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## The Role of Self-Efficacy in Expatriate Adjustment: An Allegorical Perspective

### Le rôle de la connaissance de ses propres capacités dans l'adaptation des expatriés : une perspective allégorique

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper is unique among the articles written about expatriates in that it focuses on the importance of self-efficacy, on developing one's cultural identity consciously, and on community building in order to facilitate adjustment. Well-adjusted expatriates build an array of strategies to overcome the many challenges they are faced with: awakening, overwhelmingness, culture shock, grief, uncertainty, communication issues, and identity loss. Most expatriates have had a wide array of experiences and thus can relate to characters with otherworldly experiences. *James and the Giant Peach*, a remarkable story by Roald Dahl, is used as a platform to illuminate the research literature as an invitation to reconceptualize expatriate adjustment creatively.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Voici un texte qui se démarque des autres articles portant sur les expatriés, car il se centre sur l'importance de la connaissance de ses propres capacités, le développement conscient de sa propre identité culturelle, et l'établissement de liens avec la collectivité en vue de faciliter l'adaptation. Les expatriés bien adaptés se constituent un ensemble de stratégies destinées à surmonter bien des défis qu'ils se doivent de relever : l'éveil, l'envahissement, le choc culturel, le deuil, l'incertitude, les problèmes de communication et la perte d'identité. Pratiquement tous les expatriés vivent une vaste gamme d'expériences, ce qui leur permet de se trouver des points en commun avec d'autres personnes ayant connu une vie sous influence mondialisée. On a recours au remarquable conte *James and the Giant Peach*, rédigé par Roald Dahl, à titre de plateforme destinée à éclairer les documents de recherche et comme une invitation à reconcevoir de façon créative la notion d'adaptation des expatriés.

The United Nations estimates that approximately 258 million people, in 2017, chose to live outside of their country of origin. If this group of expatriates formed a country, it would be the fifth largest nation in the world (World Bank, n.d.). Global nomads have an extensive reach around the globe. As such, they are

influencing and are influenced by many countries' psychological, social, spiritual, political, and financial structures (Shulman, 1997). Numerous reasons abound as to why people choose to relocate internationally: to explore the world, to follow a family, to secure gainful employment, to experience different cultures, to learn about themselves, to find freedom, and/or to fulfill their potential (Santin, 2016). Regardless of the reasons for an international move, integrating into a new culture is challenging. The purpose of this paper is to put a spotlight on the importance of self-efficacy, of cross-cultural identity development, and of community building in overcoming obstacles and adjusting to life as an expatriate.

Although global relocations can evoke a sense of exoticism, the daily realities of adjusting to new cultures can be chaotic, complex, ambiguous, and at times a painful process (Shulman, 1997). Cross-cultural interactions prompt expats to recognize that adjusting to a new culture is a process of examining not only who they are but also who they are becoming (Cason, 2015; Hall, 1996; Harari et al., 2018; Mol et al., 2005). In order to navigate and adjust to such complex cross-cultural interactions, successful expats develop a flexible sense of identity (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). Furthermore, successful expatriates work actively to meet their needs and to develop a strong belief in their ability to integrate within a new culture (Pollock et al., 2017). The next section delves into the terminology of cultural adjustment, cross-cultural identity, and self-efficacy in order to set the stage for thinking more reflexively and creatively about how these traits facilitate adjustment.

### Cultural Adjustment

The process of adjusting to a local culture enables people to develop a sense of belonging, which is vital to one's health and well-being (Pollock et al., 2017). What are the elements that expatriates need to adjust to? Part of that answer lies in having a functional understanding of the term *culture*. Plant (1996) offered a dynamic reminder about the wide reach of this term:

Culture emerges from the complex interactions of media, organisms, weather patterns, ecosystems, thought patterns, cities, discourses, fashions, populations, brains, markets, dance nights and bacterial exchanges. There are eco-systems under your fingernails. You live in cultures, and cultures live in you. They are everything *and* the kitchen sink. (p. 214)

Plant's observation provided an evocative picture of the continuous bombardment of new information that expatriates face upon entering a new country. Plant implied that people have an interdependent relationship with the local culture. This interplay between the known and the not yet known is a liminal space of potentiality. To integrate into a new culture and to build a functional

community, well-adjusted expatriates are actively navigating, interacting, disclosing, and inviting cross-cultural interactions through shared activities (Pollock et al., 2017). Cross-cultural adjustment, then, is an active process.

