

2015

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Recommended Citation

Sanders, Victoria R. and Friedlmeier, Wolfgang, "Emotion Displays in Media: A Comparison Between Mexican, Hispanic-American, and European-American Children's Storybooks" (2015). *Student Summer Scholars*. 141.

<http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/sss/141>

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Emotion Displays in Media: A Comparison Between Mexican, Hispanic-American, and

European-American Children's Storybooks

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Cultures differ in emotions not only in the emotion display rules (Matsumoto et al., 2008), i.e., how, when, and to whom emotions are appropriate to be expressed, but also in preferences for certain type of emotions (e.g., De Leersnyder, Kim, & Mesquita, 2015; Eid & Diener, 2011). Young children acquire these culture-specific emotion norms not only through their parents' emotion socialization strategies (Friedlmeier, Corapci, & Cole, 2011), but also through exposure to cultural artifacts such as children's storybooks (Tsai, 2007; VanderWege et al., 2014).

The goal of this study was to compare emotion displays in European-American, Mexican, and Hispanic-American storybooks to infer cultural differences in emotion norms with a particular emphasis on acculturation effects of Hispanic-American books. Cultural variations of emotion norms are partly explained by general cultural syndromes like individualism-collectivism (van Hemert, Poortinga, & van de Vijver, 2007) and differences in self-construal (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000), and we expected differences between Mexican and European-American storybooks regarding intensity of expression, type of emotion, and impact of ingroup/outgroup on emotion display. Furthermore, studies have shown a steady shift in acculturation scores of Hispanics living in America from their original Hispanic culture to the mainstream American culture (see Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; see López, 2009). We assumed a similar acculturation trend at the media level for Hispanic-American books; Hispanic authors and illustrators of these storybooks may shift towards the mainstream American culture, with emotion display norms falling in between those of the host and original culture.

Additionally, we looked at non-emotion related features to validate cultural differences in those storybooks.

Cross-cultural studies about display rules showed a positive correlation between individualism and endorsement of emotion expression (Matsumoto et al, 2008; van Hemert et al., 2007). Individualistic cultures endorse higher emotional expressivity because of their emphasis on uniqueness and independence of the self, and emotions are seen as authentic personal experiences, while collectivistic cultures emphasize interdependence that requires more control of emotion displays because of values such as group harmony. Mexico as a Latino culture is higher on collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), and values interdependence compared to mainstream US culture, which is high on individualism and values independence. Therefore, we expected higher intensity of emotion expression in European-American books, especially negative emotions, and lowest intensity in Mexican books.

Individualistic cultures endorse higher expressivity in general with ingroups, especially of negative emotions, and more positive emotions to outgroups (Matsumoto et al., 2008). In contrast, collectivistic cultures endorse greater expression of more positive emotions to ingroups and more negative emotions to outgroups, as endorsing negative emotions to ingroups threatens group harmony (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Therefore, we expected that European-American storybooks would display an overall higher intensity of expression with ingroups than outgroups, especially for negative emotions, and display positive emotions more strongly to outgroups, that Mexican books would display stronger positive emotions to ingroups and stronger negative emotions to outgroups, and Hispanic-American books may show middle ground.

The self-construals are related to the relevance of certain type of emotions: cultures with an independent self-construal (like European-American culture) endorse more displays of socially disengaging emotions, while cultures with an interdependent self-construal (like Latino culture) endorse more displays of socially engaging emotions (Kitayama et al., 2000). The media analysis allows testing the frequencies of emotion displays in cultural media, such as children's storybooks, which gives insight to the relevance of the respective emotion in each culture. The distinction mostly applies to negative emotions. We expected that negative socially disengaging emotions, such as anger and disgust, would be more prominent in the European-American books than the Mexican books, whereas negative socially engaging emotions, such as shame and disappointment, would be more prominent in Mexican books than in European-American books. Hispanic-American books are expected to fall in between. Furthermore, as parents universally foster positive emotions in their infants and children (see Cole & Tan, 2007), we expected that positive emotion displays will strongly dominate in the storybooks for the three cultural groups.

To validate emotion display differences across the three groups in these media, we also expected cultural differences in general features: more emphasis on the individual and independent self should be reflected in more depictions of the protagonist and less characters (per page) in European-American compared to Mexican books. Because of cultural values central to Hispanic culture such as familism (i.e. strong commitment to family harmony) (Luna et al., 1996; Sabogal Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987; Schwartz, 2007) and stronger interdependence, we predicted there would be more ingroup than outgroup displays in Mexican books

compared to European-American books. A higher male dominance in Latino culture should be reflected in more depictions of male characters in Mexican books.

Methods

$N = 1059$ storybook characters (figures) were coded based on 10 popular storybooks from each culture. Popularity was determined based on popularity lists (Amazon and a Latino forum). The main focus of the analysis was on emotion type (positive, negative socially engaging, negative socially disengaging) and intensity (weak, medium, strong) of expression across cultures. The three emotion types differentiated 17 distinct global emotions (*positive*: happiness, surprise, pride, self-confidence, relaxation, liking; *negative socially engaging*: fear, sadness, shame, confusion, worry, guilt, disappointment, embarrassment; *negative socially disengaging*: disgust, anger, dislike). Context variables like number of figures per page, social partners (alone, ingroup, outgroup, mixed), gender (male, female, unknown), and protagonist (yes/no) were also tested for cultural differences.

