


## Acculturation in Jewish Argentines Migrating to Israel

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to investigate to what extent a migrant's personality influences his/ her acculturation process, measured by the four categories defined by Berry (1994); integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. A series of variables based on the Big 5 personality traits are used to accurately analyze Argentinian Jews who chose to migrate to Israel. Among other variables, our research focuses on factors such as employment, social adaptation, negative and positive affect, the migrant's display of responsibility, and the desire to migrate. By doing so, we are analyzing the impact of these personality traits on how well a Argentinian migrant adapts to Israel, and how he/ she identifies with the host country and the country of origin after the migration.

**Keywords:** Jewish Argentines, Israel, Migration, Acculturation.

### INTRODUCTION

Most of us have experienced feeling foreign in another country when going on vacation or traveling. When we were not born and raised in a specific country, its culture, customs, and language are foreign to us. When choosing to visit another country, we are forced to quickly compare the customs and traditions we observe with those of our native culture. Based on this experience of foreignness and alienation, we might find simple conversations, meeting locals, or ordering our favorite dish more difficult. The profound decision to migrate and settle down permanently in another country obviously goes beyond a short vacation and experiencing a foreign country through the eyes of a tourist. In order to become a part of a new society and culture, a maximum personal effort is required. The acculturation process in which we will find ourselves immersed will have a permanent effect on our life. The results of this integration process cannot be clearly and binary defined between having integrated or being marginalized by the recipient country. Quite the contrary, migration is a complex phenomenon that integrates a multiplicity of economic, social, psychological, and security aspects, among other elements that can affect daily life (Martínez & Martínez, 2018) It is a very nuanced experience and acculturation in itself has many facets, which is being analyzed in this paper.

Throughout its history, Argentina suffered successive economic and social crises (Sznajder, 2005). Even though most Argentines managed to adapt to an unstable economy and rapid political changes, there are

specific periods of time in which many citizens choose to immigrate to another country (Babis, 2016). Pull factors were also not trivial the greater prosperity that marked Israel in the 1960s, the positive reports sent back by tourists and immigrants. It shows that chain migration is a relative analytical category in this context – the immigrant’s contacts, media, were of paramount importance for the process (Klor, 2017). In short, many Argentines decided to immigrate to Israel in order to find better opportunities, and given a desire for access to higher quality education and professional interests are also crucial determinants. That is why immigration to Israel has been composed of families and singles, academics, businessmen, professionals, and students, mostly of medium socioeconomic levels (Babis, 2016). Clearly, the economic situation of the desired country is not the only factor weighing in. Also religious affinities as well as an ethnic component, immigrant’s sense of belonging to the Jewish community, were decisive (Klor, 2017). Identifying as a Judeo-Argentine has a huge influence on one’s acculturation. The 2001 crisis led 1,500 people (Steinberg, 2002) to make this decision -an increase of 30% over the previous year. Nonetheless, for most Argentines, it is of importance to preserve their cultural heritage (Babis, 2016).

As researchers, we are interested in learning more about the results and various factors that play into an individual’s migration and their acculturation. This process defines four categories within the integration process (Berry, 2006). David Sam and John Berry (2010) state that “variations in ways of acculturating have become known by the terms integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Two variations in adaptation have been identified, involving psychological well-being and sociocultural competence. It is not surprising that the acculturation process varies from person to person. In general, it is important to examine the compatibility (or incompatibility) in cultural norms, customs, values, attitudes, and personality of the two countries, in our study the possible cultural differences of a Jewish Argentine migrating to Israel.

This is needed as the base for understanding the acculturation process that is set in motion (Berry & Sam, 2010). Whereas many state that they see themselves as becoming fully absorbed in the new culture, and consider themselves more Israeli than Argentinean (assimilation), many point out the opposite and still feel foreign in the country they live in for years- some might even consciously reject any involvement with the host country (separation). This might stem from many interacting with Israelis, learning Hebrew, and adapting to the new culture, whereas others surround themselves with South American peers and stick to speaking Spanish. The third instance would be the optimal state of integration in which the migrant identifies with both countries relatively equally (integration), celebrating one’s roots and native culture whilst adapting to new customs. The last level of acculturation shows the marginalized individual with no real sense of belonging to either of the two cultures (marginalization). Nina-Estrella (2018) argues that “marginalization and separation are associated with patterns of conflict, resulting in acculturative stress. As also, migrants employing the integration strategy tend to experience the least amount of stress when adjusting to the culture”. In order to fully adapt to the foreign country and its culture, the individual actively has to decide to become a part of it and work hard in order to succeed in his or her process of acculturation. Also, emotional factors are significant as many reports to end up feeling alone and as if they belong to neither of the two countries. It is also important to note that some Jewish Argentines decide to move back to Argentina after a period of time in which they tried to adapt and build themselves a new life in Israel. In short, acculturation is defined as the process by which cultural and psychological changes occur following the contact of two or more cultures (Berry, 2006). Given these circumstances, we intend to investigate the relationship between being emotionally well and the acculturation process of Jewish Argentines in Israel.

