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The Importance of Peers: Assimilation Patterns among Second-generation Turkish Immigrants in Western Europe

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PEERS: ASSIMILATION PATTERNS AMONG SECOND-GENERATION TURKISH
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Abstract

The dominant approaches to immigrant assimilation – segmented and ‘new’ assimilation theories – analyse differences in assimilation across immigrant groups. However, neither adequately addresses variation within groups because nearly all the variables usually used to explain variation are best at addressing between-group differences. The exception is family-level variables, specifically parents’ educational attainment, income and occupational status. However, it is unlikely family effects on their own can explain assimilation outcomes for individuals. We argue peer effects are an important explanatory variable for cultural and economic assimilation. We examine data from The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES) survey, looking at second-generation Turkish immigrants across Western Europe. We find peers substantially affect cultural and economic assimilation, effects not predicted by either dominant theory of immigrant assimilation.

Keywords: immigrant, assimilation, second generation, peers

INTRODUCTION

In nearly all Western countries today a large contingent of born and/or raised in the West, second-generation immigrants has come of adult age. They have left school, are in the labour force, and many have married and had children. As their numbers have increased in the past twenty years, the immigration literature has reoriented the question of assimilation to look specifically at this group (Gans 1992a; Portes and Zhou 1993).¹

The most influential recent studies informing theoretical debates on the second generation largely draw upon four major surveys: Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York (ISGMNY), Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IIMMLA), and The Integration of the European Second Generation (TIES).² Overall, the analytical strategies – and strengths – of the work of those involved in these surveys (e.g., Crul and Schneider 2010; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2009; Rumbaut 2008) and other influential scholars in this field (e.g., Alba and Nee 2003) has been to examine differences *between* immigrant groups, and between immigrants and native-born, non-immigrants.

The goal of these scholars is to explain how and why immigrants assimilate, but they generally report *between-group* differences to explain assimilation patterns of individuals. Few studies report *within-group* differences: why individuals regardless of group affiliation show different patterns of assimilation. Indeed, Kasinitz et al. (2008, 22-3) recognise that within-group variation in assimilation is often as great as between-group, but still report their data as between-group differences. Nearly all the variables usually used – including nationality, race, context of reception and experiences of discrimination for the group – are best at addressing between-group differences, but not for explaining within-group differences as they are essentially constants

when looking within groups. The most common variables for explaining differences in assimilation at the individual level are parents' educational attainment, income and occupational status.

However, it is unlikely family effects by themselves can adequately explain assimilation outcomes at the individual level. Peer variables, including native status and education (among others) will also be important. We argue past and present peers, in addition to parents, will significantly affect variations in cultural and economic assimilation. Peers are an important explanatory variable in related fields like education, delinquency, and health (Crosnoe and Johnson 2011). Inexplicably, peers find little emphasis in the immigration literature, even though immigration scholars study these same outcomes. We go outside the immigration literature and follow Harris (2009) and Milner (1994, 2004) to argue that a person's peers affect who they are and what they do. To phrase it in terms of assimilation, if a person 'hangs out' with those of the majority, s/he is more likely to be like them and assimilate (i.e., conform) to their ways.

To examine whether peers have an independent effect on assimilation, we make use of the TIES survey. Our analysis covers eleven cities in six European countries, examining variations in cultural and economic assimilation among adult, second-generation Turkish immigrants in the labour force (aged 18-35).

ASSIMILATION THEORIES

Classical conceptions of assimilation assumed immigrants would culturally and/or economically assimilate over time (Gans 1992b; Gordon 1964; Warner and Srole 1945). However, the notion that assimilation is inevitable has been criticised since at least the 1960s (Shibutani and Kwan 1965).

In the early 1990s, concurrent with a recession in the US, Gans (1992a) proposed that many second-generation immigrant children were at risk of downward mobility. Soon after, Portes and Zhou (1993; see also Portes, Fernández-Kelly and Haller 2009; Portes and Rumbaut 2001) developed the segmented assimilation theory, which highlights shortcomings of older notions of assimilation by showing not all immigrants are upwardly mobile. The consistent theme of segmented assimilation theory is that parents' economic and educational achievements, social capital of family and ethnic groups, immigration status, and the context of legal and social reception for particular groups affect assimilation for second-generation offspring. 'New' assimilation theory largely agrees that these are important determining variables (see especially Alba, Kasinitz and Waters 2011, 764). Segmented assimilation theory also stresses how the degree and pace of acculturating patterns and interactions *between parents and child* affect educational and economic outcomes. The 'best' results occur when both parents and child engage in 'selective' acculturation, that is, they both acculturate slowly (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, 53-4).

Segmented assimilation theory has dominated for two decades, but it too has come under attack, with Alba and Nee's (2003) 'new' assimilation theory being the most influential. They dispense with aspects of classical assimilation theory that assumed pressure toward Anglo-conformity, i.e., becoming 'white' and middle class. They argue that the mainstream changes just as immigrants do, as social boundaries between whites and nonwhites, natives and foreigners shift, get blurred, and get crossed. For Alba and Nee, assimilation is the product of types of capital possessed by individuals and groups, with deeper causes being 'institutional arrangements of the state, firm, and labor market' (2003, 38). They also feel segmented assimilation places too

much emphasis on the underclass and downward mobility, that it ‘may predict an excessively pessimistic future for central-city minority youths’ (2003, 8).

This pessimism in segmented assimilation theory has provided fertile ground for empirical critique. For instance, Kasinitz et al. (2008) make the case that in New York the second generation is generally doing as well or better than their parents, contradicting a central tenet of segmented assimilation theory that those from groups experiencing discrimination are more likely to be downwardly mobile. Crul and Schneider (2009) similarly show upward educational mobility is the dominant trend among Turkish and Moroccan second-generation immigrants in Europe, who segmented assimilation theory would most likely predict should be downwardly mobile because of their status as discriminated working-class minorities. Waters et al. (2010) test tenets of segmented assimilation and find dissonant acculturation – where parents and children acculturate differentially, and which is theorised to lead directly to downward mobility – is not as common as segmented assimilation implies. Xie and Greenman (2005) also found no statistical evidence of downward mobility among second-generation immigrants along lines suggested by segmented assimilation theory. Portes and colleagues (Haller, Portes and Lynch 2011a, 2011b) defend their work by pointing out that ISGMNY is a cross-sectional survey of adults, and thus likely missed many of those people who will be downwardly mobile – including those incarcerated – who would likely not have responded to the survey. This, they say, weakens the claims of new assimilation theory that there is no real second-generation decline.