People of similar cultural backgrounds can facilitate the adjustment period. Folks with comparable experiences can readily identify gaps between homeland (or previous countries) and host countries, thus are invaluable mentors for adjustment (Cason, 2015). Moreover, when expatriates share experiences with people of the host culture, common memories are formed, which leads to mutually shared meanings that pave the way for deeper levels of cultural understanding and communication (Chiu & Qiu, 2014). Making social connections and learning the norms of the local culture enables expatriates to build a sense of community and belonging. This process of merging with a new culture necessitates an internal identity shift.

### **Cross-Cultural Identity Shift**

Identity consists of a complex network of connections between personality traits, gender, sexual orientation, family structure, cultural tradition, social membership, social responsibility, countries lived, work status, economic status, language facility, and more (Pollock et al., 2017). People inherit identities, yet they also modify their identity to accommodate their ever-changing environments. Identity is “multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions.” (Hall, 1996, p. 4). A supposition of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is that one’s identity is tied intimately to one’s deeply held values (Harris, 2009). Yet, Romanowski and Nasser (2015) found that, in order to be accepted, people tend to present an identity that is socially desirable but not necessarily consistent with their core values. These opposing viewpoints highlight the complexity of developing a cross-cultural identity. An expatriate’s identity is significantly influenced by relationships of culture and power (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). Identity is not necessarily established and unified but is fluid and evolving through continuous feedback from the environment (Plant, 1996). Successful expatriates learn the art of acculturation. They create consciously a cross-cultural identity that is consistent with their inner values yet integrates those of the host culture also (Berry, 1997). Developing a cross-cultural identity actively enables expatriates to adjust to new environments successfully.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Successful expatriates develop a high level of self-efficacy in order to adjust and to cope in their new environment (Pollock et al., 2017). Self-efficacy is an individual’s internal motivation and confidence to achieve specific tasks (Bandura,

1977). People who have a higher sense of self-efficacy utilize an array of support networks available to them, choose effective coping strategies consistently to respond to challenges, and approach problem-solving as a source of motivation and achievement (Lazarova et al., 2010). It has been established that people who have higher levels of extroversion, emotional stability, and openness tend to fare better at adjusting to international assignments (Harari et al., 2018). In contrast, introverted people may need initially to extend further outside of their comfort zone to facilitate adjustment. Expatriates, with high self-efficacy, are more open to new friendships and ask pertinent questions that help them navigate the new culture, which enables them to integrate successfully (Pollock et al., 2017). For these reasons, self-efficacy is an important feature for counsellors to identify, encourage, and develop. The next section provides an allegory to demonstrate how cultural adjustment, self-efficacy, and community building might be facilitated within a counselling context.

### Usefulness of Allegory

Using allegories within a counselling setting with expatriates can be an effective tool to build awareness, make meaning, consolidate, and integrate their lived experiences. Expatriates benefit from the practice of developing a multitude of dimensions through which to organize their knowledge, as this process develops cognitive flexibility (Scott, 1962). As well, an allegory enables expatriates to redirect the intensity of their feelings toward external characters, thereby making intense emotions less threatening (Lauzon, 2017). Also, mythical characterizations of real-life stories can help to normalize experiences, bear witness to internal change, provide containment, reorient to new ways of categorizing experiences, and offer generative solutions (Jung, 1969/2014). Interacting through story provides people with the opportunity to defuse from old patterns of thinking, clarify their values, attitudes, and beliefs, and integrate alternative cultural perspectives in a safe environment (Harris, 2009). Moreover, stories may also act as transitional objects that reorient and reconnect people to themselves, to others, and to their local environments (Winnicott, 1971).

