CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CONVERGENCE ON WESTERN ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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ABSTRACT

Studies of acculturation have assumed that, under pressure to assimilate, individuals will accommodate by adopting behavioural and attitudinal attributes of the local, dominant culture. In contrast, this empirical study based in the United Arab Emirates used an original survey instrument, together with a range of convergent analytic techniques, to demonstrate pervasive westernization in the Arab and Subcontinental dominant communities. In addition, the study demonstrates a novel use of multiple discriminant analysis to explore differences between cultural and personal identities, a potentially useful tool for the cross-cultural management literature. In contrast to other studies, we examine how individuals perceive themselves as deviating from their home cultures in a context where there is minimal pressure to conform to the local culture and commercial globalization is given free reign. We show that non-Westerners perceived themselves both as more deviant from their home societies than those from Western nations, and as more similar to Westerners than to their own societies. The fact that even those born in Gulf Arab nations tended to converge on Western beliefs and behaviours suggested the cause of westernization may have been media and Western business models. These observations lead us to challenge common theoretical models of acculturation individuals may acculturate by assuming learned transient aspects of cultural identity in order to maximize personal opportunity.
KEYWORDS: Cultural Identity, Attitudes And Beliefs, Acculturation, Migration, Globalization, Management, Middle-East
The processes by which individuals adjust their behavior, values and identity in the face of other cultures are important for understanding both the multicultural workplace and transnational migration. While research has documented individual acculturation in organizations where two cultural groups are required to work together (Brannen & Salk, 2000; De La Torre, 1978: 301; Fisher & Hartel, 2003; Peterson, 1978) and in situations of family migration (Budhwar, 2008; Konig, 2009; Malhi, 2009; Mirdal, 2006; Wagoner, 2008), in both these situations there is usually pressure to conform to a dominant, majority group for economic and social success.

This study was undertaken in a more plural society in the Arabian Gulf and therefore explores the dynamic processes of acculturation at work in a situation where cultural pressures are ambiguous. The data was collected in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a region with a very large expatriate working population, where individuals have to make their own behavior and attitudinal choices within social frameworks that encompass family, organization, and the society at large (Molavi, 2007). The largest component of the study sample came from Dubai, an economic environment in which a global population is encouraged to participate (Malecki & Ewers, 2007; Naithani & Jha, 2010; National Media Council of the UAE, 2010) and little formal pressure is applied in some Emirates to make individuals conform to the norms and practices of an Islamic society, for example in relation to dress and socialization (Khan, Clear, Al-Kaabi, & Pezeshki, 2010; Naser, Mohammed, & Nuseibeh, 2009). The Dubai Government Website (Dubai Government, 2011) indirectly illustrates this willingness to tolerate a diversity of behaviors with many pages welcoming expatriates, while the only section of the website dealing with behavioral etiquette is found in the section addressing “practicing religion”.

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Although this is an Arab Muslim State, UAE born citizens are estimated to comprise less than 19% of the total of just over 5 million (National Media Council of the UAE, 2010). Rasheed (2009) reported that the UAE consisted of a rapidly increasing expatriate population comprising 1.75 million Indians, 1.25 million Pakistanis, 500,000 Bangladeshis, 1 million from other Asian communities and 500,000 Westerners. It is not uncommon in any large organization in the UAE to have a working population representing more than 40 nationalities. Not unsurprisingly, this mix of cultures produces cross-cultural miscommunication, tension, sometimes conflict and often inefficiency. Sometimes these problems stem from language differences (El Amouri & O'Neill, 2011; Khuwaileh, 2003), but often poor levels of interpersonal trust or misunderstood values contribute (Al-Ali, 2008; Ali, 2010; Ali, Azim, & Krishnan, 1995; Barhem, Younies, & Smith, 2011; Goodwin & J., 2010; Kuehn & Al-Busaidi, 2000). These points were often acknowledged and discussed during cross-cultural management training undertaken by the first author, but would seldom be discussed openly in the workplace.

Acculturation Migration and the Middle East Context

Migrants are expected to acculturate and studies of acculturation have tended to focus on migrants who are expected to change gradually to conform to the norms of the society into which they have migrated. Much research has focused on migrants into western societies and the extent and speed of changes that occur for the migrants and their families (Budhwar, 2008; Malhi, 2009; Mirdal, 2006; Rasmussen, 2007). With a wider focus on multiculturalism, there has been some shift to considering the benefits of different multicultural policies and whether this impacts on rate of adjustment (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002). However, there has been no
research in a heterogeneous society, such as the UAE, in which there is no implicit pressure to adjust at the social and organizational level to a dominant national group. In the UAE there is also the added complexity of whether the minority local national society can maintain its own cultural heritage in the face of such plurality (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2010; Raven & O'Donnell, 2010). Indeed this concern has been so prevalent that 2008 was decreed by President His Highness Shaikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan's as National Identity Year for the UAE and included a National Identity Conference (UAW Interact, 2008).

There has been considerable interest in the West on the movement of Muslims into western society (Mirdal, 2006) and, within the Middle East there has been a growing interest in defining concepts of Islamic management (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008; Fontaine, 2008; Yeganeh & Su, 2007), Islamic work ethic (Kumar, 2010; Yousef, 2001) and Arab management styles (Behery, 2009; Dedoussis, 2004; Neal, 2007; Smith, 2007; Yasin, 2002, 2007). There appears to have been no research examining changing Arab culture as affected by immigration, or the impact of western business practices within the Middle East.

