonding social capital would increase feelings of belonging in European society. In regards to the frequency of contact with co-nationals (quantitative bonding), we found the correlation to be $r = .117$ ($p = .176$), and the correlation between qualitative bonding to be $r = .082$ ($p = .345$). As such, the correlation between bonding social capital and belonging (in this case) seems again to be negligible, failing to support hypothesis 4. However, there were some other interesting findings worth discussing. Belonging in European society amongst international students and support Dutch (qualitative bridging social capital - Dutch) had a correlation of $r = .299$ ($p < .001$). Moreover, belonging in European society amongst international students and support International (qualitative bridging social capital - internationals) has a correlation of $r = .168$ ($p = .053$). These results, as the ones above, will be discussed further in the discussion section below. Table 1. Contains descriptive statistics and correlations of the relevant variables.

Table 1*Correlations*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BelongingEU	5.49	1.093	-								
2. SupportDutch	4.164	1.426		-							
			.299*								
3. SupportCoNat	5.062	1.535	.082	.156	-						
4. SupportInt	5.596	1.082	.168*	.304*	.067	-					
			**	*							
5. BelongingNL	3.921	1.333	.511*	.496*	.014	.041	-				
			*	*							
6. FrequencyNL	2.261	0.996	.179*	.429	-.158	-.102	.424*	-			
							*				
7. FrequencyCoNat	3.097	1.408	.117	-.048	.653*	-.155	-.029	-.050	-		
					*						
8. FrequencyInt	3.97	.925	.137	.118	-.244	.370*	.054	.245*	-.171*	-	
						*					
9. DutchProficiency	1.873	.945	.136	.244*	.054	.13	.308*	.315*	-.042	.185*	
							*	*			
10. Time(prop.)inNL	4.045	.745	.267*	.135	-.149	.038	.37**	.38**	-.062	.198*	.19*

* indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. *** $p = .053$

Inferential Analysis

Based on the correlational analysis, the variables of Dutch language proficiency, Support from Dutch individuals, and Frequency of contact with Dutch individuals seemed to emerge as significant explanatory variables. To further explore the respective influence of these variables, we ran a multiple regression. Model 1 (see table 2) demonstrates that the proportion of time spent in NL is significant in explaining the variance of belonging in the Netherlands ($b = 3.921$, $SE = 0.115$, $t = 34.050$, $p < .001$, $F = 20.971$). Model 2 goes on to show that the other independent variables shown to be significant in the correlational analysis

account for 37.2% of the variance in belonging in the Netherlands ($b = -.056$, $SE = .561$, $t = -.101$, $p = .920$, $F = 19.076$). Given that, in regards to hypothesis 4, belonging in European society and bonding social capital were not significantly correlated and in turn not linearly related, belonging in European has been excluded as a dependent variable from this multiple regression analysis.

Table 2*Inferential Analysis*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	LengthofStay	1.24	.595		2.083	.039
	PropTimeinNL	.663	.145	.370	4.579	<.001
2	LengthofStay	-.056	.561		-.101	.92
	PropTimeinNL	.441	.136	.246	3.253	.001
	DutchProficiency	.182	.105	.129	1.737	.085
	Support Dutch	.351	.073	.376	4.822	<.001
	FrequencyDutch	.172	.113	.128	1.518	.131

Post Hoc Analysis

While I had not hypothesized about other possible explanatory variables which may impact individuals' belonging to Europe, the correlational analysis suggests possible interesting relations between these variables. As such, I conducted an inferential analysis investigating the effects of proportional time spent in the Netherlands, Dutch support, international support, belonging in Dutch society, and frequency of contact with Dutch people. I conducted an inferential analysis of these variables given their significance in the correlational analysis. As demonstrated by Model 2 (see table 3), ($b = 2.612$, $SE = .6$, $t = 4.351$, $p < .001$). the only significant explanatory variable to emerge through this inferential analysis

is belonging to Dutch society. The total explained variance of the variables analyzed in this model on belonging in European society was found to be 27.2%.

Table 3

Post Hoc Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Intercept)	5.507	.094		58.895	<.001
2	(Intercept)	2.612	.6		4.351	<.001
	PropTimeinNL	.2	.123	.138	1.627	.106
	SupportDutch	.004	.075	.006	.06	.952
	SupportInt	.132	.081	.132	1.619	.108
	BelongingNL	.393	.075	.487	5.24	<.001
	FrequencyDutch	-.094	.1	-.087	-.938	.35

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the effects of language proficiency and social capital on international students' sense of belonging, both in Dutch and European society. In order to examine these relationships, we hypothesized that (H1) Dutch language proficiency would increase feelings of belonging in Dutch society amongst international students, (H2) higher bridging social capital would also increase feelings of belonging in Dutch society, (H3) higher bonding social capital would decrease feelings of belonging in Dutch society, and that (H4) higher bonding social capital would decrease feelings of belonging in European Society. To test these hypotheses, we conducted a cross-sectional study utilizing a sample of 134 international students in the Netherlands. Our results supported hypothesis 1 and 2, however there was no evidence to support hypothesis 3 and 4. This suggests that bonding social capital, and in turn social interactions with an individual's own ingroup does not necessarily come at

the expense of one's ability to acculturate and develop a sense of belonging to a new group.