Our assumption, at the onset of this project, is that a person’s tendency for neuroticism and introversion correlates negatively with their well-being and integration in the context of migration. Acculturation does not occur naturally but requires an active involvement trying to adapt and participate in this foreign society. Migration to Israel to be a central event in the identities of Jewish Latin American immigrants (Simkin, 2020) Therefore, we hypothesize that an individual with a low level of subjective well-being will experience more difficulties when trying to interact with Israelis and become part of their culture. Not being able to

interact with strangers, refusing to learn about the new culture, Israeli politics and the inability to meet new people will probably have a negative effect on the individual's acculturation. It is important to note that the four strategies are neither static nor are they end outcomes in themselves (Berry & Sam, 2010).

But what is the relationship between personality factors, subjective well-being, and acculturation? The Five-Factor model created by Costa and McCrae (1980) claims that the core of personality consists of a combination of five traits: openness to experience (curiosity), extraversion (positivity, energy, sociability), neuroticism (emotional instability, distress), agreeableness (cooperativeness, trustfulness), and conscientiousness (self-awareness) (Puente, 2020).

We hypothesize that neuroticism is negatively associated with well-being and integration and positively associated with isolation. If a migrant shows signs of neuroticism, he or she is more likely to experience isolation and to suffer from depression and anxiety (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Linking positive personality traits, such as openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness to acculturation, we assume that they are positively associated with well-being, and integration and negatively associated with isolation. Those who are very open and extraverted tend to be more welcoming of new experiences and more outgoing (McCrae & Costa, 2003). A study by Roeschet. al. (2007) that suggests that "the dimensions of personality and coping styles are important when profiling migrant's acculturation"

Puente (2020) argues that an individual's personality does not only point to how they possibly acculturate, but also helps understand how they experience this process. Acculturation in relation to the psychological adaptation of the individual, refers to their state of satisfaction and emotional well-being. Studies interested in psychological adaptation have often focused on mental health outcomes, with states of anxiety and depression being the most common (Berry & Sam 2010). Acculturation should also relate to subjective well-being, as perhaps with good mental health and openness a migrant is more likely to adapt to his or her new environment (Tartakovsky& Schwartz, 2001).

Also, subjective well-being might be linked to acculturation which is why it is important to emphasize the emotional aspects of acculturation (Berry & Sam, 2010). Their correlation might be based on a number of moderating and mediating factors such as personal characteristics which we already elaborated on. This might also include the immigrant's age, gender, and also the social support network in the foreign country (Israel). Overall, personal well-being determines certain behaviors and can become an important integration tool (Puente, 2020).

Thus, in asking Jewish Argentine immigrants, who live in Israel, about their personality traits and their subsequent sense of belonging in Israel, we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between an immigrant's personality and his or her experience of immigration. Specifically, we are interested in exploring how these two variables interact in the particular context of Jewish Argentine migrants in Israel. In sum, we are seeking to analyze if the personality of a Jewish Argentine immigrant can foretell something about the likelihood that their encounter with Israeli society will result in feelings of either integration or isolation.

## METHOD

In order to better understand the correlation between neuroticism, introversion, and acculturation, the participants answered questionnaires about their personal traits and about their sense of belonging and self-assessment as either Argentinean or Israeli. To measure the participants' integration into Israeli society, they were asked to rate four statements pertaining to belonging to Israel and/or Argentina, structured according to Berry's categories of acculturation (Berry, 2006). John Berry divides acculturation into four categories: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

## Participants

The sample was made up of 204 Argentine migrants who, at the time of answering the questionnaire, live in Israel, with an age range of between 20 and 79 years ( $M = 52.29$ ;  $SD = 14.28$ ), of both sexes (Women = 52%; Men 48%)

## Measures

### *Mini International Personality Item Pool*

The Mini-IPIP has of the five personality factors has been created by Donnellan, et al. (2006). Statements are presented in order to get to know the person's perception of him or herself. Participants are asked to indicate the degree to which they agree with each statement, checking the option that they consider most accurate. The responses are presented on a Likert-type scale consisting of five items: 1 = Totally agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree. Two examples of such claims would be: "I am the life of the party" or "I have frequent changes in my mood." For this particular study, the validated version of the Argentine context of Simkin et al. (2020) was administrated.

### *Affect Balance Scale*

ABS (Warr et al., 1983) measures the frequency with which positive or negative emotions are currently perceived. Participants are asked to indicate to what degree they agree with each statement according to the Likert-type scale that goes from 1 = "Little or never" to 2 = "Generally or a lot". Two examples of such questions would be: "Have you ever felt upset about someone?" or "Have you felt very worried?" For this particular study, the validated version of the Argentine context of Simkin, Olivera and Azzollini (2016) was taken.

### *Acculturation*

In order to evaluate Acculturation, four questions were created corresponding to the four categories developed by Berry (1994): (1) I feel more Argentine than Israeli; (2) I feel more Israeli than Argentine; (3) I feel that I am as Argentine as Israeli (4) I feel that I do not fully belong to either Argentina or Israel. Questions are answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, being 1 = Totally agree and 5 = Strongly disagree.

### *Sociodemographic data questionnaire*

An ad hoc questionnaire was developed that asked participants to record their motivation to emigrate to Israel, satisfaction with job placement in Israel, satisfaction with social adaptation in Israel and if they have children.

## Procedure

To measure the integration of the Jewish Argentinean participants in Israeli society, participants were asked to rate statements regarding their sense of belonging to Israel and/or Argentina, structured according to

the four acculturation categories of John Berry (2006), who establishes a nuanced differentiation between integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Participants voluntarily collaborated with the researchers, after having been explained to that the study would be carried out for academic purposes in accordance with the code of ethics of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) (Res. D No. 2857/06), under the National Law Argentina 25,326.

## Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyzes were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 and EQS 6.4 for Windows.

## RESULTS

Associations between different variables were examined using a correlational analysis which are made explicit in Table 1.

The most significant result we found is that high levels of neuroticism and negative affect are negatively related to the acculturation process of an individual, which includes the integration into Israeli society. Such personality traits are observed in those Argentines who suffer from isolation, and loneliness, meaning, that they feel as if they do not belong to Israeli society, or cannot identify with either of the two countries. A slight correlation is also observed between low levels of neuroticism and negative affect with those Argentines who positively identify with both cultures.

One of the five personality factors on our scale Mini-IPIP (Donnellan, 2006) is responsibility. People displaying a high level of responsibility tend to be more careful, diligent, hard-working, trustworthy, and serious about their commitments. This variable negatively correlates with participants who feel as if they belong to neither, Argentina or Israel. This indicates that being responsible, hard-working, and diligent reduces the chances that migrants will feel isolated and anxious.

The results also show a slight negative correlation between the strength of a person's motivation to emigrate and them not feeling as if they belong to either country.

On the other hand, our results imply a positive correlation between migrants' satisfaction with life, their satisfaction with respect to their social position, and them identifying more as an Israeli than Argentine. There is a relationship between a person's subjective well-being and the probability of him/ her experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness, and not identifying with any particular country and culture. Surprisingly, people who are satisfied with their work and their integration into a new society, display a higher probability of feeling "more Argentine than Israeli" or "more Israeli than Argentinean."

Finally, an interesting positive correlation exists between people who have children and their identification with Israel. This shows that generally, children unconsciously support a parents' process of acculturation and help them in identifying more with the host country. But, we also found a lower correlation between people who have children and nonetheless, do not feel connected to either of these two countries

Table 1  
Correlations

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
A	1															
B	-.24**	1														
C	.25**	-.75**	1													
D	.05	.24**	-.30**	1												
E	-.16*	.17*	-.30**	.20**	1											
F	.10	-.30**	.25**	.01	-.15*	1										
G	.21**	-.35**	.36**	.00	-.19**	.64**	1									
H	.02	-.24**	.24**	.06	-.26**	.07	.16*	1								
I	-.00	.04	-.07	-.04	-.05	.12	.11	.00	1							
J	.06	-.11	.12	-.08	-.21**	.01	.14*	.07	-.00	1						
K	.17*	-.01	-.00	.03	-.08	.05	.20**	-.08	.10	.09	1					
L	.11	-.02	-.02	.07	-.06	.05	.17*	-.03	.21**	.22**	.35**	1				
M	-.19**	.18**	-.12	.14*	.25**	-.12	-.24**	-.14*	-.19**	-.16*	-.14*	-.18*	1			
N	-.15*	.30**	-.27**	.15*	.24**	-.34**	-.42**	-.32**	-.09	-.19**	-.00	-.04	.43**	1		
O	.28**	-.20**	.24**	.09	-.16*	.38**	.49**	.08	.10	.12	.24**	.28**	-.20**	-.30**	1	
P	.25**	-.31**	.34**	-.02	-.26**	.54**	.63**	.26**	.15*	.10	.22**	.18**	-.32**	-.45**	.61**	1