As mentioned previously, approximately 50% of the UAE workforce is from the Subcontinent which we define as comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. We refer to the nationals of these countries collectively as Subcontinentals for brevity. The literature on the Subcontinent has examined both Hindu and Muslim culture and its behavioral implications in comparison with Western management (Ahmed, 2008; Banerjee, 2008; Bhal, 2006; Khilji, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Parboteeah, Paik, & Cullen, 2009; Sen & Wagner, 2009) and there are studies of Subcontinentals as migrants into the West (Budhwar, 2008; Malhi, 2009). There is a growing
literature on Subcontinentals as affected by migration to the Middle East (Schoepp & Forstenlechner, 2010; Vora, 2008, 2011). There is also a significant literature on Westerners and their need to adjust in foreign work environments, indeed the bulk of the cross-cultural management literature examines these areas of difference from a western perspective, but relatively few texts focus on the Arab world (Al-Omari, 2003; Williams, 1998).

Research Approach and the Significance of the Study

Our approach adds to understanding of migration adaptations in the Gulf environment and is unique in a number of ways. First we have data from working populations situated in the context of a work-based training program. Second, we have a sample of participants drawn from across the spectrum of national identities working in Dubai and we were able to aggregate this individual data into regional groups to help discern cultural trends. Third, because we have both ratings of the self and ratings of the country of origin for every individual, we were able to compute an accurate index for each participant of the extent to which they perceived their own values and behaviors as deviating from those of their country of origin. To our knowledge, no similar data have been collected previously and, combined with the fact that this study occurred in a context without strong pressures to conform to local patterns of belief, values and behavior, provides a unique test of the process of changing identities in response to such a unique environment. Finally, our data confirm personal observations in the workplace that demonstrate a complex web of personal adjustments in behavior and attitudes that many individuals perceive to be the optimal way to maximize their opportunities in a situation of ambiguous and sometimes conflicting cultural demands.
First hand observation of behavior among the cultural groups in training classes in the UAE led
us to consider how individuals manage themselves in a heterogeneous society and how theories
relevant to cultural identity (Berry et al., 2002), including cultural identity strategy (Camilleri &
Malewska-Peyre, 1997) or social identity (Tajfel, 1978) would apply. Although there is a
substantial literature on this and related subjects, including whether or not Western and Eastern
individuals think and identify themselves in similar ways, the focus has been on comparing East
Asia and the West, often using student samples (e.g. Nisbett, 2003; Suh, 2002).

Migration and Cultural Identity

Cultural identity theory has developed largely from a western perspective in order to examine
how migrants adapt to living within or alongside another so-called “dominant” cultural group as
illustrated in general texts (Berry et al., 2002). Each theory handles the tension between ethnic
identity and civic identity in different way. Identity strategy (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre,
1997) examines this tension from an “aspirational” perspective, that is what “is” as opposed to
what one would like to be, while social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) seeks to identify with
which group the migrant identifies.

These theories predict that expatriates in the UAE should identify themselves increasingly with
either a Subcontinental or Arab culture, because these are politically and numerically the
strongest social groups. However, we cannot be sure that these theories apply with any certainty
in the heterogeneous Gulf environment. Our data set (collected between 2004-2008) indicated
that deviation from home culture was observable, the question was whether a direction of
cultural adaption could be identified. Our preliminary observations suggested that, contrary to
theory-based expectations, convergence was towards the West, not towards the politically or numerically dominant cultures. As a consequence, we framed and tested the following hypotheses:

1. Non-Westerners will perceive a larger gap between themselves and their society of origin than Westerners.

2. Self ratings of non-Westerners will converge on the Western self ratings.

The first hypothesis, if confirmed, suggests that non-Westerners adapt more than Westerners while the second suggests that adaptation is towards the Western cultural model rather than towards any other, including the local Arabic culture.

**METHOD**

**The Survey**

This study was an initiative to support both post-graduate teaching in cross-cultural management and professional training in cross-cultural awareness within local and multinational, public and private organizations. The survey was designed to clarify whether a wide range of cultural attributes, previously identified in teaching literature, were identifiable in the local working populations. The instrument was original and designed to be understood by, and of interest to, class participants in the Gulf environment. Well-known texts were used to identify cultural descriptors (Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn, 1961; Scheider, 1997; Thomas, 2002; Trompenaars, 1997), with particular attention paid to attributes that were of interest to students or were
particularly salient dimensions of inter-cultural dynamics in the region. The survey design also allowed individuals to consider whether or not they identified with the cultural attributes of their home society. The survey questions included in the analysis are listed in Appendix A.

Questions were in relatively simple English to avoid misunderstanding (Harzing, 2005, 2006). Most Subcontinental and Western respondents either spoke native English or were fluent in English. Among the local Arabic speaking population, many were fluent in English but others were much less so. These participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire in an Arabic translation or use English and Arabic versions simultaneously in order to assist understanding.

After providing demographic information regarding country of nationality, the country the person had lived in longest, gender, age and religion; participants completed 120 items organized into two sections. The first 60 items pertained to values, attitudes or behaviors from the perspective of most people in “your society” and the second 60 repeated the questions but asked for a “personal” response. The question of “national” identity was an important issue for those participants who were effectively double migrants, perhaps having moved from the Subcontinent to Britain and then recruited to work the Middle East. As a consequence, “Your society” was explained as meaning either the country of a participant’s birth or the country with which they most strongly identified and in which they felt most comfortable.