Linking peers and assimilation

While the debate between these camps can be contentious, they largely agree on the major independent variables affecting between-group assimilation. Their disagreements center on the empirical degree of second-generation downward mobility between groups.³ We criticise both theories for another reason: their neglect to foreground peers as an independent variable.

Peers are central to the study of outcomes of adolescence and young adulthood that immigration theories also examine, including educational achievement (Crosnoe 2011), dating (Kreager 2008), violent behaviour (Harding 2009), delinquency and criminal behaviour (Haynie and Osgood 2005), substance abuse (Kandel 1985), and mental health (Ueno 2005). Many scholars also observe how gender differentially affects peer group formation and dynamics (Clampet-Lundquist et al. 2011; Piquero et al. 2005). In all these fields, peers are just one of a number of explanatory variables. Researchers also differ in the degree to which they find peers to be important, and how they explain the importance of peers.

Importantly, peers in the above-mentioned studies are treated as having an independent effect from parents. Generally, parents don't *directly* affect choices of peers (Harris 2009). Parents' education and income affect economic class, the neighbourhoods their children live in, and the types of schools they go to, and parents give their children their color of skin, ethnicity and religion. Parents may shape the *pool* of their children's possible peers, but not whom they actually end up with as peers.⁴ Who children, teenagers and young adults have as peers is ultimately about who they choose and who chooses them (Harris 2009).

Our point here is not to give a deep review of these literatures, rather to show peers are a necessary part of the explanation of many outcomes that assimilation theories are concerned with. Given that, it is striking that peers are absent from new assimilation theory, and have at best a secondary place in segmented assimilation theory, where they are seen as reflecting

parental and ethnic group effects. For example, children's involvement with drugs and gangs are seen as a result of "bad" peers, which some argue is ultimately due to a lack of parental and/or ethnic community social capital and control over children, *rather than* choices children make independent of parents or ethnic community (Haller, Portes and Lynch 2011a; Zhou and Bankston 1998). However, these hypothesised negative effects of peers, which find repeated mention in theoretical writings, barely relate to the few questions asked about peers in CILS, which was developed by Portes and Rumbaut. In the first two waves of this longitudinal survey (respondents' average ages were 14 and 17), CILS asked questions about number of friends, where their friends are from, languages they use, if their friends dropped out of school, and friends' plans for college and work. In the third wave (average age of 24), the only question about friends was which language respondents speak with closest friends.⁵ The other major American second-generation surveys show an even greater blindspot for peers: ISGMNY and IIMMLA did not ask *any* peer-related questions. Further, while ISGMNY had a comprehensive ethnographic component, peers were barely mentioned in the twelve ethnographic accounts (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters 2004).

In many landmark qualitative studies of immigration, peer effects are absent from scholars' arguments, but can be gleaned from their data (e.g., Gibson 1988; Waters 1994). An example from Min Zhou, one of the developers of segmented assimilation theory and co-director of IIMMLA illustrates this point well. Zhou et al. (2008) described the plight of Rodolfo, a second-generation Mexican man who joined a gang, got into trouble with the police, was nearly deported for being undocumented, and at twenty worked long hours for low wages. They report that Rodolfo said 'if he could turn back time, he would have stayed in school and away from gangs – a path adopted by his older sister, who is now in college and aspires to become an

immigration lawyer' (2008, 48). Rodolfo emphasises the effects of peers, but Zhou et al.'s analysis of Rodolfo's woes does not mention peers, and places the emphasis elsewhere: 'From the very start, he had numerous odds stacked against him – low parental human and economic capital and unauthorised migration status' (2008, 49). But these stacked odds worked against his sister as well, and yet she seems to be succeeding.

Zhou et al.'s theoretical stance is clear in how they ignore the sister, whose life seems to dramatically diverge from Rodolfo's. Rodolfo and his sister share ethnicity and likely parents – critical variables that segmented assimilation theory sees as central are essentially held constant. So what differs between them? Gender and peers, the latter Rodolfo himself emphasises when he says he should have stayed away from gangs. But Zhou et al. ignore how this vignette demonstrates the importance of peers.

Gibson's 1988 landmark study of Punjabi high school students in rural California also points to the centrality of peers. While her conceptual argument stresses the effects of parents upon educational achievement, much of her empirical data points to the importance of peers. For example, she writes, 'teachers cited the importance of peer pressure in bringing deviant students back into line. Punjabi students, one shop teacher observed, *competed with one another for good grades, teased those who did poorly, and placed pressure on one another to uphold Punjabi standards of behavior*' (1988, 131; emphasis added). While these Punjabi standards of behaviour originate with parents, the quote implies they are meaningful because *the children themselves* enforce this norm. While Punjabi parents may insist on good grades, it is their children, through peer group interactions, who concretely make each other achieve higher grades.

While in some studies of assimilation peer effects creep into the narrative if not the argument, there are some (mostly quantitative) studies foregrounding the role of peers in

assimilation outcomes. For example, Cavanaugh (2007) examined drinking behaviour among young second-generation Mexican immigrants in the US and found the more white friends they had, the more likely they were to binge drink. Similarly, Prado et al. (2009) found substance abuse by second-generation Hispanic youth was directly associated with perceived peer substance abuse. Importantly, they found no direct relationship between parental involvement and substance use.