### Synopsis

In Roald Dahl's story *James and the Giant Peach* (1961/2007), a 4-year-old boy is sent to live with his two cruel aunts after a rhinoceros eats his parents. James is incredibly lonely in his new surroundings. After 3 years of living with his abusive aunts, an old man visits and offers James magical seeds that he claims will change James's life for the better. James accidentally drops the seeds on the ground, where a peach grows to enormous proportions. James enters the peach through a hole in the bottom and finds his way to the pit, where he meets several enormous creatures: Spider, Centipede, Earthworm, and Old Green Grasshopper.

The centipede cuts the peach from the tree; it crushes the two evil aunts, killing them, and subsequently rolls into the ocean. A series of frightening events occurs in their sea voyage, such as encounters with attacking sharks, Cloud-Men, and helpful seagulls. James and his peach mates find their way to New York, where he takes up residence in Central Park inside the peach pit. The next section weaves together the research literature with the experiences of the characters in the story and discusses some ideas for ways to utilize the allegory in counselling practice.

### **Awakening**

James enters the womblike space of the peach, emboldened by the old man's foretelling that "*marvelous* things will start happening to you, *fabulous, unbelievable* things—and you will never be miserable again in your life" (Dahl, 1961/2007, p. 20). Moving to a new country "suggests the idea of *renovatio*, renewal, or even of improvement brought about by magical means" (Jung, 1969/2014, p. 114). Expatriates report consistently the thrill of moving to a new country because of the idea that they can be released from challenges that have beleaguered them in their previous locations (Pollock et al., 2017). There is almost an expectation that by crossing a physical boundary, new personal boundaries will also be overcome (Lauzon, 2017). Embracing the otherworldly permits people to break out of their usual roles and routines, thus enabling them to explore "authenticity, awareness, pursuing self-potential, freedom, and the ineffability of existence" (Madison, 2005, p. 224). The romantic anticipatory phase seems necessary in order to forge through the fear, the overwhelmingness, and the ambivalence that also attends an international move. Like expatriates who see moving as a way to escape difficulty, James appears to be inexplicably drawn to enter the peach. He is answering the call to awaken something. He is carried forward by the promise of marvellous new things that were foretold by the old man.

### ***Putting the Allegory Into Practice***

Expatriates may find solace in a story of characters embarking on a worldwide expedition with limited resources. Upon hearing the beginning of the story (found in the synopsis) of how James came to be inside a giant peach, several questions could be posed. Perhaps the client could imagine being the 7-year-old boy walking into a giant peach. What sort of sights, sounds, smells, or textures might exist within the peach? What curiosities, fears, or excitement might arise within James? What do you imagine James might be sensing as he enters the room with the giant insects? What do you imagine prompts James to remain in the peach and not to run away? Whom or what do you imagine might have offered assistance? What elements of the physical environment might be supportive on such a journey? How long do you imagine or hope the journey might take? What marvellous new things do you think James will encounter? What aspects of his life do you think James is happy to leave behind? The answers to these questions, born out

of the symbolic characters, can often be reflections of the closely held, perhaps even unconscious beliefs, values, and ideals of the client.

### **Allowing Space for Grief and Loss**

James experiences grief and loss, as a result not only of his parents' death but also of having to live with his cruel aunts. James is in a state of depression for three years before he is able to lift out of his bereavement and be open to the possibility of something new, which comes in the guise of the old man with the magical beans. Like James, the grief and the loss that expatriates experience can be suppressed while the more immediate tasks of adjusting to daily life are attended to (Pollock et al., 2017). Grief and losses occur with each move (Pollock et al., 2017). Losses can pertain to friends, family, acquaintances, mentors, routines, general knowledge of daily living, homes, objects, weather, and more. Metabolizing grief and loss can be difficult, owing to the fact that expatriates are removed physically from their support networks (Cason, 2015). What is more, in their new location, expatriates may experience lower social status (Cason, 2015), poorer mental health, and/or a propensity for substance misuse (Truman et al., 2011). Counsellors may recognize grief and loss that surface within clients as they take the form of stress, self-isolation, anger, and criticism (Pollock et al., 2017).