For each question, the respondent was asked to either agree or disagree with each statement on a scale from 1-7. Some of the questions used agree-disagree as the anchors while others used ‘yes-
no’. This was a historical accident and comparative analyses demonstrated that this had no impact upon the results. Some questions were worded positively and some negatively.

Twenty-eight of the questions involved an exact or near-exact replication of the belief (e.g. Q1/61: “My society believes that all people are equal”, Q61 “I believe that all people are equal”) or behavior (e.g. Q24: “Where I’m from, people will meet a time deadline even if it clashes with a social obligation”, Q84: “I will meet a time deadline even if it clashes with a social obligation”). Twenty-six of the questions required slight rewording to make sense in both the personal and societal context. For example: Q.13 asked “Where I come from people try to hide their emotions in public,” Q.73 asked “I believe I should hide my emotions in public.” Six of the questions (Questions 16, 27, 38, 45, 55, and 57) involved a significant rewording between the societal and individual version and these were excluded from further analysis. Questionnaires that were completed improperly (e.g. responses all the same) were discarded, as were incomplete questionnaires.

Participants

Because participants in the survey came from a wide variety of countries, to increase statistical power we grouped their data as follows:

Gulf Arabs (n=166): Included UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman and a small sample of Iranians.

Mediterranean Arabs (n=137): The Levant, Egypt, North African Arab Countries.

Subcontinent A (n=317): India, Sri Lanka.
Subcontinent B (n=97): Pakistan, Bangladesh.

West (n=128): Western Europe, Canada, United States, New Zealand and Australia.

This arrangement requires explanation. The Gulf Arabs were separated from the Mediterranean Arabs because the historical and economic bases of their culture were rather different. The small Iranian sample was included in the Gulf Arab group. Although Iran is not an Arab country, it has a common religion in Islam and has a long influence in the commercial history of the Gulf Arab States. Subcontinent A was separated from Subcontinent B because of the obvious religious differences and their potential impact on behavior and values. However, while noting that India in particular is an extremely culturally and religiously diverse nation with sizeable Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian populations, it was appropriate to separate this group from the Muslim Subcontinent. In the Subcontinent A sample, the Hindu group was the largest and the Indian Christian group second largest (reflecting commercial recruitment into the Gulf from the Indian South). Muslims were only 10% of the sample among those who chose to reveal their religious affiliation. The use of a regional “Subcontinental” group is consistent with Indian perceptions of regional identity as noted by Vora (2008) in interviews with the Dubai Indian population. The Western group was also heterogeneous and included non-English speaking Europeans.

Organizations did not ask for the results of the survey and participants were not required to provide information that would reveal their identity. Because the questionnaires were nearly always completed as part of training and offsite, the survey was undertaken in an atmosphere of learning, inquiry and trust. It was fully explained that outcomes were anonymous, that results
were only for research purposes and that there were never “right” or “wrong” answer. We believe this strategy counters the noted difficulties of both access and inhibition in responding to questionnaires in the Gulf region, especially among women (Bennett & Wright, 2010; Forstenlechner & Al-Nakeeb, 2010; Forster, 2011; Khan et al., 2010). The questionnaires were handed in on completion without comment from trainers. Thus the pressures for socially desirable responding were extremely low or nonexistent.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed in three different ways to obtain different, but converging, perspectives on the data: a) an analysis of difference scores between self and societal ratings, b) a repeated measures comparison between regions and c) a multiple discriminant analysis to confirm patterns of results between regions. These analyses are presented in turn below.

Comparisons of Self and Societal Ratings within Regions

For each participant, absolute difference scores were first calculated for each item (e.g. Q1 – Q61, Q2- Q62 ...). The mean absolute difference was then calculated for each participant across all 54 pairs of items. This score thus indexed the extent to which each participant saw themselves as deviating from their own societal beliefs and behaviors: High scores indicated high perceived deviations and low scores indicated low perceived deviations from their own society. The mean absolute difference between a participant’s societal rating and their personal rating is herein referred to as a ‘deviation’ score as it reflects how far the individual perceives that they deviate from their own culture.
Although a series of planned comparisons fitting age, gender and religion as single predictors all revealed significant differences, only Country of Origin was significant ($F(4,510) = 6.8$, $p < .001$) when all the variables were included in the analysis. Because we expected time spent in a country during formative years and total time spent in a country would exert an impact upon personal beliefs, we conducted a separate analysis with just these two variables (“Country of Origin” and “Country Most Lived In”) to explore interaction effects. There was a significant interaction ($F(7, 857) = 4.09$, $p < .001$). The main effect for Country of Origin ($F(4,857) = 2.92$, $p = .02$) was significant but Country Most Lived In ($F(4, 857) = 1.04$) was not.