In their study of sexual behaviour, King and Harris (2007) found second-generation adolescent immigrants who befriended native whites were more assimilated in dating and sexual behaviour than those whose friends were first-generation immigrants. Huschek, Liefbroer, and de Valk (2010) looked at timing of first marriages among second-generation Turkish immigrants in Europe and found the more non-coethnic friends a respondent had, the greater the delay in marriage age. Similarly, Huschek, de Valk, and Liefbroer (2011) found that for second-generation Turkish immigrants, contact with non-coethnic peers increases the likelihood of marrying a second-generation Turk or native partner, as opposed to a first-generation Turk.

Similar findings of peer effects among second-generation immigrants have been reported in education. A classic example comes from Matute-Bianchi (1986) who discussed how some Mexican schoolchildren derided their coethnics who sought to achieve academically as ‘acting white,’ a phenomena widely reported among black students in the US (e.g., Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Fryer 2006; for a critique of ‘acting white,’ see Tyson 2011). Gibson, Gandara, and Koyama (2004) expand upon the negative influences of peers on second-generation Mexican students in the US, but also point out, importantly, that peers can positively influence school achievement as well.⁶

While studies of peers and social/cultural/educational facets of assimilation are slowly increasing, studies of peers and labour market outcomes are few. One recent study of interest, though, found that for second-generation Turks having more German friends greatly raised the odds of obtaining a skilled-market position, which led to a complete reduction of ethnic disadvantage. Conversely lack of contact with native-born German peers greatly accounted for their ethnic penalties (Kalter 2011, 176). Kalter (2011, 180) refined this point by examining whether having German friends was cause or consequence of economic mobility. He found strong, positive statistical evidence that it was causal. He then tested the idea that having German friends was a *consequence* of economic mobility. He found the effect was also positive, but only at a 10 percent level.

The importance of peers in the assimilation process

Interestingly, none of these studies foregrounds the *theoretical* significance of peers to assimilation. We build upon Harris's (2009) group socialization theory and Milner's (1994, 2004) theory of status relations to explain the importance of peers in assimilation outcomes. Harris boldly argues that rather than looking to parents, we can better account for the development and outcomes of children across time and place by looking at their peers, the ones they spend most of their time with from a young age, who they are generally close to in age, and whom they most identify with. For example, Harris shows how acquisition of language and accents results from which language peers speak and how they speak the language, even if their parents do not speak the language of the host country, or even if the parents are deaf (2009, 240, 366-7). Thus, if a person grew up with friends who speak the native language without a 'foreign' accent, that person will also speak without a foreign accent. Though if s/he grew up with friends

in New York who speak with, say, a Spanish accent, s/he too will speak with a Spanish accent even if s/he was born in New York (Harris 2009, 178-9).

Milner (1994, 2004), expanding on Weber's famous essay, 'Class, Status, Party,' conceptualises peer groups as status groups, or groups that share 'lifestyle.' Status, or accumulated approval or disapproval, is gained through conforming to group norms and making intimate associations (especially around eating, dating and marrying) with those of greater, or at least equal, status (Milner 2004, 29). Where status is an important resource that people compete for, such as in schools, conforming to group norms and making the right kinds of intimate associations will be critical to maintaining or improving one's status (Milner 2004, 22-5).

Milner strikingly describes how crucial status is to American teenagers, who can confer, or take away, status from each other. They – *not parents and not teachers* – have the ability to define their cultural worlds, and control each other's social standing within. This desperate striving for status markedly affects how teenagers behave and has been profitably exploited in Hollywood films on teens trying to be popular such as *Can't Buy Me Love* (1987), *Heathers* (1988), *Jawbreaker* (1999) and *Mean Girls* (2004).

Following the insights of Harris and Milner, we rethink cultural assimilation as another way of saying that second-generation immigrants learn to conform to the norms of their various high school, university, post-school peer/status groups, and learn to make the right kinds of intimate associations (Ali 2008). Drawing from this, we hypothesise that the more acculturated an individual's past and present peers are, the greater the degree of acculturation the individual will display, as individuals will want to be like the peers they associate with and conform to their norms. We further hypothesise that past and present peers will affect economic assimilation. Past peers are likely to influence school performance, again, because individuals will want to emulate

their peers. If their peers were high achievers in school, likely they will have achieved as well. If their peers were low achievers, it is likely they too would not have performed well in school (see Harris 2009). Present peers, and here we can conceive of them as social networks, may affect employment choices and opportunities and therefore income possibilities (Granovetter 1995). Indeed, Kalter (2011) points out having native friends is a cause of upward economic mobility.

DATA

The data come from TIES, a survey of second-generation Turks, Moroccans and former Yugoslavs in fifteen cities in eight European countries: the Netherlands (Amsterdam and Rotterdam), Belgium (Brussels and Antwerp), Spain (Barcelona and Madrid), Sweden (Stockholm), France (Paris and Strasburg), Germany (Berlin and Frankfurt), Switzerland (Zurich and Basel), and Austria (Vienna and Linz).⁷ Using cross-sectional surveys, about 10,000 respondents aged 18-35 years, including 3,750 persons belonging to native comparison groups, were interviewed in 2007-2008 (two second-generation groups and one native comparison group per city with approximately 250 persons per group; in France and Sweden only second-generation Turks were interviewed, and in Spain only second-generation Moroccans). An identical questionnaire was used in all cities, allowing the pooling of datasets. Respondents were born in the survey country and if at least one of their parents was born in Turkey, Morocco or former Yugoslavia, respectively. The survey, however, did not have a uniform sampling design. While population registers were used in the Netherlands and Sweden, the method of surname-recognition using phone books was the only feasible sampling frame available for France, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria.⁸

We focus on Turks, one of the largest immigrant groups in Europe.⁹ Our sample was limited to 11 of the 15 cities, as data for Spain do not include second-generation Turks and Belgium's data is restricted. We restricted the sample to those not attending school on a full-time basis, giving us N=2,265 cases. We excluded full-time students (n=392) simply because their degree of economic assimilation is less than it will be once they have completed their studies and are in the workforce. That is, they likely will be more economically assimilated than current data will reflect. The pooled multinational sample is reduced to N=1,723 due to missing values on one or more indicators of economic and cultural assimilation, the two dependent variables.¹⁰

With regard to missing values on the independent variables, we performed multiple imputation. The amount of missing data was three percent or less for all independent variables other than parents' educational level, which was missing for 22 percent of the respondents.¹¹ For the multiple imputation, we used the user written command ICE (Royston 2009) in Stata to multiply impute our dataset using chained equations. Five copies of the dataset were created in the imputation process, each with missing values imputed on the basis of the variables used in the analyses of this study. The 'match option' within ICE was used to ensure the imputed values are within the observed ranges.¹² Subsequently, regression modeling was performed on each dataset and the regression coefficients and standard errors (clustered at the city level) of the five models were combined in Stata according to Rubin's rules (Rubin 1987).

MEASUREMENTS

Dependent variables

Economic assimilation is captured by three indicators: (1) education, measuring the respondents' highest level of educational attainment where national qualifications were

transformed into harmonised educational codes (ranging from 0=primary school graduation to 4=completion of tertiary school) to make educational attainment comparable across countries; (2) current or last occupational prestige, coded according to the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI; Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996) of occupational status; and (3) perceived difficulties with current income, running from 0=great difficulties to 4=comfortable.¹³ Instead of examining these indicators separately, we constructed a factor score derived from a Principal Component Analysis. Table 1 shows the factor loadings, that is, the correlation of each of the three economic assimilation indicators with the extracted factor.¹⁴ The factor score (range: -4.73 – 4.54) was calculated by multiplying these factor loadings by the individual scores, which are standardised with mean zero and standard deviation one on the corresponding indicators. The higher the factor score, the greater the degree of economic assimilation.

Cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is constructed in a similar manner using the following five indicators: (1) self-measured proficiency in the Turkish language, ranging from 0=excellent to 5=bad; (2) watching Turkish TV stations (0=only Turkish-language stations, 1=mostly Turkish-language stations, 2=as much survey country as Turkish-language stations, and 3=only survey country's language stations); (3) feelings of belonging to survey country, ranging from very weak/not at all (=0) to very strong (=4); (4) whether the respondent intended to return to parents' country of origin, ranging from certainly (=0) to certainly not (=4); and (5) religiosity, a constructed indicator based on four items of religious behaviour (fasting, eating halal food, daily prayer, and visiting the mosque) and self-identifying as Muslim, running from 'strict Muslim' (=0; fasting, eating halal food, daily prayer and visiting the mosque 'most of the time' or 'always') to 'not Muslim at all' (=4; 'never' on the four items on religious behaviour and not identifying themselves as Muslim).¹⁵ The factor loadings of these five acculturation

indicators are presented in Table 1.¹⁶ The higher the respondent's factor score, the higher his/her level of acculturation (range: -6.06 – 4.48).

--- Table 1 ---

Note that our indicators of acculturation and their ordering seem to imply the further one deviates from strictly adhering to one's faith and maintaining other facets of ethnic/national identity, the more acculturated one is. While this approximates notions of classical assimilation that Alba and Nee (2003) rightly criticise, we feel that taken together in this manner they do roughly indicate degree of acculturation to the host society.

Independent variables

Most scholars in the field argue family effects, particularly of parents, are critical in determining assimilation. Four variables refer to parental human capital: (1) *parent's educational level*, i.e., highest level of father's and mother's education: 1=incomplete education/primary school; 2=secondary; and 3=above secondary (reference group); (2) *father's* and (3) *mother's proficiency in the language of survey country*, ranging from 1=not at all to 6=very well; and (4) *mother having paid work when the respondent was 15 years of age* (0=no, 1=yes). Another effect of parents is *parents' supportive role for school matters*, an index based on responses to four questions asking the respondent how often during secondary school parents (a) controlled the time they spent on homework; (b) helped with homework; (c) talked with them about school or studies; and (d) met with or talked with their teachers. The answer categories ranged from 0=never to 4=often, with the index ranging from 0-16 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75).

Additionally, three variables refer to respondent's older siblings: (1) *highest education level*, with the answer categories: 0=no diploma/primary school/lower secondary (reference group), 1=upper secondary, and 2=tertiary; (2) whether (=1) or not (=0) *one or more older siblings left secondary school without diploma or certificate*; and (3) *older siblings' supportive role for school matters*, an index based on the questions how often (0=never to 4=often) older siblings (a) helped with homework and (b) talked with them about school (scores ranged from 0-8; Cronbach's alpha = 0.87).

We argue that peers are also an important factor affecting assimilation. Four variables are included to assess effects of past peers: (1) *proportion of natives in secondary school*, measuring the ethnic composition of respondent's secondary school: 1=almost no native students, 2=up to 25 percent, 3=approximately 50 percent, 4=up to 75 percent, and 5=almost all native students; (2) *number of natives among the three best friends during secondary school* (range 0-3); (3) *importance of peers during secondary school* in supporting with studies or schoolwork, with answers varying from 1=not important at all to 5=very important; and (4) whether (=1) or not (=0) the respondent had *close friends who left secondary school without a diploma or certificate*. The proportion of natives in secondary school is used as a proxy for contact with natives and to indicate extended friendship ties. As most European children go to school near home the proportion of natives in secondary schools is likely to reflect the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood (de Valk and Crul 2008). However, we cannot rule out that the proportion of natives in secondary school is, to some extent, correlated with the quality of the school.

For current family situations, first, a dummy variable is created with 1=respondents *living with parents* and 0=living on their own. Secondly, the variable *contact frequency with relatives* is constructed based on answers to the question how often they met relatives they most

frequently have contact with, ranging from 0=never/rarely/no relatives in the country of residence or another European country to 4=daily. Thirdly, two dummy variables are created for whether (=1) or not (=0) respondent's *father* and *mother were employed* during the time of interview.

Three variables measure respondent's present peers: (1) *number of natives among the three current best friends* (range 0-3); and (2) the *highest* and (3) *lowest educational level of the three best friends*, combining respondents' answers to questions of the educational level attained by each of the three best friends separately, with the answer categories: 0=no diploma/primary school/lower secondary, 1=upper secondary, and 2=tertiary, with the first and last category, respectively, as reference group.