Although people can find support through social media platforms (Tseng, 2016) and through other expatriates (Cason, 2015), there remains a gap when social ties are severed. Either consciously or unconsciously, expatriates may distance themselves from support systems as a form of self-protection (Pollock et al., 2017). What is more, expatriates change through their experiences in ways that may be difficult for friends and families to understand, thus alienating the expatriate further (Cason, 2015). To facilitate a successful transition, expats need to be aware of the numerous changes and losses in their lives and to be permitted to grieve them (Lauzon, 2017). Discussing grief (both previous and anticipatory) with empathetic people can help the expatriate grieve, normalize, find language for, and make sense of their experiences (Pollock et al., 2017). This process takes time and energy. Once James decides to step into and remain in the inner sanctum of the peach, he opens up to the possibility of building a new community. So too encouraging the expatriate client to explore the multi-faceted aspects of grief and loss will create the opportunity to metabolize the transition and to make room for living more fully in the present.

### ***Putting the Allegory Into Practice***

The expatriate who is adjusting may not necessarily recognize their responses as grief. Here, too, an imaginal exploration may help bring to light the small and large griefs and sorrows that otherwise may be dismissed in typical conversations. Some probing questions for the fictitious character might be the following: What is left behind in the journey? What does James give up in the move? Whose voice

was dominant within James's family? Why do you think James becomes more assertive when he lives with the insects? Does the move shift the characters' social status or financial status? What healthy or unhealthy coping mechanisms might also be activated within James or others? In what ways can you imagine James acknowledging his losses? Who or what might prove helpful in companioning this character in moving through his grief? Drawing upon the imaginal conversation, the counsellor and the client may discover together useful ideas about identifying the specific griefs and losses and about cultivating healing solutions.

### **Effective Communication Strategies**

Effective communication is essential to building relationships. Communication reflects what is innately held within the body (Jung, 1969/2014). It reflects one's beliefs and values (Harris, 2009). When these belief systems can be connected with people's communication style, people become more aware of what is being communicated, versus what they intended to communicate. When intentions, values, and needs are made known, clients have more choices available to them (Jung, 1969/2014).

For James, effective communication is born out of his need to collaborate with the others in order to live through the shark attack. When James proposes to use Earthworm as bait to capture the seagulls and to pull the peach out of the shark-infested waters, he is met with intense opposition.

“Ridiculous!” they shouted.

“Absurd!”

“Poppycock!”

“Balderdash!”

“Madness!” (Dahl, 1961/2007, p. 105)

James studiously avoids arguing with the others and focuses instead on his goal of getting all of them out of the shark-infested waters alive. He adopts a mutually agreeable plan, which is met with the supporting characters calling James “absolutely brilliant” and “a genius” (Dahl, 1961/2007, p. 110). By avoiding conflict and concentrating on the task at hand, James is able to encourage each character to help resolve the problem.

So, too, when expatriates employ a non-combatant style of communication, they are perceived as fostering trust, reducing stress, and improving adjustment within groups (Jannesari et al., 2016). Communicating through more harmonious means encourages people to perceive problems as less serious, thus directing energy toward problem-solving and mutual tolerance (van Erp et al., 2011b). At the same time, when people engage in open conflict, relationships are perceived as being threatened, thus increasing psychological stress (van Erp et al., 2011a). As James experiences, communication can be difficult when the stakes are high.

Since building trusting relationships is essential for James to continue living, he befriends the insects, accepts their differences of opinion, avoids open conflict, and adopts an interdependent and mutually agreeable stance. Drawing on a multitude of inner resources and on a studious understanding of the local population, expatriates can transcend differences and build effective relationships with others.

