

18 Emotional acculturation

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Do emotions acculturate when people move from one culture to the next? We conceive of “emotional acculturation” as the process by which immigrants come to share the host culture’s most prevalent patterns of emotional experiences. In this chapter we will discuss the first evidence that emotional acculturation takes place, and provide details on the dynamics of this process. We will also highlight how the finding of emotional acculturation speaks to mechanisms of emotional change generally.

Emotional patterns and emotional similarity

Each culture is characterized by a distinct pattern of emotional experiences: emotions that are consistent with the prevalent cultural ideas and practices are experienced at higher frequency and intensity, while emotions that are inconsistent are rather rare (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1994; Mesquita, 2003; Mesquita and Leu, 2007). Individuals engaging in the same cultural context will tend to share the same *patterns of emotions*. Conversely, the emotions of people engaging in different cultural contexts tend to diverge.

What does it mean exactly when the patterns of emotions diverge? Let’s take Ayşe, a Turkish girl, and Ann, a Belgian girl. Both girls encounter the situation that a colleague at work claims a prestigious task for herself, while this task had been assigned to the girls as well. In some ways Ann and Ayşe’s emotional experiences are similar: they are both angry. Yet, Ayşe’s angry feelings are accompanied by shame and guilt, because the situation prompts her to think about the different ways in which she herself may have contributed to the incident. Ann would likely report high intensity anger, but low intensity for all other emotions. The patterns of emotions that the girls experience may be seen as reflecting their respective take on the emotional event. While Ann focuses on the way her colleague blocks her goals, Ayşe is more focused on the relational aspects of the situation (and how she herself might have contributed to them). The differences in emotional patterns can be understood from differences in the dominant meanings of each cultural context. Ann’s anger is consistent with the dominant Belgian values of autonomy and independence. In contrast, Ayşe’s feelings of shame and guilt would be consistent with the dominant cultural ideas in Turkish contexts that emphasize

social harmony. In each case, these meanings fit within the dominant ideas of the cultural context in which she has spent most of her life. Different patterns of emotions reflect different cultural practices and beliefs; and by the same logic, two people's emotional patterns will converge to the extent that their world views are similar.

Emotional acculturation: adoption of the host culture's emotional pattern

Suppose Ayşe moved to Belgium: would her emotional responses become more like Ann's? Would Ayşe's exposure to the new cultural context change her emotional patterns? Several recent studies suggest that people's emotional patterns do change when they change cultures (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, and Kim, 2011). We conducted two studies in which we tested these ideas, involving Korean immigrants in the US and Turkish immigrants in Belgium. In both studies, we found that an immigrant's emotional concordance (similarity) with the host culture's emotional pattern was commensurate to his or her engagement in that new culture.

We selected these two immigrant groups because they were maximally different: on average, Korean immigrants in the US tend to be educated and middle class, whereas the majority of Turkish immigrants in Belgium received little education and are working class. Convergent findings for Korean and Turkish immigrant groups would thus bolster our confidence in the phenomenon of emotional acculturation.

We did not ask immigrants to what extent their emotions were similar to those of the host culture. Rather, we had respondents from both immigrant and host culture groups rate their emotional experiences on the Emotional Patterns Questionnaire (EPQ) that was developed for the purpose of measuring emotional acculturation. In the EPQ, participants first report a recently encountered situation that elicited one of four types of emotion, as defined by both valence (positive, negative) and social engagement (socially engaging emotion, socially disengaging emotion) in one type of relationship context (either family or work/school). Then, they rate the intensity of their feelings during that situation on a set of 17 emotion scales (1: totally not – 7: extremely); these 17 emotion scales were confirmed to be structurally equivalent across cultures. To measure people's emotional concordance, we first calculated the average host group pattern of emotions for each type of situation. We then correlated, by situation type, each person's emotional pattern to the corresponding average emotional pattern of the host culture. We coined these correlations the person's "emotional concordance score".

There are several indications that emotional concordance is a meaningful measure of acculturation. First, the mean emotional concordance with the (Belgian or European American) host culture pattern was highest for the host groups themselves, and lowest for first generation immigrants; the concordance scores of second or later generation immigrants fell neatly in between (De Leersnyder

et al., 2011; for the Belgian data, see Figure 5, left panel). Furthermore, both Korean and Turkish immigrants were more emotionally concordant to the respective host group patterns to the extent that they spent a greater part of their life in the host culture. Finally, the number of social contacts that Korean and Turkish immigrants had with members of their respective host groups (measured as the degree to which they used the host culture language across many different social contexts) was predictive of their level of concordance. Therefore, across immigrant groups and host cultures, a person's exposure to mainstream culture predicts convergence to the mainstream patterns of emotional experience.