Many (81%) of the participants had lived most of their lives in their country of origin, while some (15%) had mostly lived in a Gulf Arab nation despite being born elsewhere (see Table 1). These two populations were analyzed separately. There was a significant country effect for those who had lived most of their lives in their country of origin ($F(4,707) = 60.5$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons revealed 3 main groups of respondents, with those from the West deviating less than those from either the Gulf Arab or Sub-Continent A regions, who in turn differed less than either those from the Mediterranean Arab or Sub-Continent B regions. In other words, those from the West who had lived most of their lives in their home countries, perceived themselves as more similar to their own societies than those from other nations.

| TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE |
A similar pattern of results was also obtained for those who had lived most of their life in a Gulf Arab nation ($F(4,296) = 3.5, p = .01$). However, here the power was considerably less and the only significant group differences were between the Sub-Continent B participants and those from the West or Gulf Arab nations. For those people who had spent most of their lives living in Gulf Arab nations, those who were originally from a Gulf Arab nation or the West deviated the least from their own ratings of their society. In summary, Westerners consistently saw themselves as closer to their home societies than others, regardless of whether they had lived most of their lives in their home country or as expatriates.

**Comparisons Between Regions**

To compare regions with one another we conducted a two by five repeated measures ANOVA with self and societal ratings as the within subjects factor and country of origin as the between-subjects factor. To control for positive and negative wording with regard to different cultural attributes, scoring was reversed for all questions on which Westerners responded on average with a score greater than 4 (the mid-point). Country of origin ($F(4,877) = 63.8, p < .001$) and the comparison between self and societal ratings ($F(1,877) = 1290.7, p < .001$) were both significant as was the interaction ($F(4,877) = 39.3, p < .001$). Figure 1 reveals that the interaction arose because the differences between societal and self ratings for the West (and to some extent the Gulf Arabs) were smaller than the differences for the other groups. Multiple comparisons showed that, even though the difference between self and societal ratings for the Westerners was the smallest, it was still significant ($F(1,132) = 53.1, p < .001$). Furthermore, separate analyses revealed that the differences between the self ratings for the five national groups were
substantially smaller ($F(4,877) = 12.4, p < .001$) than the differences between the societal ratings ($F(4,877) = 94.8, p < .001$).

This analysis was also conducted with just those subsets of people who had lived most of their lives in Gulf Arab nations (Figure 2) and once again the pattern was repeated with a significant interaction ($F(4,294)=4.3, p = .002$), although here only societal versus self ratings ($F(1,291) = 192.4, p < .001$) was significant while country of origin ($F(4,291) = 1.1, p = ns$) was not. In this case, separate analyses revealed that the differences between the self-ratings were not significant ($F(4,291) = 0.7, p = ns$) while the differences between the societal ratings were ($F(4,291) = 4.2, p = .003$).

In summary, these analyses confirmed the earlier finding that Westerners had a smaller gap between self and societal ratings than others. However, they also showed that the self ratings of the other national groups converged on the Western ratings.
The preceding analyses both collapsed items into a single mean score and therefore did not consider patterns of response across multiple items. To examine these patterns, and to avoid having to reverse the sign of any items, multiple discriminant analysis (MDA) was also used to test whether significant differences existed between mean item profiles (across all questionnaire items) for the different national groups. The MDA had a single dependent variable with 10 categories (societal and self ratings for each of 5 regions) and 54 independent variables corresponding to the questionnaire items. To identify a reduced set of questionnaire items that most effectively discriminated between groups, we used stepwise estimation as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010). All 54 items showed significant mean differences between groups (lowest \( F(9,1754) = 2.8, p = .003 \)) so they were all candidates for inclusion in the MDA. The thirty-one questions that best discriminated between groups were retained in the analysis after the stepwise estimation.

Overall the Wilk’s \( \lambda \) of the discriminant function was \(.107 (\chi^2(279) = 3891.3, p < .001)\) indicating that the ten group means (self and societal ratings for 5 national groups) were not equal on the selected independent variables. Holdout analyses using Press’s \( Q \) statistic (Hair et al., 2010: 301) provided strong support for model adequacy (estimation sample \( Q = 4219, p < .001 \); holdout sample \( Q = 3429, p < .001 \)). The first three discriminant functions together explained 85.8% of the variance. Figure 3 depicted the reduced space scores (Hair et al., 2010: 310) for the first discriminant function which explained 58.6% of the variance (canonical \( r = .893 \)). This function weighted most heavily on the items: “My society is comfortable with young men and women meeting freely in public”, “In my society men and women usually work with
their own gender rather than a mix” and “In my society most people at work wait to be told to do something rather than just do it without being asked”. Thus, this discriminant function could be thought of as reflecting both the perceived importance and formality of gender, and a mix of fatalism and authority relations. The next two discriminant functions explained 17.0% of the variance (canonical $r = .596$) and 8.9% of the variance (canonical $r = .473$) respectively. For all three functions, the difference between the self and societal scores was the smallest for the Western group (indicated in Figure 3 by the Western line having the least slope). Furthermore, for all three, the self ratings for the non-Western groups converged on the Western values. Thus participants from the other groups saw themselves as being more similar to Westerners than their own society.

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FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

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Discussion

In summary, using three different dependent variables (differences between self and societal ratings, mean transformed scores and multivariate patterns of covariation between items), we have shown that non-Westerners perceived a larger gap between themselves and their home societies than did Westerners (Hypothesis 1), and that the self ratings of the non-Western nationalities converged on the Western self ratings (Hypothesis 2). This acculturation pattern requires explanation and we now examine why these effects might have arisen in terms of three
possible explanations: personal disposition and identity, temporary changes in response to local demands, and globalization. We also consider associated gender and workplace issues.