### ***Putting the Allegory Into Practice***

Counsellors can support clients by illuminating their existing communication styles and connecting those styles to the values that are supporting them. Using the example above, James responds to the shark threat by creating a plan of action. What does this say about his values and beliefs about himself and others? What do you think is going through James's mind when he calmly proposes to use Earthworm as bait to capture the seagulls, in order to pull the peach out of the shark-infested waters? When the insects respond by calling this idea absurd, what effect do you imagine does James's calm demeanour have on the others at this point in the story? If James became frustrated and combative, what effect might that have on the situation? What resources do you think James is able to access that help him stay calm and forge on in the face of opposition? Considering carefully the motivations of the symbolic characters can highlight the values and inner resources that the client can draw upon in order to forge ahead in the face of difficulties.

### **Coping With Uncertainty**

Uncertainty reigns throughout *James and the Giant Peach*. The inhabitants of the peach are faced with the possibility of drowning, of being eaten, of being attacked, or of starving. At one point in the story, the sharks are furiously eating the peach, which is sinking lower and lower into the water, threatening to submerge its hosts. So, too, uncertainty is woven into the daily experiences of the expatriate. Global nomads express uncertainty about the temporary nature of their employment, the lack of transparency, the degree of freedom of expression, the legal recourse for injustices (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015), security, possessions, social status, role models (Pollock et al., 2017), and the demands of the new culture (Harari et al., 2018). Whatever form it takes, uncertainty can bring about painful reminders of the past and call into question people's perceived capability to respond effectively to challenges (Pollock et al., 2017). Expatriates experience uncertainty in many areas of their lives.

In order to function within a landscape of uncertainty, well-adjusted expatriates can be supported through the development of cognitive flexibility. In his seminal research, Scott (1962) discovered that when people increase the number of dimensions through which to categorize their experiences, they tended to gain information and were able to provide a broader range of ways to solve a problem. The introduction of an allegory, then, provides clients with an alternative way to



categorize their phenomenologically complex experiences and to discover new information that is relevant to their ever-changing environment. These same principles (of recategorizing, discovering new information, and developing cognitive flexibility) can occur within multiple locations of expatriates' lives. Cason (2015) found that when people broadened their horizons by ingratiating themselves into numerous communities (work-related, educational, social, political, spiritual, and recreational), they were better able to cope with uncertainty. In doing so, expatriates gained a broader perspective and developed caring connections with others who could help them navigate physical and psychological uncertainties (Näsholm, 2009). Expatriates reduce uncertainty by making long-term plans yet also are able to identify when long-term planning becomes a source of anxiety (Pollock et al., 2017). Other people find solace in approaching uncertainty as an opportunity to identify and accomplish goals (Harris, 2009) and whose fruition engenders a sense of achievement (Lazarova et al., 2010). Living with uncertainty is a reality for most expatriates. Learning to develop cognitive flexibility helps to minimize its attendant stressors.

Part of how people learn to reduce the stress of uncertainty is to learn to accept it (Harris, 2009). One way to learn acceptance is to make a daily practice of letting go of the desire to exert control, through a meditation practice (Chödrön, 2018). Harris (2009) extended the idea of accepting uncertainty by encouraging people to recognize when they are overidentifying or fused with the expectation that life is supposed to unfold in a particular way. Harris encouraged people to accept the fact that they will experience psychological discomfort when uncertainty is present. Another strategy is to engage creatively with the problem with a view to illuminate new solutions, thereby developing a flexible mindset (Jung, 1969/2014). In the story, when James accepts the existence of the sharks, he does not become entrenched with the problem by trying to change their behaviour nor complain about their existence. Instead, his mental agility enables him to identify the lack of safety and to respond creatively to the problem.