However, nor did we find bonding social capital to be of particular assistance to acculturation and one's sense of belonging to a new group as suggested by Valdez et al. (2012). This may suggest a relative lack of meaningful interactions between individuals' different and various group identities.

Upon running both a correlational analysis and inferential analysis, two variables emerged as significant explainers of the variance in belonging; proportion of time spent in the Netherlands and qualitative bridging social capital. Quantitative bridging social capital also emerged as a relatively strong explainer, with Dutch language proficiency also relating to higher feelings of belonging. There was however no significant correlation between any form of bonding social capital and belonging in either Dutch or European contexts. In testing for both dependent variables and senses of belonging, Dutch support, or qualitative bridging social capital, was the strongest predictor.

Given the variables tested in this study, it would seem that at least in this context belonging to a new group seems easier to foster through social capital than it does for social capital to hinder one's sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly and in accordance with previous research both language proficiency and bridging social capital appear to foster a sense of belonging towards a new group, given that the language and social capital are relevant to the new group. However, the regression showed the correlation between language proficiency and belonging in the Netherlands to not be significant. Such a finding may be attributable to the fact that the majority of the population of the Netherlands speak English proficiently. The correlation between international support (qualitative bridging social capital) was shown to be almost significant. This may be attributable to the study's own limitations. While the study specifically related Dutch support, it did not specifically relate European support. Instead, international support was used to conceptualize this bridging social capital. However, it is

evident that not all international support is European support. As such, support from internationals who were not European may account for this lack of significant correlation. Perhaps however, it is more local connections within a foreign European country that is more important in the forging of European identity among international students, as opposed to more connections with a broader pool of internationals. This may be supported by our findings of significant correlations between Dutch proficiency and support Dutch and belonging in European society. This particular study differs from others similar to it in that instead of focusing on a particular national or ethnic identity it tests a broader region as an independent variable. Future research could serve to better conceptualize and in turn operationalize European identity (and in turn other broader regional identities).

Practically speaking, our findings suggest that the most important factor in developing a sense of belonging as an international student in the Netherlands is the perceived support received from Dutch people. As such, relevant Dutch institutions, such as universities, could enact policy to facilitate interactions between Dutch and international individuals. In such situations international students are more likely to experience support from their Dutch counterparts.

A significant limitation in our study, as already alluded to, is that the destination country (the Netherlands) is one wherein a large portion of the local population speaks English proficiently. As such, the effects of language proficiency on belonging may have been dampened. This would certainly hinder the external validity of our findings in regards to language proficiency. Future research could investigate similar phenomena in contexts where a common language such as English is less available. A further limitation stems from our sample, which consisted largely of psychology students given our sampling techniques. It is possible that important distinctions between psychology students and students from other disciplines may have altered our results. As such, future research could broaden its sample

base. A final possible limitation is that the majority of our sample lived and studied in Groningen, a relatively small and isolated student city. As such, our findings may not translate to students in other contexts, such as in larger, less student-oriented cities. This suggests a focus for future research which could focus on students from other contexts and environments.

There are a multitude of directions future research could take. One possible direction could be to investigate participant's sense of belonging to their home nation. Particularly in regards to belonging to European society, it may be possible to individuals integrate their senses of belonging from the home country (should it be a European nation) and sense of belonging in a destination nation (should it also be European) into an encompassing sense of belonging to Europe. Previous research also focuses on economic integration, namely through employment in the destination country (Amit, 2010, 2012b). Future research could investigate the effects of this form of integration on international students. Finally, future research could also investigate the potential moderating effects of individuals' motivation to integrate. Research by Chow (2007) suggests that it is not only the degree to which one is motivated that may moderate the acculturation process, but the kind of motivation an individual has. Chow (2007) explores economic and political motivations to acculturate, future research could apply these to international students.

Conclusion

We investigated the effects of language proficiency and bridging and bonding social capital on international students' sense of belonging in both Dutch and European societies. Our findings were mixed in regards to confirming and failing to support our hypotheses. Firstly, we found that Dutch language proficiency does indeed relate to higher feelings of belonging in Dutch society. However, when compared to Dutch support, language proficiency no longer had a significant effect. Furthermore, we found that bridging social capital does

increase feelings of belonging in Dutch society, particular qualitative support more so than frequency of contact. However, our findings suggested the higher bonding social capital did not decrease feelings of belonging, either in Dutch or European society. Evidently, the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital is a significant one.

Word Count= 4947

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Appendix A

Correlation plot