**Personal Disposition and Identity**

A combination of identity strategy (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) appears to provide a partial explanation for the observations. Using Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre’s (1997) concepts we assert that non-Westerners express an aspirational value for themselves to become more like those in the West, and yet assert that their home communities represent their heritage and past associations. This strategy is mediated by a need to belong to a group – either at work or at home (Tajfel’s “social identity”). Recognition through citizenship is closed to members of migrant communities (Vora, 2008) and there is no formal policy geared to achieving multiculturalism. So in the UAE, joining the dominant political community is not a realistic aspiration. Consequently neither the “melting pot” or “multicultural” models of plurality distinguished by Berry (2001) apply in this context.

Indeed, a fuller explanation for the expressed deviation among the non-western groups, but still allowing them to domicile within their ethnic communities, is their additional capacity pragmatically to assume multiple identities, according to needs for acceptance within home or workplace; a strategy which Suh (2002) observed is a non-Western phenomenon. Malhi (2009) also noted that Canadian South Asians shifted to a hybrid identity when conversational circumstances forced or allowed this and Vora (2008) noted Indians in Dubai adapted to cultural ambiguity, differentiating themselves both from other expatriate groups and Indians in India.
In terms of identity, why did Western expatriates demonstrate the smallest gap between self and societal ratings? First, they were the only expatriate group for whom returning home had no major long-term economic disadvantage so there would be no aspiration to adopt alternative cultures as part of a family migration strategy. Second, given that most Gulf businesses in which they were employed formally aspired to western practice, their need to adjust their workplace identity was minimal. Third, despite the challenges faced in the Gulf (Cerimagic, 2010), many Westerners appear to see their management style and its underlying values as self-evidently the right way to behave, consistent with the widely accepted individualism and emphasis on a strong internal locus of control in the West (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007; Trompenaars, 1997). This contrasts with other cultural groups where comfort with multiple identities and sensitivity to external pressures are normal (Suh, 2002).

**How Transient Is Identity Change?**

The concept of the “consumer citizen” appears in the literature concerning those who aspire to a range of western consumer behaviors, while not assuming western values (Assad, 2007; Ramsaran, 2003; Vora, 2008). Since our survey data indicates that many non-western individuals actually claim behavior and beliefs that are western and are also migrants who have moved to an environment defined by consumerism, this possibility of a superficial transient identity must be considered. This links to and supports our conclusions above concerning the assumption of multiple identities acknowledging that any claimed identity may not be firmly held or permanent. It may be transient or a step on a road to acculturation.
That non-western individuals were more likely to choose behavior patterns in order to maximize their personal advantage at work or in their community is confirmed at least for Indians in studies of the Hindu mindset (Kumar, 2004; Sen & Wagner, 2009). The latter suggests, among other things, a religious basis for Hindu cultural pragmatism and contrasts this with the more inflexible basis of the Abrahamic (Western) religions. Behavioral pragmatism was also confirmed in class discussions with the first author when members of the non-Western community indicated that they made pragmatic choices about Western or non-Western behaviors according to need, usually using the phrase, “it all depends….” Our data alone does not allow us to judge whether or not the differences claimed by non-Western groups between themselves and their home societies were transient or signs of permanent identity change, albeit towards multiple identities. Most likely all three states were present.

**Globalization**

Our data reveals both that non-Westerners adapt more than Westerners, and that the direction of adaptation is towards the Western model. However, it is not clear from where behavior is learned. This is not a region with a dominant Western culture. In addition, commercial organizations in the region have a mix of Western, Subcontinental and Arab management, and Government institutions are almost entirely Arab. So there do not appear to be strong organizational pressures to become more Western in beliefs and attitudes. But our data shows significant changes in all the groups, including the Gulf Arabs, towards the more Western cultural model. One possible reason for these changes is the pervasive influence of Western media in all its forms throughout the region. Not only can we expect this to be the key influence
in Gulf Arab attitudes and behavior (who are not exposed to pressures to change by a conflict with the culture of the UAE) but also a necessary condition for changed values and behaviors amongst all the other non-Western groups.

Western media and commerce influences the thinking and behavior of a large group in any non-Western society with access to communication systems. The phenomenon is described in the literature on globalization, for example for the Gulf in Saudi Arabia by Assad (2007) where it is described as “emulation” of the west and for India by Vora (2008). The influence of media can explain why so many non-Western migrants are sufficiently familiar with Western norms that they are able to adapt quickly to Western behavioral strategies in the corporate environment. This influence is consistent with Khilji’s (2004) observations of changing values among younger employees in Pakistan and Budhwar’s (2008) observations on the impact of media and the internet in India. It also explains why the Gulf Arab group which is “in situ” also adopts Western behavior patterns, albeit to a more limited degree. Presumably the Gulf Arab group members were both very aware of key western behaviors but must also be responsive to the overwhelming presence of their home societies. In summary, the pattern of change towards the Western model for all the groups sampled, but particularly including the Gulf Arabs, suggest that the identity deviations observed in our samples were sown before migration and represent a wider globalization, westernization, or modernization process which may or may not be associated with longer term value changes.
Interactions Between Acculturation and Globalization: Attitudes Towards Gender

The Gulf Arabs (including Emiratis), who had to adapt to a working life in a society in which they were a numerical minority, albeit with overarching political and economic influence, demonstrated a somewhat different pattern of convergence. The MDA analysis showed that the Gulf Arab group appeared to have deviated from their home society on many items but self ratings were still similar to their home societal ratings on social gender issues. On this they deviated significantly from western values at the personal level. Of course the area of gender relations, in particular issues concerning social separation of the sexes, remains a significant difference at a societal level between Islamic and Western culture.