A qualification should be made: across cultural contexts, and for immigrants and host group members alike, we found consistent evidence that emotional concordance was higher in positive than in negative situations. The reason may be that the emotional complexity of positive situations is lower: the same set of emotion items co-varied more in positive than in negative situations. Therefore, it may be easier to acquire the new culture's emotional patterns in positive than in negative situations; an idea that is consistent with developmental evidence showing that children master emotion knowledge in the positive domain before they do in the negative domain (Doost, Moradi, Taghavi, Yule, and Dalgeish, 1999).

Interestingly, while emotional concordance is commensurate with objective measures of acculturation (e.g., age of immigration), it is unrelated to the commonly used acculturation scales. The latter scales measure the immigrant's willingness to adopt the host culture's values and traditions (e.g., Ryder, Alden, and Paulhus, 2000). An immigrant may welcome a new culture without being emotionally concordant to it (e.g., new immigrants) or, conversely, be reluctant to adopt the mainstream culture's values and yet be emotionally concordant

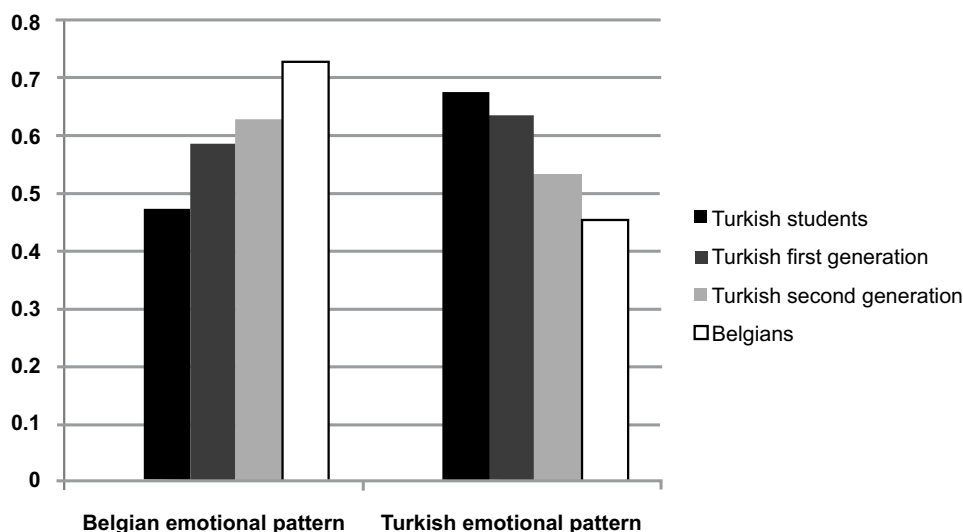


Figure 5 Mean emotional concordance scores to the Belgian and Turkish average emotional patterns, matched for type of situation.

(e.g., second generation). This means that the extent to which an immigrant shares the meanings and practices of the host culture, as reflected by emotional acculturation is independent of that immigrant's desire to be part of the host culture. Emotional change is contingent on the immigrant's *implicit* acceptance, but not on his/her *explicit* endorsement of the new culture.

Emotional acculturation: maintenance of the heritage culture's emotional patterns.

Now suppose that Ayşe moved to Belgium, and that her emotional responses acculturated. Under what circumstances would Ayşe's emotional patterns also be concordant with the Turkish emotional patterns? What would predict her maintenance of the Turkish emotional patterns? And would Ayşe's emotional patterns be more Belgian in some contexts, and more Turkish in other?

To answer these questions, we expanded the Turkish-Belgian data with a large sample of native Turkish college students in Turkey. The Turkish respondents completed the same Emotional Patterns Questionnaire that we used for the Belgian samples. We first established the structural equivalence between the emotion ratings in the native Turkish group in Turkey and the Turkish immigrant groups in Belgium; the majority of emotions were again found to be structurally equivalent. We then calculated the common heritage culture's emotional patterns by averaging the ratings of the Turkish college students by situation. The emotional concordance to this Turkish average emotional pattern was established for every Turkish immigrant in Belgium who had participated in our earlier studies. The results show that, at the group level, mean concordance scores with the Turkish emotional pattern are highest for Turkish students themselves and lowest for second generation immigrants to Belgium, with first generation immigrants' concordance scores in the middle (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, and Kim, 2012; see Figure 5, right panel). Emotional concordance was yet again higher in positive than in negative situations.