### ***Putting the Allegory Into Practice***

Uncertainty is invariably a part of the expatriate journey. It may be helpful for expatriates to identify the areas in which things are going well and why that might be the case, thus minimizing the tendency to be overwhelmed by uncertainty. Further explorations about uncertainty may also prove helpful. Some lines of inquiry might be as follows: What do you imagine bothers James the most about uncertainty (need for control/have the answer/attempt to get it right)? When uncertainty is present, what are you reminded of? Once the underlying issues are illuminated, new lines of inquiry might involve how James deals with uncertainty. What role does acceptance play in a shifting and changing landscape that James and the other characters face? What difference does it make when the characters are focusing on the present versus when they are projecting into

the future? When James forges onward, in spite of the sharks, what does that say about his values? Do you think there is value to experiencing uncertainty? Thinking about the ways in which James deals with uncertainty, has that got you thinking differently about your own life? These questions are designed to support the client in developing an awareness of the options they have in the face of uncertainty. When expatriates focus on the present, clarify their values and goals, and put a valued plan into action, they are more likely to accept some discomfort in their journey as an expatriate.

### **Reconstructing Cultural Identity**

We see James's cultural identity bloom throughout the story. When he first steps into the inner sanctum of the peach, he is afraid that the ravenous, enormous insects will eat him. Once James gets to know these characters, he encourages them to utilize their resources and to risk their lives for the good of the group. If cultures are recursive, adaptive, and dynamic systems designed to meet the needs of its populace, as suggested by Plant (1996), how do expatriates transform their cultural identity to become fully functioning members, like James?

When living in a new culture, expatriates are tasked with the question of the degree to which they should maintain aspects of their culture of origin and the extent to which they should adopt to the cultural norms of the local group. Invariably, cross-cultural contact brings rise to an awareness of differences as well as the struggle to coexist within the confines of one's existing frame of reference. This tension presents the opportunity to shed some aspects of one culture and to learn to adopt new ways of living. There are a wide range of individual and social factors that influence the acculturation process. On an individual level, acculturation is moderated by age, gender, education, choice in the move, expectation, cultural distance, and personality factors (Berry, 1997). On a social level, the acculturation process is moderated by local attitudes, social support, prejudices, discrimination, political climate, economics, demographic factors, and more (Berry, 1997). The research implies that the acculturation process is complex and can be unique to each individual.

In the initial stages of the acculturation process, people acquire an awareness, an understanding, and an acceptance of the change process (Bennett, 1993). Immersion in a new culture prompts people to be active in identifying cultural differences, reassigning new values and meanings to their existing identity, and making meaning of their experiences (Näsholm, 2009). Nevertheless, the process of developing cultural sensitivities can be fragmenting and dissociating (Shulman, 1997). This process appears to be smoother for people with healthy attachment styles as they anticipate that they will make friends easily, that they will establish connections quickly, and that people will be helpful (Harari et al., 2018). All expatriates are faced with the complex task of deconstructing, negotiating, and reconstructing their identity within each interaction (Näsholm, 2009). Through

observation, reflection, and considered conversations, expatriates can develop an ethno-relative stance, meaning they learn to view cultural events within the context of the cultural norms of others.

The process of cultural identity reconstruction is the subtle shift from a narrow, personal, and cultural viewpoint to internalizing an alternative cultural frame of reference (Bennett, 1993). Successful expatriates take the time and the effort to develop a facility with local customs and languages, thereby increasing their tolerance for ambiguity (Mol et al., 2005). They make efforts to understand the national perspective and to move beyond stereotypes and ethnocentric views (Näsholm, 2009). Navigating new cultures prompts people to expand their awareness of how power structures operate and how to shift their identity within various contexts (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). In this way, expatriates learn to handle and resolve cultural misunderstandings and miscommunication issues successfully (Romanowski & Nasser, 2015). Consistent with Plant's (1996) remarks about culture, Bennett (1993) encouraged people to integrate multiple cultural perspectives, thereby creating a reality that provides a plethora of choices—thus, ease—within multiple cultural locations. Acculturation is a maturation process. Its process prompts people to recognize the origins of tension, the tolerance for difference, and the acceptance of change. The result is the development of a sense of self-efficacy and cognitive flexibility, which are fundamental features of the successful expatriate.