Results

As expected, expression intensity in general was highest in European-American books, especially for positive emotions. However, Mexican books showed similar intensity for negative emotions and Hispanic-American books did not fall in between European-American and Mexican books; these books displayed the lowest expression intensity for positive and negative emotions.

A differentiation of emotion intensity between in- and outgroups could not be confirmed. The expression intensity towards in- and outgroups was the same in Hispanic- and Mexican books for positive and negative emotions. The only distinction occurred in

European-American books for negative emotions as the intensity was higher towards ingroups than outgroup members.

Positive emotions were dominant in all three groups (Hispanic-American 87.86%; Mexican 75.21%; European-American 73.75%), and – beyond this similarity – occurred significantly more often in Hispanic-American books.

Negative emotions showed up in a similar rate for socially disengaging and engaging emotions in European-American books (about 13%), whereas frequencies of socially disengaging emotions were much lower for Mexican books (6%), and nearly absent for Hispanic-American books (1%). Hispanic-American and Mexican books were similar in displaying more negative socially engaging emotions and less negative socially disengaging emotions. Interestingly, certain global emotions were absent in both Hispanic-American and Mexican books, such as liking, shame, disappointment, and disgust.

Regarding the validation in relation to other features, Mexican books displayed more figures per page and a significantly lower number of protagonists than US and Hispanic-American books. Though European-American books showed much higher percentage of ingroup than outgroup contexts compared to Mexican books, the latter had about 54% mixed contexts, i.e., ingroup and outgroup members are present. Hispanic-American books showed a similar pattern as European-American books. Finally, Mexican books displayed a significantly higher number of male characters than the other two cultural groups. Both European-American and Hispanic-American books displayed a more balanced gender distribution.

Discussion

The cultural comparison of the non-emotional features validate the assumption that these media reflect cultural norms. European-American compared to Mexican storybooks displayed a higher representation of protagonist and lower presence of others, reflecting stronger independence norms by focusing on the individual. The hero is the focal point of the story. European-American compared to Mexican books displayed more balanced gender distribution, which may represent the stronger gender equality. The assumption that Mexican books present more ingroup contexts as a reflection of familism was not confirmed. However, the presence of ingroup and outgroup members as context occurred much more often in Mexican books which supports the emphasis of the social context and may reflect the value of interconnectedness. Interestingly, Hispanic-American books demonstrated strong similarities with the host American culture in all these features.

Regarding cultural differences in emotion norms, the results were mixed: As expected, Mexican books displayed less negative socially disengaging emotions compared to the European-American books. Hispanic-American books showed similarities to the original culture.

The hypothesis that expression intensity will depend on culture and valence of emotion was not confirmed. The intensities did not vary between ingroup and outgroup, with the exception that European-American storybooks displayed an overall higher intensity of negative emotions to ingroups than outgroups. There are several explanations possible. First, as we left out the mixed context (both ingroup and outgroup members are present), and this context occurred often in Mexican and Hispanic-American books, we may lose statistical power to detect effects. Second, the effects may not occur, as some

books are translations and not original stories. Finally, the definition of in- and outgroup members is not clear-cut in the literature (e.g., Safdar, Friedlmeier, Matsumoto, Yoo, & Kwantes, 2009). The fact that we included peers and distant relatives to outgroups may also reduce the potential effect of ingroup/outgroup on expression intensity.

The low intensity of emotion expression in Hispanic-American books does not fit with the acculturation assumption. The effect may be attributed to the minority status of this cultural group that require control of emotion expression to adapt to the host culture (e.g., Consedine, Magai, Horton, & Brown, 2012). The high frequency of positive emotion type in Hispanic-American books may also be attributed to a similar effect by overemphasizing a desired positive emotional experience (see Consedine et al., 2012).

This study has several limitations. The number of coded books was small and should be expanded in the future. We also exclusively focused on the coding of emotion displays. It would be interesting to add content analysis of the text, especially analyzing whether emotions are expressions in the narrative and how these emotions are worded. Finally, young children do not consume such books alone but parents will read them with the child. It is important to understand how parents present the emotional context in these media.

Nevertheless, the study showed several systematic differences of emotion displays between European-American and Mexican children storybooks. The identification of emotion norms in media like children's storybooks is an important approach to identify culture-specific emotion norms. Such specific norms can serve as meaningful framework for future studies about emotion socialization with the respective cultural groups because

these norms, related beliefs, and socialization practices can vary between cultures with similar general cultural norms (Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011).

This study has demonstrated that acculturation at the media level for Hispanic-American storybooks may rather reflect an adoption of certain norms from the host culture and a legacy of values from the original culture, as opposed to falling in the middle. This flexibility can be seen as a successful acculturation strategy described as “integration” by Berry (1997), in which the minority culture “develops a bicultural orientation and successfully integrates cultural aspects of both groups and feels a certain sense of identification and comfort with both groups” (Cuéllar et al., 1995, p. 279). As media such as children’s storybooks continue to influence the emotion socialization process, especially in a diverse setting such as the United States, it is important to understand the similarities and differences of emotion norms across ethnic groups that are exposed to children living together in this environment.

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