Furthermore, we found that Turkish immigrants were more concordant to the Turkish emotional patterns to the extent that they spent a greater part of their life in Turkey and immigrated to Belgium at an older age. Furthermore, Turkish immigrants' maintenance of Turkish emotional patterns was predicted by the number of daily social interactions in which Turkish was the language spoken. This means that immigrants who engaged in Turkish cultural contexts tended to be more emotionally similar to the average Turkish emotional patterns. Immigrants' explicit attitudes towards the maintenance of Turkish values and traditions did not predict concordance with the heritage emotional patterns; these findings are parallel to the findings on mainstream culture acculturation of emotions.

As a final step, we calculated the emotional concordance of native Belgians living in Belgium to the Turkish emotional pattern (Figure 5, right panel). As would have been expected on the basis of their exposure to Turkish culture, the Belgian group has lower emotional concordance with the Turkish emotional patterns than any of the other groups. This finding suggests that emotional

concordance is not merely a matter of education. The Turkish and the Belgian samples were more similar in education than either of these groups were with the Turkish immigrant groups—especially the first generation immigrants—and yet, their emotional patterns were the most divergent.

Moreover, we did the reverse as well (Figure 5, left panel), and found that Turkish college students in Turkey were less emotionally concordant with the Belgian emotional pattern than any of the immigrant groups. The lower concordance of monocultural respondents with the other culture's emotional pattern is evidence that immigrants' lower emotional concordance with the host country's emotional patterns is not due to unreliable data. Rather, in Figure 5, the ascending concordance with the Belgian emotional pattern, and the descending concordance with the Turkish emotional pattern, seem to reflect the exposure of the various groups to these two cultures respectively.

Our research has also provided some first insights into the conditions under which the one or the other culture is foregrounded. In family contexts or at home, Turkish first generation immigrants were far more concordant to the Turkish emotional patterns than to the Belgian ones, whereas Turkish second generation immigrants were equally concordant to both culture's emotional patterns. In work or school contexts, Turkish second generation immigrants are far more concordant to the Belgian emotional patterns than to the Turkish ones, whereas Turkish first generation immigrants were equally concordant to both culture's emotional patterns. These results may mean that given contexts signal to the immigrant the relevance of one type of emotional pattern over another: interactions with Belgian colleagues at work signal the relevance of a Belgian pattern, whereas interactions with Turkish family members at home signal applicability of the Turkish pattern of emotional experience. Or put differently, immigrants' emotional patterns may be maximally congruent with the pattern of emotions that is most prevalent in that social context. Further research is needed to fully understand how and when these contextual effects occur.

Emotional acculturation: a model for continued emotional change

Why would immigrants' emotional concordance increase after they have spent more time with majority members? Let's go back to the example of Ayşe at the beginning of the chapter, and let's assume that the incident with the colleague took place in a Belgian context. If Ayşe had experienced the situation in the Turkish way—that is, if she had felt shame or guilt in addition to anger and, therefore, had tempered her anger—she might not have been taken seriously. In the eyes of her colleagues, her behavior would have been harder to understand than if she responded with full-fledged anger—which is the Belgian pattern of experiencing the situation. In other words, in a Belgian context, the Belgian emotional pattern will serve Ayşe better than the Turkish emotional pattern, and is thus reinforced. Moreover, repeated exposure to Belgian contexts will make the Belgian way of emotional experience chronically accessible, at least in certain contexts. We predict that, over time, and depending on the immigrants' level of contact with

majority members, immigrants' emotional experiences will converge with those of members of the host culture in ways that maximize the fit of immigrants.

Our model of emotional acculturation can be taken as a model of emotional change generally. It suggests that people's emotional patterns shift in response to changes in their socio-cultural context. Social circumstances may change, even for non-immigrants: it is not uncommon to move between cities or neighborhoods, to change jobs, or to start new relationships. We suggest that each of these changes may stand for a shift in reinforcement structure or affordance, and thus to (small) and, at times, incremental changes in emotional patterns. Consistent with this idea, longitudinal research has yielded increased emotional concordance in dyads and groups after they have spent time together (Anderson, Keltner, and John, 2003; Totterdell, 2000). More generally, emotional change may thus be a function of an individual's socio-cultural contexts, and particularly their reinforcement structures.

Our research on acculturation, therefore, suggests a model of emotional change that is not unlike some learning models (e.g., Bouton, 2010). Each new interaction or experience affords new ways of emotional responding. Changes in emotional patterns throughout the life span are answers to changing requirements of a person's (new) social environments. Consecutive interactions with others may thus produce successive (not end-point-oriented) changes in emotions (Saarni, 2008) that enhance their functionality to the particular social context.

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- Totterdell, P. (2000). Catching moods and hitting runs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, 848–859. Figure 1. Mean emotional concordance scores to the Belgian and Turkish average emotional patterns, matched for type of situation.