### ***Putting the Allegory Into Practice***

Although the research literature supports the development of a cross-cultural identity, it can be a complex, lengthy, and difficult process. For this reason, imaginary characters might prove useful in containing strong emotions and providing a safe space in which to test new aspects of one's identity. Some questions to facilitate a cross-cultural identity might include the following: What would James need to do to see the world through the eyes of insects? How does James conclude that the hungry insects are likely to eat him? What stereotypes do you imagine Earthworm, by Grasshopper, by Centipede, and by Spider hold about James? What resources does James need to change his long-standing beliefs about insects? Do you think that awkward conversations—like those that James, worried about being eaten by them, has with the insects—are a necessary component of learning new cultures? How does James come to accept the insects and work amicably alongside them? In what ways does James shift his identity to respond to the various contexts he finds himself in? How does he manage the differing beliefs that are held by all of the insects? How does he increase his tolerance for ambiguity? In what ways was this helpful? Reflecting in a safe space encourages expatriates to acknowledge tension, to consider differences consciously, and to build an appreciation for a multitude of ways of being. In doing so, expatriates

expand their identity to host multiple values and belief systems, to increase their tolerance for differences, and to develop a flexible cross-cultural identity.

Too often, expatriates move to a new country only to find themselves overwhelmed by the myriad of tasks that need to be addressed, often within a short period. Expatriates often discuss the long period of adjustment that is required to build community with each move. A creative allegorical approach may be a balm to what is otherwise a painful, frustrating, and chaotic change in lifestyle.

### Conclusion

A significant number of people live in countries foreign to their homeland (United Nations, 2017). The experience of being an expatriate is not universal; no two experiences are alike. Transitioning to a new geographical location is to be faced with grief and loss as well as with the challenges of living within a new culture with new norms, values, beliefs, and unique structures. The move emboldens people to pursue unexplored aspects of themselves (Madison, 2005). The excitement of the move can be useful in working through the more overwhelming aspects. The highly anticipated awakening can give way quickly to culture shock, profound alienation, communication issues, grief, loss of identity, and uncertainty (Pollock et al., 2017). Nevertheless, successful expatriates develop a wide range of skills to meet the challenges that arise. This paper brings to light the importance of self-efficacy and of consciously developing one's cultural identity and community to adjust to a new culture successfully.

*James and the Giant Peach* is a fantastical story with unique characters who have otherworldly experiences. Introducing a story that parallels some aspects of an expatriate's experience offers relief from what may otherwise be experienced as idiosyncratic and isolated. The story is a symbolic offering through which to contain, metabolize, and transform the expatriate experience.

The images within *James and the Giant Peach* are suggestive of a myriad of actions and reflections that support the journey of the well-adjusted expatriate. Hopefully, this paper prompts counsellors to use an allegory of one sort or another to demystify the adjustment process of an expatriate. Transitioning from excitement, the new expatriate may have their own stories of overwhelmingness, culture shock, fear, grief, and loss. Expatriates may have their personal stories of shark-infested waters. Yet, like James, the well-adjusted expatriate faces each challenge through their own stories of self-efficacy. Each new experience allows the expatriate to reflect upon what lies inside their own peach pits (beliefs and values). Just as James believed initially that insects are carnivores who eat indiscriminately, expatriates may have stories of stereotypes that changed the valence of their experiences. James reconciles with the insects and, in doing so, creates a functional community. In the same way, expatriates reconcile with their cultural location by learning to tolerate a greater degree of uncertainty, adopt a

communication style that fosters trust, and develop a fluid and flexible identity that is well suited to their current environment, thus positioning themselves to integrate into the community successfully.

In essence, *James and the Giant Peach* provides embodied images that align with expatriate experiences, hence lending a sense of self-efficacy that carries the expatriate toward adjustment within their world. Viewing experiences through a different centre of orientation, by way of allegory, companions the expatriate in developing a fluidity with multiple ways of being. As a consequence, the skills developed to meet each challenge become woven into the psyche and sustained.