Note: A = Motivation to emigrate to Israel; B = Separation; C = Assimilation; D = Integration; E = Marginalization; F = Satisfaction with job placement in Israel; G = Satisfaction with social insertion in Israel; H = Having children; I = Openness; J = Consciousness; K = Extraversion; L = Kindness; M = Neuroticism; N = Negative affect; O = Positive affect; P = Satisfaction with life.

Later, a regression analysis was performed to evaluate the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable, acculturation. In other words, the migrant’s motivation to migrate to Israel, satisfaction with life, employment, social adaptation, their level of consciousness, neuroticism, negative and positive affect, and the fact of (not) having children were analyzed with the help of Berry’s four categories of acculturation (Berry, 2006): integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. As shown in Table 2, the motivation to emigrate to Israel, employment, and social circumstances, and (not) having children were observed.

Table 2  
Regressions

		B	Type error	Beta	t	sig
<b>Separation</b>	(Constant)	5,590	,455		12,284	,000
	1. JP	-,185	,105	-,145	-1,760	,080
	2. SA	-,238	,107	-,189	-2,226	,027
	3. CH	-,193	,061	-,202	-3,153	,002
	4. ME	-,221	,077	-,186	-2,871	,005

Note: 1 = Satisfaction with job placement in Israel; 2 = Satisfaction with social adaptation in Israel; 3 = Having children; 4 = Motivation to emigrate to Israel.

Also, we want to note the importance of the variables "satisfaction with social adaptation", "having children" and "motivation to emigrate to Israel" as predictors of the migrant's feeling of belonging to either, Israel or Argentina. This is due to social adaptation being the variable with the greatest impact (Table 3).

Table 3  
Regression

		B	Type error	Beta	t	sig
<b>Assimilation</b>	(Constant)	1,257	,564		2,229	,027
	1.SA	,390	,083	,309	4,708	,000
	3.CH	,184	,061	,191	3,007	,003
	4. ME	,218	,077	,183	2,839	,005

Note: 1 = Satisfaction with social adaptation in Israel; 2 = Having children 4 = Motivation to emigrate to Israel.

Finally, the fact of having children turned out to have a strong impact on marginalization and the low or non-existent identification of belonging more to Argentina as to Israel. Also, the level of satisfaction regarding the individual's adjustment to the workplace is shown, even though it is a minimal correlation (Table 4).

Table 4  
Regression

		B	Typ error	Beta	t	sig
<b>Marginalization</b>	(Constant)	3,481	,768		4,531	,000
	1. JP	-,174	,099	-,116	-1,762	,080
	3. CH	-,242	,075	-,214	-3,238	,001

Note: 1 = Satisfaction with job placement in Israel; 2 = Having children

## DISCUSSION

The present study sets out to examine the relation of the following variables in the process acculturation. Undoubtedly, a complex process whose result varies depending on the cultures that are being intertwined and thus, results are not definitive. Whether or not an individual integrates in a new society depends on a very heterogeneous set of variables that exceed this particular investigation

### **Negative Affect, Neuroticism and acculturation**

The Affect Balance Scale assesses positive and negative affect as indicators of life satisfaction and well-being. Neuroticism is one of Big Five central groupings of personality traits in the study of psychology. People who score high on neuroticism are more likely than the average person to typically and regularly experience moodiness and to experience feeling like jealousy, fear, guilt, concern, anxiety, rage, frustration, depression, and loneliness.

One of the central hypotheses of this study was that neuroticism and negative affect would interact with acculturation and negatively impact acculturation. The results of the study supported our hypothesis. Negative affect and neuroticism correlate with acculturation. In fact, of the variables considered in this study, these two were the only ones that resulted in a slight correlation with “successful” integration feeling both, Israeli and Argentinian. A stronger correlation was found between negative affect/neuroticism and the feeling of isolation, that is, feeling belonging neither to Israel nor Argentina

The higher a person’s tendency is for neuroticism and negative affect, the higher his or her chances are to continue feeling more Argentinean than they do Israeli. This is especially true of people with tendencies to negative affect. The more negatively someone responds to changes and dramatic upheavals, the more a person is easily stressed and fretful, the more difficult it is to acculturate.

Unexpectedly, negative affect and neuroticism were also the only variables included in this study that showed any correlation with reporting feeling “as Argentinian as Israeli” (.142\* for neuroticism and .153\* for negative affect). A possible explanation for this could be that a tendency for negative moods and emotions does not, in fact, interfere completely with the process of acculturation. While people who have this tendency are more likely to feel stronger belonging to Argentina, less likely to feel stronger belonging to Israel, and more likely to feel isolation, but that there is also some likelihood that the person will, after all, feel equally both, while attributing equally negative emotions with both parts of his or her identity.

### **Conscientiousness and acculturation**

One of the big five factors of personality, conscientiousness is considered to be a continuous dimension of personality, rather than a category of a ‘type’ of person, and associated with people who are careful, diligent, hard working, dependable and serious about their commitments to others. As can be expected, the more conscientious a person is, the lower the chances are that they will experience a lack of belonging to both countries. This is explained by the fact that people who form strong relationships with others and have a sense of duty towards them are less likely to report that they suffer from isolation and an absence in social connections resulting in isolation.

Read together, the results for neuroticism and the likelihood of isolation compared to the results for conscientiousness and isolation could be understood as completing each other to a certain degree. For instance, a person who experiences their connections to other people and to society as a stressor is more likely to feel isolated, whereas a person who experiences ties to society as a source of obligation and duty that related to their personal feelings of pride and meaning, will be less likely to experience isolation.

## Motivation to emigrate and acculturation

The study found correlation between the strength of motivation to emigrate to Israel and feeling either more Israeli or more Argentinian.

The higher the motivation to emigrate, the likelier a person is to feel more Israeli than they do Argentinian (.255\*\*). On the other hand, the stronger the motivation to emigrate, the lower the chances are that a person will feel more Argentinian than they do Israeli (-.247\*\*). Interestingly, the results found a slight negative correlation (-.162\*) between the strength of a person's motivation to emigrate and their feeling that they do not belong in either Israel or Argentina. In other words, people who experienced a strong desire and need to either leave Argentina or move to Israel, or both, are less likely to feel isolated and a lack of belonging to either country.

## Satisfaction with job placement, satisfaction with social placement, satisfaction with life in general and acculturation

The study shows that there is a positive correlation between a person's satisfaction with life, specifically their satisfaction with their social position, and them feeling more Israeli than they do Argentinian. This is unsurprising, because it is easily predictable that a person who moves to Israel and manages to achieve professional goals and social positioning that he or she are satisfied with, is more inclined to feel that they belong to Israel more than they belong to Argentina; the less likely that same person is to experience isolation. These results support the assumption that there is a relationship between a person's subjective well-being, expressed in satisfaction with their lives, and the unlikeliness that they will experience isolation. An immigrant who is able to fulfill themselves on the social level of community, to feel acknowledged by others, and to accomplish professional goals and earn a living they are satisfied with, is an immigrant who does not feel isolated and a lack of belonging.

Perhaps the more surprising aspect of these results is that people who are satisfied with their job and social placement are more or less just as likely to feel "more Argentinian than Israeli" as they are to feel "more Israeli than Argentinian." This could be explained by the fact that people can feel satisfied with their position and job even if they live in a relatively closed community of immigrants in Israel who emphasize their Argentinian heritage, identity and culture, and therefore still identify more as Argentinian than Israeli.

## Having children

Interestingly, the study showed that there is a statistical relationship between people who have children and their acculturation in Israel. People who do have children had a slight negative correlation with answering "more Argentinian than Israeli" and a slight positive correlation with answering "more Israeli than Argentinian". In other words, if you have children, presumably if you have had them in Israel, you are less likely to still feel more connected to the country you left behind. In fact, you are more likely to experience a stronger sense of belonging to Israel. This is also reflected in the negative correlation between having children and feeling "neither fully Israeli nor Argentinian" (-.261\*\*).

## CONCLUSION

The study of personality traits and its impact on a migrant's complex process of acculturation is interesting and important. The experience of living in a new country is continuous and in evolves permanently.

The results of the questionnaire carried out for this analysis allowed us to affirm assumptions about the relationship between personality and acculturation. Research shows us that the culture of a society is not an abstract that we can passively observe. It is clear that integrating into a different society and foreign to our customs is not easy and requires personal effort to adapt and thus, being able to integrate better and becoming an active part of a new culture.

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