Finally, we included the following control variables: (1) respondent's *age*; (2) gender, represented by the dummy variable *man*; (3) religion, represented by *Shia/Alevi*, comparing with Sunni sect of Islam; (4) *Anatolia*, a dummy variable indicating whether (=1) or not (=0) the respondent's father or mother lived in an Anatolian province before they were 15 years of age; (5) *partner*, referring to living with a partner (=1) or not (=0); (6) *children*, referring to having children (=1) or not (=0); and (7) *resident of country with multicultural policies*, distinguishing countries with a more multicultural approach (Sweden and the Netherlands) from those with a more exclusionist or assimilationist approach (Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and France).¹⁷

Table 2 provides descriptive information on the economic and cultural assimilation indicators and independent variables (before imputation). We checked for multicollinearity between independent variables, regressing all independent variables on the set of other independent variables, by using two measures: variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance level for each variable. A VIF value greater than 10 and tolerance values less than 0.10 may indicate

multicollinearity (Belsley, Kuh and Welsch 1980). The two measures indicated no sign of a serious multicollinearity problem: none of the VIF's exceeded 4.3 and minimum tolerance value was 0.23. In addition, none of the correlations between the independent and dependent variables was above 0.5. The highest correlation was observed between economic assimilation and 'lowest level of education among the three current best friends' (-0.41) and acculturation and 'number of natives among the three current best friends' (0.30), respectively.

--- Table 2 ---

RESULTS

In order to test the extent to which past and present peers, besides family factors, affect assimilation outcomes, we conducted stepwise multivariate regression analyses on economic and cultural assimilation. Tables 3 and 4 present the results. In Model 1, the control variables are included. Models 2 and 3 incorporate the set of *past* family and peer variables. Models 4 and 5 then take into account variables capturing the *present* family and peer situation. The sequence of the models is chosen to largely follow the chronological order of respondents' lives.

--- Tables 3 and 4 ---

Basic model

When only control variables are considered (Model 1), respondents' age had a positive effect on both economic and cultural assimilation. Men were less economically and culturally assimilated than women. Respondents' sect of Islam had no effect on economic or cultural

assimilation. Being of Anatolian origin had a negative effect on acculturation, but none on economic assimilation. Having a partner had no effect on either cultural or economic assimilation, but having children negatively affected both cultural and economic assimilation. Multicultural or assimilationist policies of the participating countries had no effect upon how the respondents assimilate, a finding that runs counter to much prevailing wisdom on this topic (e.g., Caldwell 2009). Overall, the control variables explained 7.5 and 3.6 percent of the variance in economic and cultural assimilation, respectively.

Family factors in past

Respondents' past family situation determined the degree of economic and cultural assimilation to a considerable extent, increasing the explained variance in Model 2 by 7.7 (economic) and 8.3 (cultural) percent. Respondents whose father and/or mother had completed less than upper secondary (economic) and secondary (cultural) schooling, respectively, were less assimilated than their counterparts with higher-educated parents. Interestingly, the degree of fluency of the father in the language of the survey country positively affected respondents' economic, but not cultural assimilation; mother's fluency positively impacts respondent's cultural assimilation, but not economic. Having a mother with a paid job when they were 15 years old had no effect on economic or cultural assimilation. Parents' supportive role in school matters significantly impacted economic assimilation, though not cultural.

With regard to siblings, respondents whose older siblings had tertiary education were more economically assimilated, while older siblings' level of education did not affect their degree of acculturation. Siblings who left school without a diploma negatively affected cultural

but not economic assimilation. No relationship was found between siblings' support for school matters and economic or cultural assimilation.

Once past family factors are accounted for, no differences are found between men and women with respect to economic assimilation and between those with or without an Anatolian origin with respect to cultural assimilation.

Past peers

In line with our hypothesis, the composition of *past* peers substantially affected the degree of assimilation, as shown by significant increases in the explained part of the variance in Model 3 (2.9 percent for economic and 5.1 percent for cultural assimilation). Respondents who went to school with a higher proportion of natives and those with greater numbers of natives as best friends during secondary school were significantly more assimilated economically and culturally. Having friends who left secondary school without diplomas as well as respondents' opinions on whether peers were important during secondary school in supporting studies or schoolwork had no effect on economic and cultural assimilation.

Once past peers were accounted for, no differences in cultural assimilation between men and women and between parents and childless individuals remained. Moreover, the previously observed negative effects of respondents whose parents had completed secondary school (economic) or less than secondary (cultural) became insignificant, as did the positive effect on economic assimilation of father's language proficiency and the negative effect on acculturation of one or more siblings who left school without diplomas.

Present family

Living with parents and frequent contact with relatives were negatively associated with acculturation, though these did not affect economic assimilation (Model 4). Moreover, having a mother or father being employed does not affect respondent's economic and cultural assimilation. The modest change in increased variance (2.0 percent for acculturation, 0.3 percent for economic assimilation) indicates the present family situation was a relatively minor factor affecting assimilation. When taking present family factors into account, the previously observed positive effect of age on acculturation became insignificant.

Present peers

After including present peer variables, the explained part of the variance of economic assimilation increases by 7.4 percent and for cultural assimilation by 4.0 percent. Having native friends in the present had a strong positive relationship with acculturation, but interestingly no relationship with economic assimilation. Furthermore, both economic and cultural assimilation were higher among those with best friends who completed upper secondary or tertiary education. The lowest educational attainment of respondent's best friends negatively related to respondent's economic assimilation, but not cultural.

Once controlling for the present peer situation, living with parents positively affected economic assimilation. On the other hand, the previously observed negative effect on economic assimilation of respondents whose parents had not completed secondary school became insignificant, as did the positive effect of parents' supportive role in school matters. Also, the proportion of natives during secondary school went from having a positive effect to being statistically insignificant for economic assimilation. More interesting, however, is the persistent effect of this factor upon acculturation, as well as the remaining effect of the number of natives

during secondary school on both economic and cultural assimilation, suggesting the effect of ethnic composition of past peers upon assimilation is permanent to a large extent.

--- Table 5 ---

When looking at the effects of our independent variables upon economic and cultural assimilation, it is striking that so few family-level variables remain significant after we ran all the models. For economic assimilation, these included tertiary-level education of older siblings and living with parents; for acculturation it was degree of mother's fluency in the host language, living with parents, and contact frequency with relatives. Many of the peer variables though did play a key role in explaining economic and cultural assimilation in the final model. As their contribution is partially masked in Tables 3 and 4 by their order in the stepwise regression analysis, we re-ran the analysis, once by including the set of past and present peers in the last two models (results not shown, but available upon request), and once with the groups of family and peer independent variables separately (Table 5). Both analyses clearly support our argument that peers matter. In Table 5, all past and present peer R-squares are substantial, with the highest R-squares for present peers.

In a cross-sectional survey like TIES, one can never be certain whether the independent variables are impacting the dependent variables or vice versa when they are measured at the same point in time. In addition, the large contribution of the peer factors may partly reflect the effect of uncontrolled variables related to respondent's social mobility. In the case of acculturation we were able to examine this by additionally including the three indicators of respondent's economic assimilation: educational and occupation level and perceived income.

The results showed no effect of any of the three economic assimilation indicators and, more importantly, the peer effects did not change. Moreover, although country differences in the effect of peers and other factors are not the core of this article, we re-ran the models for each country separately and found results pointing in the same direction: economic and cultural assimilation were largely affected by the composition of past and present peers.¹⁸

DISCUSSION

Our goal was to address a question other theories of assimilation have not adequately answered: how and why do individuals regardless of ethnic background assimilate? We expanded upon Harris's (2009) and Milner's (1994, 2004) theories, making the case that peers are central to the assimilation process, thereby bringing the theoretical focus of the immigration subfield more in line with other sociological subfields studying similar outcomes.

To assess the role of peers in the assimilation process, we examined the impact of past and present peers, besides family and other background characteristics, on both cultural and economic assimilation among Turkish second-generation immigrants aged 18-35 years in eleven cities in six Western European countries. While parental factors are significant – as predicted by new and segmented assimilation theories – the data clearly indicate peers have a substantial effect upon both cultural and economic assimilation, as we hypothesised.

Regarding economic assimilation, education level (highest and lowest levels) of present best friends and ethnic background in past are the most important peer variables, though interestingly, natives among best friends in present was not significant. For economic assimilation, what your friends *achieve* is more important than *who* your friends are. For cultural assimilation, the highest level of education of present best friends, number of native friends in

past and present, and proportion of natives in secondary school are the most important peer variables. Here too, what your friends achieve is important, but clearly who your friends are affects acculturation. The other past and present peers variables in question are not significant in the full model, but all are in the expected direction.

Other results that bear repeating here are which parental variables play a key role, beyond that of peers. For cultural assimilation, mother's fluency in the host language in the past has a significant positive effect, while frequent contact with relatives in the present and living with parents have significant negative effects. For economic assimilation, siblings having tertiary degrees, and living with parents have significant positive effects.

Segmented and new assimilation theories both excel at examining between-group variations in assimilation – why some *groups* achieve educationally and economically more than others. One of our contributions is to change the focus to individuals. By looking at variations *within* one group, we are able to assess how individuals, regardless of group affiliation, vary in their patterns of assimilation.

Another contribution we make is to highlight the *independent* effect of peers. New assimilation theory does not address peer effects, and segmented assimilation theory sees peers as a reflection of parental and ethnic group effects. Our research convincingly demonstrates the significant independent effect of peers upon economic and cultural assimilation, and shows that peers deserve more attention in future theoretical and empirical studies of assimilation.

Like the effects of present family factors, the role of present peers factors may to some extent be overstated: in a cross-sectional survey one can never be certain about the causal direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables that are measured at the same point in time. It is possible that, to some extent, peer effects transmit social

background influences to contemporary socioeconomic and acculturation outcomes. It is also possible that measured effects partly reflect unmeasured school and neighborhood variables that are not observed in the data. On the other hand, however, it is possible that the observed impact of peers may even be *underestimated*, as many of the TIES survey questions used to operationalise our independent and dependent variables, especially of acculturation, did not directly translate from our theoretical notions, and some operationalizations of the theory were not available. To properly test our hypotheses would require more questions about past and present peers' specific behaviours and accomplishments, including number and background of friends, education (majors, time to degree, etc.), employment history, religious practice, drinking, smoking, drug usage, dating patterns, sexual activity, and more specifics on these cultural behaviours of respondents themselves. We feel strongly our results may have been more substantial for economic and cultural assimilation had there been such questions.

One approach in particular could directly test the efficacy of our proposed theory – studying intra-family variation. Examining siblings, especially those of the same gender and close in age (better still if they are identical twins) would control common variables used to assess assimilation: nationality and religion, legal and social context of reception, experiences of group discrimination, and family-level variables of parents' educational attainment, income and occupational status. It would also control for neighbourhood and likely schools. An empirical focus on same-gender and same-age siblings would highlight the effects of peers and should shed light on the microprocesses of peer group dynamics. Our short discussion of Rodolfo and his sister in the introductory section illustrates well the utility of such an approach.

There are a number of notions deriving from our theoretical perspective that thoughtful ethnographies and longitudinal surveys could employ to study peer effects. Assimilation is not a

‘one-time-only’ affair, but is continually negotiated, and may vary over the individual’s lifetime as there are different status groups the individual is associated with, and different norms s/he will conform to or deviate from. (Unfortunately this is not something we were able to examine through the TIES cross-sectional data.) Self-identification with and membership in different peer groups may vary over time and context for the individual, and the importance of peer groups may vary, as individuals marry, have children, leave school, enter the labour force, become unemployed, divorced, and so on. Assimilation can also be reversed. For instance, culturally assimilated individuals in the West can ‘de-acculturate’ by turning their backs on Western/Westernised peers and ‘hanging out’ more exclusively with peers who share a disinterest or even disdain for Western culture and people (Ali 2008). Given that so few studies have been conducted on immigrants and peer effects, any and all studies in the US, Europe and elsewhere would be welcome contributions.