We assert that this illustrates a key area in which personal choice is heavily influenced by the home culture. Indeed, the first author experienced on many occasions the problems faced by Emiratis adopting western behaviors in their home country. The strength and resilience of Gulf Arab culture has been described elsewhere (Crabtree, 2007; Itani, Sidani, & Baalbaki, 2011; Madsen, 2010; Raven & O'Donnell, 2010; Sidani & Thornberry, 2010; Wright & Bennett, 2008) although its importance has been contested in relation to workplace issues (Naser et al., 2009; Yousef, 2001). That Gulf Arabs remain personally supportive of their society’s traditional view on gender supports our contention that individuals make pragmatic adjustments to suit their identity needs, in this case according to the proximity of the home environment and the strength of the value in question.

While the Emirati group has been studied in the context of the Government’s push for “Emiratization”, and its success or otherwise (Al-Ali, 2008; Forstenlechner, 2008; Ibrahim, Al
Sejini, & Al Qassimi, 2004; Pech, 2009; Raven, 2011), and the progress of women in the workforce (Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Sayegh, 2001; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Naser et al., 2009; Raven, 2011), the cultural responses of the national Gulf Arabs to the high number of expatriates has not been studied. While we note that the Gulf Arab group covers some cultural variation both between countries, such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman (Elamin & Omair, 2010; Neal, 2007), and to some extent within the Emirates themselves (Khan et al., 2010; Naser et al., 2009), we stress that the Gulf Arabs showed a significant convergence on the Western model, albeit smaller than that of other non-Western groups (see Figures 1-3). The pattern of results suggests that Gulf Arabs adapted certain non-core attitudes and behaviors towards the Western model but that core attitudes and behaviors associated with Gender were not influenced by Globalization pressures.

Management and Workplace Implications

There is a growing literature on the effective functioning of the multicultural Gulf workplace including studies of work satisfaction (Elamin, 2011; Goodwin & J., 2010; Klein & Radnell, 2009), the impact of Islam (Hillman, 2007), Arab culture (Hutchings & Weir, 2006) and the changing role of women (Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Sayegh, 2001; Bennett & Wright, 2010). The presence of cultural ambiguity or discontinuity, consistent with our assertion of the presence of multiple identities, has been noted (Ali, 1995; Behery & Paton, 2008; Crabtree, 2007; Elamin & Omair, 2010).

The qualitative experience of the first author in the classroom suggests that the patterns of adaptation suggested by our data may cause a loss of trust in the workplace. For example,
Western managers sometimes commented that the capacity of their non-Western colleagues to change their behavior, language and values according to pragmatic needs was both unexpected and disconcerting. Conversely non-Western managers often became frustrated and commented that Western managers were inflexible, intolerant and unwilling to adjust to local conditions. The loss of trust on both sides resulting from cultural ambiguity is inimical to economic cooperation and productivity (Aboyassin, 2008; Ahmed & Salas, 2008; Fukuyama, 1996; Kim, Dirks, & Cooper, 2009; Wang & Clegg, 2002).

In order to improve workplace performance, non-Westerners need to better understand and appreciate why Westerner’s appear relatively unwilling to adapt as suggested by our data. Westerners need to understand and accept that non-Westerners are adept at assuming multiple identities - which may seem disconcerting but does not reflect untrustworthiness. These observations and suggestions for action are supported by evidence from class discussion in training groups. In these groups non-Western cultural groups could usually explain their own cultures well, and knew the behavioral manifestations of Western culture, but seldom understood what made Westerners “tick.” Conversely, Westerners who did not have prior training or experience in cross cultural matters were seldom capable of explaining their values to members of other cultural groups. We suggest, therefore, that cross-cultural training should go well beyond behavioral issues, should include the study of underlying values, and must be undertaken across all cultural groups present in the workplace.

To summarize, in the UAE we see cultural developments that challenge the typical concept of acculturation toward a dominant or majority group. We believe that the outcomes of the cultural
mix in the UAE are moderated by factors including residential transience, broader globalization, and for local Arabs proximity to their home culture. This is a very complex environment and explanations may be undermined because arguments based on data such as ours often mask other realities. For example, we claim that migrants understood that adoption of local nationality was closed to them but Vora (2008, 2011) notes this is not necessarily true for well-established wealthy families. Nonetheless, we have argued that changes to identity resulting from exposure to the ‘melting pot’ of the UAE are complex and arise from aspirations to act in more Western ways as well as forces to acculturate. We believe that individuals will seek to maximize their personal advantage by adaption of attitudes and behaviors that will work well for them in this ambiguous environment. It seems that for all nationalities, choosing to emulate Western behaviors provides the most satisfactory outcome.

**Implications for Further Research**

The data were collected among a predominantly expatriate group of whom the majority were reasonably well educated, albeit at a range of levels in the workforce. Further research is clearly required to understand whether such patterns of change also arise in non-working populations in the home communities, particularly for those who are less well-educated. We have argued that both globalization and expatriation are important influences upon behavior. Widespread access to international media, the internet and mobile phone technology throughout the Middle East and the Subcontinent may result in similar patterns of change across the region even among less well educated or non-working populations. Further research is required to separate the effects of media and internet technology from those of expatriation or migration.
A second line of enquiry would explore the extent to which the stated deviant values of non-Western expatriates are deep-seated and permanent or, as we suggest, a pragmatic reaction to immediate need. We accept that individuals can have varying degrees of flexibility or ability to move from their home cultural orientation (Rosinski, 2003). What is poorly understood is how and when an aspiration becomes a permanent value, when a value identity becomes a real identity, especially when domestic and work environments are in different cultural domains. Can this happen within a generation, or is it a matter of generational change? Can emulation lead to deeper change and does the consumer-citizen eventually become a citizen if the doors are open to long-term residency?

