



Components of Emotional Meaning: A sourcebook

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CHAPTER

34 Familiarity and disappointment: A culture-specific dimension of emotional experience in Greece?

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Abstract

The Greek GRID largely confirmed the four-factor structure of emotion dimensions discovered cross-culturally and revealed a fifth culture-specific factor which is discussed using a mixed approach from cultural and cross-cultural psychology. The profile of Greece on the four cultural dimensions of values by Hofstede and the Greek factor structure of social axioms, a concept presented by Leung et al. 2002, will contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of the fifth emic factor of emotional experience. We conclude that variation along several cultural dimensions and the existence of possible emic conditions in cultures might shed some light onto similarities and differences between languages and cultures along the emotional dimensions, as well as on how these interact and change over time.

Keywords: [social axioms](#), [values](#), [emotional experience](#)

Subject: [Developmental Psychology](#), [Social Psychology](#)

Collection: [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

34.1 Culture and psychological differentiation

Explaining human behavioral reactions has been a longstanding research effort based on psychological constructs—including motivational constructs, such as values—and cognitive constructs, such as social axioms (Bond et al., 2004). Social axioms are generalized beliefs about oneself, the social and physical environment, or the spiritual world, and are in the form of assertions about the relationship between two entities or concepts (Leung et al., 2002: 289). They are built on the individuals' life experience within their culture.

Analysis of social axioms has identified a structure of five factors: (a) Social Cynicism, represents a negative assessment of human nature, lack of trust in social institutions, and rejection of legitimate means in achieving one's goals (e.g., "kind-hearted people usually suffer losses"); (b) Reward for Application, refers to the belief

that investment of human resources, knowledge, and planning will lead to positive outcomes (e.g., “hard working people will achieve more in the end”); (c) Social Complexity, refers to the view that there are multiple solutions to a problem, the outcome of events is uncertain, and human inconsistency across situations is acceptable (e.g., “one has to deal with matters according to the circumstances”); (d) Fate Control, refers to the general belief that social events are influenced by impersonal, external forces (e.g., “fate determines one’s successes and failures”); and, finally, (e) Religiosity, refers to the view that spiritual forces influence the human world and that religious institutions exert a positive effect on social outcomes (e.g., “religious people are more likely to maintain moral standards”).

This social axiom structure varies to some extent across cultures in the relative importance of each factor (Neto, 2006). Replication of the basic structure has also revealed a sixth factor operative in some cultures (e.g., Safdar et al., 2006), including Greece (Gari et al., 2009). For the Greek sample, the sixth factor appears to represent a notion of Competition that derives from the struggle of the individual to address effectively the perceived complexity of societal reality. Competition combines the Social Cynicism dimension with the Social Complexity dimension in a contrasting fashion. The Greek sixth factor’s core meaning refers to a possibly competitive and cruel world, in which competition may or may not hinder progress, and in which the individual causing cruelty is divinely punished and eventually isolated.

But the most widely known attempt to define culture and subsequently explain human behavior has been based on values and conducted by Hofstede. Individualism–Collectivism, POWER Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity–Femininity are used as organizing and explanatory constructs in many disciplines. A fifth dimension named Short-term vs Long-term orientation was later added to the initial four (Hofstede, 1980, 1991).

In Hofstede’s structure (2001), Greece is placed in the middle of the POWER Distance index and the Individualism index, highest (first) on the Uncertainty Avoidance index, and relatively high on the Masculinity index. Based on the Uncertainty Avoidance ranking, Greeks appear to be facing extreme uncertainty, which entails intolerable anxiety. In addition, Greece has demonstrated a high positive correlation between Uncertainty Avoidance scores and the expression of affect, which is associated with high cultural levels of anxiety (Edelmann et al., 1989).

In this chapter, we discuss a culture-specific factor emerging from the Greek GRID results using a mixed approach from cultural and cross-cultural psychology. The profile of Greece on the four cultural dimensions of Hofstede will constitute the theoretical framework of the cross-cultural aspect of our approach. The culture-specific factor arising from the social axioms survey in Greece will contribute to the cultural-indigenous approach. It may appear as if, in our cross-cultural effort to discuss the Greek culture-specific—hereafter referred to as emic (Pike, 1967; Berry, 1999)—factor of the GRID based on Hofstede’s dimensions, we will be committing the ecological fallacy (Hofstede, 1980). However, because the GRID survey in Greece was carried out on a representative and highly reliable sample, we contend that Hofstede’s measurements can be used for this purpose (Smith & Bond, 1997).

34.2 Reliability and dimensions of the Greek GRID data

The Greek sample comprised 245 students at undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels in a wide range of disciplines from several Greek universities². The majority of the respondents were women and the average age was 26 years.

Internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) of the Greek item-level raw data was very high, ranging between 0.95–0.98, except for compassion (*συμπόνια*, 0.90), surprise (*έκπληξη*, 0.93), and contempt (*περιφρόνηση*, 0.88) (see Table SM 1)³,

indicating high reliability of the great majority of the ratings. The excellent reliability of the Greek data allows greater confidence in the results of the factor analysis.

The analysis of the Greek GRID centered data has successfully reproduced the general four-factor structure of emotion dimensions found cross-linguistically. However, when the analysis of the Greek raw data was carried out without prior centering, thus allowing response tendencies of potential cultural significance to affect the covariance matrix, an additional fifth factor was reliably extracted.

p. 469 Specifically, initial factor analysis of the Greek raw (uncentered) data set extracted a four-factor solution. On the basis of the individual feature loadings, the resulting factor structure was judged to be poorly interpretable. The total proportion of variance explained was 76.8%. After applying Procrustes rotation toward the original Belgian/Swiss/UK solution (Fontaine et al., 2007), the resulting congruence indices (Tucker's Φ) were very high for the factors VALENCE (0.94) and POWER (0.90) but moderate for AROUSAL (0.84), and low for NOVELTY (0.76).

A subsequent analysis, extracting five factors, resulted in a higher proportion of variance explained (80.9%) and better interpretability of the solution. Due to the high reliability of the data, the five factor structure was deemed acceptable. After Procrustes rotation of this structure, the first four factors were sufficiently congruent to the original Belgian/Swiss/UK four-factor solution, with Φ values of 0.94 (VALENCE), 0.91 (power), 0.89 (AROUSAL), and 0.83 (NOVELTY). The corresponding proportions of variance taken up by the four dimensions were 45.8%, 10.5%, 9.5%, and 7.6%, respectively. The remaining 7.4% was accounted for by the additional (fifth) factor, which did not appear in the cross-cultural analysis.

In the remainder of this chapter, we present and discuss this fifth factor as reflecting the reality of life in Greece. In particular, we consider the possibility that the fifth factor is related to the culture and social context of Greece as this emerges from the aforementioned research on social axioms and cultural dimensions.

34.3 The fifth factor

Table 34.1 lists the emotion features loading on the fifth factor. There were no negative loadings among them. On this dimension, Greek individuals classify the eliciting events of the ensuing emotion state with respect to "frequency," "suddenness," "unpredictability," "consistency with one's expectations," "relevance to one's goals," "chance cause," "cause someone else's actions," "unavoidability of consequences," "result of irrevocable loss," and "unpleasantness." The emotional state following the eliciting event is characterized by a "slowing down of breathing," "slowing down of the heartbeat," "tiredness," "exhaustion," "submissiveness," "showing tears," "speech disturbances," "dropping of the jaw," as well as by a "desire to tackle the situation," "overcome the obstacle," "take action or initiative," "control the situation," and "seek external support."

Table 34.1 Emotional features with highest loadings on the fifth Greek factor, in descending order (only features with loadings of 0.30 or greater are shown)

Emotion feature (emotion component)	Loading
how frequently experienced (general)	0.63
familiar (evaluation)	0.51
enough resources to avoid or modify consequences (evaluation)	0.51
heartbeat slowing down (physical symptoms)	0.51
wanted to tackle the situation (action tendency)	0.49
breathing slowing down (physical symptom)	0.49
caused by somebody else's behavior (evaluation)	0.49
showed tears (expression)	0.48
wanted to overcome an obstacle (action tendency)	0.45
produced a long utterance (expression)	0.43
felt tired (subjective feeling)	0.43
had the jaw drop (expression)	0.41
changed the melody of her or his speech (expression)	0.40
suddenly (evaluation)	0.39
caused by chance (evaluation)	0.38
wanted someone to be there to provide help or support (action tendency)	0.38
wanted to act, whatever action it might be (action tendency)	0.36
consequences avoidable or modifiable (evaluation)	0.36
important and relevant for person's goals (evaluation)	0.36
important and relevant for goals of somebody else (evaluation)	0.35
unpredictable (evaluation)	0.35
wanted to take initiative her/himself (action tendency)	0.34
wanted to be in control of the situation (action tendency)	0.34
felt an urge to be attentive to what is going on (action tendency)	0.34
consequences able to live with (evaluation)	0.33
irrevocable loss (evaluation)	0.33
moved toward people or things (expression)	0.32
inconsistent with expectations (evaluation)	0.32
showed the emotion to others more than s/he felt it (regulation)	0.31

to what extent is it socially accepted (general)	0.31
confirmed expectations (evaluation)	0.31
felt exhausted (subjective feeling)	0.31
wanted to be near or close to people or things (action tendency)	0.31
felt submissive (subjective feeling)	0.30
in itself unpleasant for somebody else (evaluation)	0.30

Note: corresponding feature categories indicated in parentheses. There were no features with high negative loadings (<-0.30) on this factor.

Based on this list of defining features, it seems that the emotion dimension defined by the fifth factor concerns the frequent and familiar experience in the Greek cultural setting of unforeseen situations demanding the individual's attention. The situations in question constitute obstacles and are a cause for concern. Individuals are worn out by the constant struggle to maintain balance and progress in the face of potential negative developments. Effective management of such situations is a prerequisite for the individual's involvement. The individual will either turn to him/herself for support or s/he will attempt to externalize his/her emotions and course of action—the line between the two options is a fine one. Therefore, this factor may be described as the emotional reaction of a Greek when trying to function effectively and adapt to the surrounding social context.

From the cross-cultural perspective, Greeks, living in a country high in Uncertainty Avoidance, “look for structure in their organizations, institutions, and relationships, which makes events clearly interpretable and predictable” (Hofstede, 2001: 148). They may demonstrate a high sense of urgency, engage in dynamic problem solving, and become involved in risky behavior in order to reduce ambiguity. They are used to living in a country with unstructured situations—novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual—from which uncomfortable feelings ensue.

Additionally, Greece has been traditionally found to be a collectivistic culture, but is currently placed in the middle of the Individualism index (Triandis et al., 1986; Hofstede, 1980, 2001). This placement is indicative of a transition from collectivism to individualism, which results in conflicting schemas in everyday encounters that attract the individuals' attention and emotional reaction. ↵

p. 470

As a traditionally collectivistic culture, Greeks focus on groups, contexts, and relationships; whereas as a budding individualistic culture they are associated with overall higher expressivity norms avoiding inward emotions such as contempt, irritation, or anxiety (Matsumoto et al., 2008). This state of flux may underlie the reduced predictability and increased need for coping expressed in the fifth Greek factor.

p. 471 ↵

The set of emotions best exemplifying the fifth factor is consistent with a mix of individualist and collectivist aspects (see Table 34.2). The emotion terms scoring positively highest included *disappointment*, *sadness*, and *being hurt*, whereas the highest negative scores were found for *disgust*, *guilt*, *shame*, *contempt*, *fear*, *hate*, and *love*. Some of the high-scoring emotion terms refer to engaged emotions (Kitayama et al., 2000), that is, emotions which emphasize vulnerability, interdependence, and closeness with others. Respect for authority and maintenance of social order, social ↵ norms, and social participation, which are features of hierarchical cultures like Greece (Schwartz, 2004), appear to be relevant for the conceptual definition of this factor, because disruptive emotions such as shame, guilt, and fear score negatively high on this factor. However, emotions such

p. 472

us disgust, anger, and hate, which are expressed more in individualistic countries, also score high on this factor (Matsumoto et al., 2007).

Table 34.2 Scores of individual emotion terms on the Greek fifth factor

Emotion term	Regressed 5th-factor value
disappointment	1.62
sadness	1.42
being hurt	0.92
interest	0.83
anger	0.72
despair	0.64
anxiety	0.55
compassion	0.54
stress	0.46
contentment	0.45
joy	0.45
irritation	0.32
jealousy	0.24
pleasure	0.17
surprise	−0.06
happiness	−0.33
pride	−0.70
love	−0.70
hate	−0.91
fear	−0.96
contempt	−1.03
shame	−1.53
guilt	−2.09
disgust	−2.19

Given that competition is salient in individualistic behavior, the rise of individualism is further supported by the finding that competition in interpersonal relations was the main emphasis in the sixth Social Cynicism dimension in the survey of social axioms. In other words, research on social axioms introduced the parameter of Competition as an important functional element for the dimension of Social Cynicism (Gari et al., 2009).

Competition, as a dynamic feature of the relationship with out-groups, has been studied in the Greek cultural setting as a contrast to “filotimo,” a Greek culture-specific term whose meaning is associated with “cooperation, fairness and altruism” (Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972; Vassiliou & Vassiliou, 1973).

The fifth Greek factor, then, may be related to the special circumstances of the emotional makeup of Greeks living today in a transitional culture resulting in certain frequent emotional conflicts and tensions between old-fashioned collectivism and emerging individualism, between the clearly emic notion of “filotimo” and the enriched notion of Social Cynicism with social axioms referring to competition. If this interpretation is on the right track, then other transitioning cultures with their unique cultural dimensions profile might also exhibit idiosyncratic dimensions in their conceptual space of emotion terms, in addition to the four general cross-cultural dimensions, specifically related to the particulars of their intermediate situation. Inasmuch as dimensions used to describe nations at the cultural level, such as Hofstede’s dimensions, do not necessarily align with the same qualitative and quantitative differences among cultural groups at the individual level, there is no guarantee of the stability of the findings from cultures placed highest or lowest on each dimension. Rather, what is implied is the existence of possible emic conditions in the intermediate cultures. Perhaps variation along several cultural dimensions might shed some light onto similarities and differences between languages and cultures along the emotional dimensions, as well as on how these interact and change over time.

Notes

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- 2 This number includes both the participants who rated the 24 standard GRID terms, as well as another group who rated an additional set of Greek words.
- 3 All supplementary materials (SM) are available at the GRID website: <http://www.affective-sciences.org/GRID>. See Appendix 1 (“Availability”) for further details.