### **Implications for Counselling Practice**

The expatriate who seeks counselling is not likely to present every theme that was brought forward in this article. Rather, these themes are common among expatriates and bear consideration, which may be unique from the general population. I am also aware that not every client and counsellor will have read *James and the Giant Peach*, nor do I believe that it is necessary for clients to have read this story in order to gain benefit from its principles. If the counsellor is familiar with the story, they could simply relay the segment of the story that coincides with the current experience of the client. A small segment of the story is sufficient to support the client in amplifying, symbolizing, and exploring the character's responses to themes that are resonant with the client. The questions posed in the subsections entitled "Putting Allegory Into Practice" are informed by the scientific literature. The aim is to elicit responses that lead clients to develop a deeper understanding of their circumstances and illuminate opportunities for adjustment. Encouraging clients to reorganize their innate knowledge in new ways helps them to gain perspective, to reflect, to bring new ideas to consciousness, and to develop cognitive flexibility. Clients then have new resources and knowledge to draw upon and inform their personal lives.

*James and the Giant Peach* is embedded with cultural values that may not resonate with every client. For this reason, I would encourage counsellors to use stories that they and the client have in common. Clients who present issues similar to those presented in this article may find a mutually shared allegory with the counsellor. The characters in the new story may be asked similar questions posed in this article. The client is afforded the opportunity to reflect, to muse, and to discover new ways of viewing the world. In this way, different allegories can meet the same purpose.

As I was writing this article, I was aware that several therapeutic theories could readily integrate the use of an allegory into therapeutic sessions. Art therapists might work with clients to amplify, to symbolize, and to express clients' challenges artistically, thereby discovering alternative solutions with clients. The narrative therapist may be inspired to utilize poignant themes of the allegory

in order to externalize, to deconstruct, to illuminate the implicit, to scaffold unique outcomes, and to support the client in re-storying their lives alongside those of the allegorical characters. The acceptance and commitment therapist could readily use the allegory to demonstrate the value of psychological flexibility by defining clients' values, being present, accepting, defusing, and creating a path to committed action. Whatever your theoretical orientation, it is my hope that the themes and symbolic characters outlined in this article can be integrated into your practice in service to expatriate clients in their adjustment process. Hopefully, this paper encourages the reader to consider using an allegory of one sort or another to demystify the adjustment process. Encouraging people to reflect on the allegory illuminates clients' resources. Like stories, adjustment has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Encouraging clients to discuss in depth the beginning, the middle, and the end of a story can stimulate new stories being rewritten in clients' lives as well.

### **Implications for Research**

This paper offers a broad framework for working with expatriates who have moved recently to a new country. Major themes are discussed alongside an allegorical perspective. The allegorical approach companions the expatriate by encouraging reflection, observation, and active imagination to stimulate capacity development. Unique among counselling articles, this paper offers a framework for therapists to integrate recent research and creative practice to support expatriates in adjusting to their new environment. Rarely do scientific articles provide a coherent compilation of the major hurdles that expatriates face, alongside the strategies that support adjustment. This article also raises several opportunities for future theoretical and concept validation research.

To my knowledge, there is no one satisfactory and unifying theory of expatriate adjustment that can guide therapeutic conversations effectively. Although many articles and books offer a plethora of observations and directional insights, clients and therapists are left primarily to find their own pathway to adjustment. For this reason, the realm of expatriate adjustment is in great need of a unifying theory.

Further research is also required to understand the key constructs that underlie adjustment. As a starting point, I proposed that self-efficacy, cross-cultural identity development, and community building are fundamental to the process. Identity development is a complex process, particularly within a new cultural context. Future research could shed light on the nuances of cross-cultural identity development throughout different life stages. Investing resources into understanding expatriate adjustment has the potential to impact a multitude of communities positively.

Finally, I urge counsellors to integrate a creative approach into their practice, similar to the allegorical approach outlined in this article. Expatriates are privy to

a wide array of unusual and unique interactions that are not experienced by other populations. Thus, new and creative approaches to support these populations are required. Furthermore, I would urge researchers to examine this allegorical approach scientifically in order to determine its effectiveness, relative to other treatments currently in use.

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