Finally, measuring both self-perceptions and perceptions of the culture of a person’s home society provides a new and important approach to investigating issues of acculturation. Our data allowed us to explore gaps between personal and cultural identity in a way that has not been done before. In our view, our approach provides a promising line of measurement and analysis for further studies of acculturation and the effects of globalization. However, our instrument also has limitations. The survey was developed from cultural descriptors used in well-known texts (Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn, 1961; Scheider, 1997; Thomas, 2002; Trompennaars, 1997), and the items were selected and adapted based on their value for teaching and discussion, with particular attention paid to attributes that were of interest to students or were particularly salient dimensions of inter-cultural dynamics in the region. The intention was not to develop a standardized research instrument. It is possible, therefore, that some important attitudes and beliefs that change may not have been sampled in the instrument, or that some of the items were
Our study has demonstrated that expatriates from four regions, including the national Gulf Arabs, claim to diverge from their home cultures and converge on several key cultural attributes associated with a Western model of self, while the Westerners themselves apparently claim no significant movement towards any of the local cultures. We interpret these observations through a model that allows for cultural identity based on pragmatism, rather than a more deeply rooted cultural change. In a unique heterogeneous workforce with no predisposition to conform to any dominant culture, we observe a form of globalization, with convergence on the Western attitudes and behaviors. However, whether the convergence is real and permanent is questionable. We need to understand the adoption of these seeds of cultural deviation, so that our understanding of their impact on behavior after migration is better understood. These observations have wider application than in our limited Middle Eastern research environment.

Workplace managers should note that tolerance and trust are better developed through appreciation of individual’s needs for pragmatic adaption rather than through a desire to seek more permanent attitudinal or behavioral change. Although there is a business literature that emphasizes the need for Western expatriates to prepare for culture shock when they travel overseas, our data and personal observations provide evidence that Western expatriates see little need to adjust their values in the UAE. This observation, and our earlier note that non-
Westerners seldom understand the foundation of Western values, indicate a need to teach cultural understanding to all participants in the Gulf workplace.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: SURVEY ITEMS INCLUDED IN ANALYSES