Endnotes

¹ Scholars in the US earlier in the century were also concerned with second-generation European immigrants (e.g., Warner and Srole 1945). But it is the latest post-Milton Gordon (1964), post-1965 (in the US) assimilation theories that are of concern here.

² Some ethnographic and mixed-method studies are also influential in the field (e.g., Gibson 1988; Waters 1994; Zhou and Bankston 1998).

³ See the exchange in *Social Forces* (Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters 2011; Haller, Portes, and Lynch 2011a, 2011b).

⁴ How individuals choose peers is an important question, though one we cannot address with our dataset. One prevalent argument is people choose peers based on ‘homophily’ – ethnic or racial similarity (Moody 2001; Quillian and Campbell 2003). However, Wimmer and Lewis (2010) using data from Facebook friends make a convincing case that the emphasis on racial homophily is greatly exaggerated.

⁵ The codebooks are available at <http://www.princeton.edu/cmd/data/cils-1/>.

⁶ Not everyone who looks closely at peer effects agrees peers are important to second-generation immigrants’ educational attainment (e.g., Ryabov 2009).

⁷ For further information on TIES and country documentation, see www.tiesproject.eu.

⁸ In France, population registers do not include information on parents’ country of birth; in the German-speaking countries strict data-protection laws prevented access to population register data.

⁹ The Turkish population varies throughout Europe. For example, many Turks in Sweden originate from rural areas in Central Anatolia, while many in Germany are from more urbanised, western parts of Turkey (Bayram et al. 2009). There are also variations in religious sect. While

the bulk of Turks are Sunni Muslims, many are Shia, and many are Alevi, a heterodox Muslim sect unique to Anatolia (Kaya and Kentel 2007). As these variations in the Turkish European population could impact assimilation patterns, we controlled for sect (Muslim: Shia or Alevi) and region (Anatolia).

¹⁰ The rather high number of missing values is mainly due to missing data on occupational status: 302 respondents (13 percent) did not share their current or last occupation.

¹¹ Missing cases on parental education is a common problem in immigrant surveys and has largely to do with variation in educational systems between and within countries over time, which is hard to adequately capture in a single parental education question (see Heath, Rethon, and Kilpi 2009).

¹² In general three to five imputations are sufficient for datasets with small to moderate proportions of missing values (Rubin 1987).

¹³ This subjective income variable was chosen for three reasons: (1) the two objective income variables in the TIES data were categorical (respondents were asked to indicate in which category their labour income and, if any, their benefits fall rather than their exact labour income and received benefits, respectively); (2) both objective income variables included many missing values; and (3) studies have repeatedly shown subjective income indicators closely link to objective income indicators.

¹⁴ There was no statistical support for the extraction of more than one factor. The eigenvalue for the first factor was 1.57, for the second, 0.82. Moreover, the Principal Component Analysis showed that Factor 1 accounted for 53 percent of the total variance.

¹⁵ The other three categories are: 1= 'social Muslim' (only fasting and eating halal food 'most of the time' or 'always'; daily prayer and/or visiting the mosque less often); 2= 'symbolic Muslim'

(one or more of the four religious behaviour items less often); and 3= 'identificational Muslim' ('never' on the four religious behaviour items but they identified as Muslim).

¹⁶ The eigenvalue for the first factor was 1.99, for the second, 0.89. The first factor accounted for 40 percent of total variance.

¹⁷ For simplicity we use countries, although our data only represent on average two cities per country.

¹⁸ Tables of additional exercises available upon request.

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Table 1. Factor loadings for economic and cultural assimilation (N=1,723)

	Economic assimilatio n		Cultural assimilat ion
Education	0.78	Proficiency in the Turkish language	0.45
Occupational prestige	0.76	Watching Turkish TV stations	0.70
Perceived difficulties with income	0.62	Feelings of belonging to survey country	0.71
		Return intention to parents' country of origin	0.59
		Religiosity	0.66

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the economic and cultural assimilation indicators and independent variables

	Range	Mean	SD
Economic assimilation indicators			
Education	0 - 4	2.46	1.09
Occupational prestige	16 - 88	41.17	13.4
Perceived difficulties with income	0 - 4	2.77	0.97
Cultural assimilation indicators			
Proficiency in the Turkish language	0 - 5	1.35	1.17
Watching Turkish TV stations	0 - 3	2.16	0.99
Feelings of belonging to survey country	0 - 4	2.28	1.08
Return intention to parents' country of origin	0 - 4	3.06	1.22
Religiosity	0 - 4	2.07	1.34
Control variables			
Age	18 - 35	25.32	4.74
Man	0/1	0.49	0.50
Muslim: Shia or Alevi	0/1	0.08	0.28
Anatolia	0/1	0.51	0.50
Partner	0/1	0.45	0.50
Children	0/1	0.31	0.46
Resident of country with multicultural integration policy	0/1	0.26	0.44
Family factors in past			
Educational level parents	1 - 3	1.63	0.65
Fluency host language father	1 - 6	4.34	1.04
Fluency host language mother	1 - 6	3.91	1.26
Mother had paid job when respondent was 15	0/1	0.43	0.50
Supportive role of parents for school matters	0 - 16	7.09	3.70
Educational level older siblings	0 - 2	0.65	0.73
One or more older siblings left school without diploma	0/1	0.14	0.35
Supportive role of older siblings for school matters	0 - 8	2.45	2.56
Peer factors in past			
Proportion natives in secondary school	1 - 5	3.31	1.05
Number of natives among 3 best friends during secondary school	0 - 3	0.94	0.94
Peers important during secondary school	1 - 5	2.70	1.20
Friends left school without diploma	0/1	0.46	0.50

Family factors present			
Living with parents	0/1	0.41	0.49
Contact frequency with relatives	0 - 4	2.13	1.22
Father employed	0/1	0.57	0.50
Mother employed	0/1	0.32	0.46
Peer factors present			
Number of natives among 3 best friends	0 - 3	0.94	0.96
Educational level best friends	0 - 2	1.09	0.71

Table 3. Determinants of the degree of economic assimilation among Turkish second-generation immigrants in selected TIES-cities (N=1,723; unstandardised regression coefficients)

Model:	1	2	3	4	5
Control variables					
Age	0.07**	0.08***	0.07**	0.08***	0.06***
Man	-0.19*	-0.11	-0.06	-0.07	-0.09
Muslim: Shia or Alevi	0.08	0.14	0.15	0.14	0.12
Anatolia	-0.03	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.07
Partner	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.22	0.23
Children	-0.89**	-0.74**	-0.67**	-0.65**	-0.56**
Resident of country with multicultural integration policy (versus differential excl. integration/assimilationist policy)	0.38	0.26	0.35	0.38	-0.08
Family factors in past					
Highest level of education parents (ref. above secondary):					
Incomplete education/Primary		-0.50*	-0.43*	-0.43*	-0.30
Secondary		-0.26*	-0.22	-0.22	-0.15
Fluency host language parents:					
Degree of fluency father		0.09*	0.07	0.06	0.06
Degree of fluency mother		0.06	0.03	0.03	0.00
Mother had paid job when respondent was 15		0.16	0.15	0.12	0.08
Supportive role of parents for school matters		0.05*	0.04*	0.04*	0.02
Highest educational level older siblings (ref. no diploma/primary school/lower secondary):					
Upper secondary		0.01	0.03	0.03	0.04
Tertiary		0.65**	0.63**	0.63**	0.49**
One or more older siblings left school without diploma		-0.13	-0.11	-0.09	-0.03
Supportive role of older siblings for school matters		-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02

Peer factors in past					
Proportion natives in secondary school	0.13*	0.13*	0.09		
Number of natives among 3 best friends during secondary school	0.22**	0.23**	0.17*		
Peers important during secondary school	0.05	0.05	0.05		
Friends left school without diploma	-0.16	-0.17	-0.06		
Family factors present					
Living with parents		0.27	0.32*		
Contact frequency with relatives		-0.03	0.01		
Father employed		0.04	0.05		
Mother employed		0.03	0.04		
Peer factors present					
Number of natives among 3 best friends				0.01	
Highest educational level best friends (ref. no diploma/primary school/lower secondary):					
Upper secondary				0.32*	
Tertiary				0.73**	
Lowest educational level best friends (ref. tertiary)					
No diploma/primary school/lower secondary				-0.97***	
Upper secondary				-0.41*	
Adjusted R ²	0.075	0.152	0.181	0.184	0.258
Change in adjusted R ²		0.077***	0.029***	0.003	0.074***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Determinants of the degree of cultural assimilation among Turkish second-generation immigrants in selected TIES-cities (N=1,723; unstandardised regression coefficients)

Model:	1	2	3	4	5
Control variables					
Age	0.07**	0.07**	0.05*	0.03	0.02
Man	-0.28*	-0.22*	-0.14	-0.14	-0.14
Muslim: Shia or Alevi	-0.29	-0.23	-0.24	-0.24	-0.24
Anatolia	-0.30*	-0.18	-0.14	-0.15	-0.13
Partner	-0.09	-0.02	0.02	-0.21	-0.21
Children	-0.68**	-0.49*	-0.39	-0.36	-0.24
Resident of country with multicultural integration policy (versus differential excl. integration/assimilationist policy)	0.05	0.02	0.19	0.29	0.10
Family factors in past					
Highest level of education parents (ref. above secondary):					
Incomplete education/Primary		-0.51*	-0.38	-0.33	-0.21
Secondary		-0.25	-0.18	-0.16	-0.10
Fluency host language parents:					
Degree of fluency father		0.07	0.03	0.02	0.01
Degree of fluency mother		0.37**	0.33**	0.29**	0.27**
Mother had paid job when respondent was 15		-0.13	-0.15	-0.17	-0.18
Supportive role of parents for school matters		-0.01	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04
Highest educational level older siblings (ref. no diploma/primary school/lower secondary):					
Upper secondary		0.30	0.33	0.31	0.28
Tertiary		0.32	0.28	0.21	0.17
One or more older siblings left school without diploma		-0.38*	-0.34	-0.31	-0.27
Supportive role of older siblings for school matters		-0.01	-0.00	0.01	0.01

Peer factors in past					
Proportion natives in secondary school		0.16*	0.16**	0.12*	
Number of natives among 3 best friends during secondary school		0.39**	0.37**	0.13*	
Peers important during secondary school		0.03	0.01	0.03	
Friends left school without diploma		-0.31	-0.28	-0.20	
Family factors present					
Living with parents			-0.57*	-0.54*	
Contact frequency with relatives			-0.17**	-0.14**	
Father employed			0.19	0.21	
Mother employed			0.11	0.09	
Peer factors present					
Number of natives among 3 best friends					0.41***
Highest educational level best friends (ref. no diploma/primary school/lower secondary):					
Upper secondary					0.67**
Tertiary					0.69*
Lowest educational level best friends (ref. tertiary)					
No diploma/primary school/lower secondary					-0.05
Upper secondary					0.05
Adjusted R ²	0.036	0.119	0.170	0.190	0.230
Change in adjusted R ²		0.083***	0.051***	0.020***	0.040***

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5. R-square values and their percentage of the total explained variance for each group of independent variables

	Economic assimilation		Cultural assimilation	
	Adjusted R ²	% of the total explained variance (0.258; see Table 3)	Adjusted R ²	% of the total explained variance (0.230; see Table 4)
Control variables	0.075***	29.1	0.036***	15.7
Family factors in past	0.087***	33.7	0.094***	40.9
Peer factors in past	0.072***	27.9	0.099***	43.0
Family factors present	0.005*	1.9	0.051***	22.2
Peer factors present	0.195***	75.6	0.149***	64.8

F-test: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$