001. My society believes that all people are equal / 061. I believe that all people are equal
002. Where I am from people are born into different levels of society (e.g. high and low) / 062. I believe people are born into different levels of society (e.g. high and low)
003. In my society people can get authority and status through wealth / 063. I believe people can get authority and status through wealth
004. My society believes people with more ability should have more authority / 064. I believe that people with more ability should have more authority
005. Where I am from, if you work harder than others you get higher status / 065. I believe if you work harder than others you should get higher status
006. Where I come from, strong personal relationships are more important than rules / 066. I believe strong personal relationships are more important than rules
007. In my society it is acceptable for people to bend the rules/laws if they get in the way / 067. I believe it is acceptable to bend the rules/laws if they get in the way
008. Where I'm from, if there is a conflict, keeping a personal relationship is more important than achieving objectives / 068. I believe if there is a conflict, keeping personal relationships is more important than achieving my ...
009. In my society, people in the workplace prefer to be managed as a group rather than as individuals / 069. I prefer to be managed as part of a group rather than individually
010. In my society, people believe they must take care of themselves, and cannot depend on their community in times of need / 070. I believe that I should look after myself and not depend on others
011. Where I come from people will bend the rules/laws if they have to, in order to be loyal to a friend / 071. In my friendships I believe I should bend the rules/laws if I have to, in order to be loyal to a friend
012. In my society we only invite very close friends into our homes / 072. I only invite very close friends to my home
013. Where I come from people try to hide their emotions in public / 073. I believe I should hide my emotions in public
014. In my society we talk about difficult subjects directly and openly / 074. I am comfortable discussing difficult subjects directly and openly
015. My society is comfortable with young men and women meeting freely in public / 075. I am comfortable with young men and women meeting freely in public
017. Where I come from, if people are given a choice, they like to do many things simultaneously rather than one at a time / 077. If given a choice, I like to do many things simultaneously rather than one thing at a time
018. In my society most people want to finish tasks even if they are given new priorities to work on / 078. I prefer to finish an old task even when I am given new priorities to work on
019. Where I'm from people prefer quick (e.g. quarterly) returns rather than waiting for (possibly better) longer-term (e.g. 2-year) results / 079. I prefer quick (e.g. quarterly) returns, I don't like waiting for (possibly better) long term (e.g. 2-year) returns
020. In my society people plan for the long term (like 5 years), rather than for the short term (like 1 year) / 080. I prefer to plan for the long term (like 5 years), rather than for the short term (like 1 year)
021. In my society people think more about the past than the future / 081. I prefer to think about the past rather than the future
022. Where I come from, people spend most of their time doing traditional things rather than new things / 082. I prefer to spend my time doing traditional things rather than new things
023. In my society people believe there will always be enough time to complete a task / 083. I believe there will always be enough time to complete a task
024. Where I'm from, people will meet a time deadline even if it clashes with a social obligation / 084. I will meet a time deadline even if it clashes with a social obligation
025. In my society people think of time as being in endless supply / 085. I believe time is in endless supply
026. Where I'm from, people get to meetings on time no matter what may come up / 086. I believe I should get to
meetings on time no matter what may come up
028. In my society people conduct business meetings in public offices rather than requiring privacy / 088. I prefer
to conduct business meetings in public offices rather than make an appointment to see ...
029. Where I'm from, most people work in a room with others and have little personal privacy at their desk / 089.
I don’t mind working in a room with others
030. People in my society usually go shopping in crowded market places rather than shops or stores / 090. I prefer
shopping in open crowded market places rather than shops or stores
031. Where I come from, people wait in line or queue rather than crowd around to do business / 091. I would
prefer to wait in line or queue, rather than crowd around to do business
032. Where I'm from, people in offices work with their doors open rather than keep them closed / 092. I prefer to
keep my office door open rather than closed
033. In my society friends usually greet each other by embracing / 093. I prefer to greet people by embracing
them rather than shaking their hand or just saying a greeting
034. In my society people would be comfortable concluding a contract discussion in a café rather than waiting for
a formal business meeting / 094. I don't mind holding formal contract discussions in a casual atmosphere (like a
café)
035. Where I am from we touch each other during friendly conversation rather than stand at a distance / 095. I
prefer to be able to touch my friends when having a conversation rather than stand at a distance.
036. In my society most people at work wait to be told to do something rather than just do it without being asked / 096. I like to wait to be told to do something, rather than do it without being asked
037. Where I come from, social groups tend to take credit collectively for the achievements of individuals within
their group / 097. I prefer to share credit collectively for my achievements rather than take personal credit
039. In my society men and women usually work with their own gender rather than a mix / 099. In my workplace
I prefer to work with my own gender rather than with a mix of genders
040. In my society a spoken agreement has the same importance as a written agreement / 100. I believe that a
spoken agreement has the same importance as a written agreement
041. Where I'm from managers expect to give written approvals before action will be taken / 101. I expect staff to
request written approvals before taking action
042. Where I'm from employees always get written approval before taking action / 102. I prefer to receive written
approvals rather than act on spoken instructions
043. In my society we need to get a personal commitment from a staff member in order to ensure an application is
processed / 103. I expect to need a personal commitment from a staff member in order to ensure an application is...
044. In my society people are rewarded with long-term employment rather than more cash / 104. I prefer to be
rewarded with long-term employment rather than with more cash
046. In my society people will accept a better/higher job title rather than a pay rise as a reward for doing well / 106. I prefer to be given better/higher job title as a reward for doing well instead of receiving cash
047. In my society people take long term employment rather than higher status as a reward for good work / 107. I
would prefer to be given a promise of long employment rather than higher status as a reward for ... 
048. Where I'm from people would prefer to leave nature (rivers, forests etc) alone rather than try to manage it / 108. I believe that we should leave nature (rivers, forests etc) alone rather than try to manage it
049. In my society we believe the future will look after itself, we should not try to influence it / 109. I believe the
future will look after itself, I should not try to influence it
050. In my society people let problems sort themselves out rather than take action / 110. I prefer to let problems
sort themselves out rather than take action
051. Most people where I'm from have a career plan (e.g. 5 or 10-year) / 111. I believe I should have a career plan
for 5 or 10 years ahead
052. In my society it's important to think and reflect on a decision, even if it may cause long delay / 112. I think
it's important to think and reflect on a decision, even if it may cause a long delay
053. Where I'm from people accept their situation in life rather than strive to make changes / 113. I accept my situation in life rather than try to make changes

054. Where I come from people enjoy leisure and art more than seeking monetary rewards / 114. I would rather enjoy myself through leisure and art than look for financial reward

056. In my society people do not pay upfront and trust someone to finish a job, they only pay when a job is completed / 116. I pay for a job when it is completed, I do not pay upfront and trust someone to finish it

058. Where I am from we believe that even when people are not supervised they will still work as hard as they can / 118. I believe that most people will work as hard as they can even when they are not supervised

059. In my society we like to act after carefully thought out logic, rather than on intuition and what 'feels right' / 119. I like to act after carefully thought out logic rather than on intuition and when it 'feels right'

060. Where I am from we like to explain things with stories rather than with scientific explanation / 120. I prefer to explain things with stories rather than by scientific explanation
Table Captions

Table 1: Number of participants, means and standard deviations of perceived deviation of self from own societal ratings for those who had lived most of their life in their country of origin and those who had lived most of their life in a Gulf Arab nation. Rows are ordered by decreasing size of perceived deviation.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Continent B</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.1 (0.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med Arab</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.0 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Continent A</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>1.8 (0.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Arab</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1.7 (0.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>1.2 (0.38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure Captions:

Figure 1: Mean self and societal ratings across all items for the five national groups with positively worded items reversed.

Figure 2: Mean ratings for those who had lived most of their lives in Gulf Arab nations.

Figure 3: A plot of reduced space coordinates (Y-axis) for the first discriminant function of the multiple discriminant analysis explaining 58.6% of the variance. A discriminant function is a weighted average of all the items assigned statistically (Hair et al., 2010).
Figure 2

[Graph showing mean response across societal and self ratings for different regions: Gulf Arab, Med. Arab, SubCont A, SubCont B, and West.]
Figure 3: