



# Longitudinal Links in Maternal Mood from 3 Cultures: Trends in the Netherlands, Spain, and United States.

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## Introduction:

Mothers of newborns experience emotions ranging from joy and pleasure, to anger and depression. Their emotional mood is an easily measured potential marker for motivation, affect, and psychological well-being. The general literature on emotional experience suggests that there are cultural and ecological influences mood during the peripartum period. Given the importance of sensitive, emotionally available caregiving during infancy, understanding patterns in mood across parturition through the postpartum period is important in developing culturally appropriate models of support for maternal and infant development in those months. This may be especially true because patterns of support and isolation for new mothers vary across, as well as within, Western societies. However, the majority of peripartum mood research focuses on new mothers who are identified as either at risk or are known to be suffering from emotional disturbances, screening out or possibly distorting cultural differences.

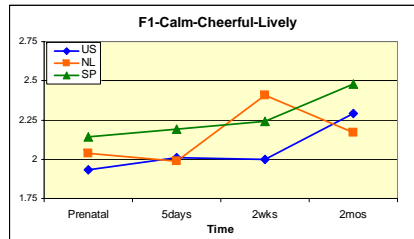
## Sample:

This poster presents initial data from an ongoing longitudinal study of maternal and infant arousal and affect during the first years of life among middle-class families in Seville (Spain), Boemenheim (the Netherlands), and western Connecticut (the US).

Site	N	Average Age	N <sub>Primiparous</sub>
US	48	31	19
NL	28	32	18
SP	31	34	24

## Procedure:

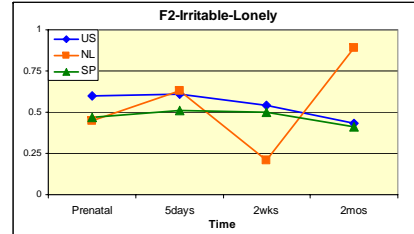
The data presented here consist of maternal self-reports of mood at four time points - during the third trimester of pregnancy, and 5 days, 2 weeks, and 2 months postpartum. Mothers were asked to rate their moods from 0 to 4 on 30 mood descriptors. These were collapsed into 16 mood clusters, on the basis of face value and bivariate correlations, prior to factor analysis.



**Factor 1**  
 Alpha = .88  
 (US=.87, NL=.85, SP=.91)

Site  $F(2,273)=3.57, p=.03$   
 Time  $F(3,273)=2.89, p=.04$   
 SxT  $F(6,273)=0.74, ns$

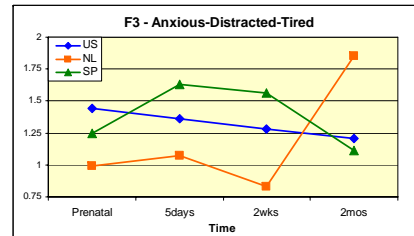
ITEMS:  
 Loving Clear-headed  
 Lively Calm  
 Curious Secure  
 Open Cheerful



**Factor 2**  
 Alpha = .83  
 (US=.83, NL=.86, SP=.80)

Site  $F(2,273)=0.75, ns$   
 Time  $F(3,273)=1.18, ns$   
 SxT  $F(6,273)=2.65, p=.02$

ITEMS:  
 Irritable Lonely  
 Helpless Sad  
 Bored



**Factor 3**  
 Alpha = .54  
 (US=.71, NL=.47, SP=.64)

Site  $F(2,273)=1.47, ns$   
 Time  $F(3,273)=1.32, ns$   
 SxT  $F(6,273)=7.17, p<.001$

ITEMS:  
 Distracted Anxious  
 Tired

## Results:

Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) indicates a satisfactory 3-factor solution which accounts for 57% of the variance; Varimax rotation yields the three scales listed to the left, which have good internal reliability in nearly all cases (see left). The final Eigenvalues are 4.11, 2.94, and 2.11.

The first factor contains items of positive mood, emotional openness, and calm, focused energy. Means scores increase reliably across the time period studied, and there are small but reliable differences among the sites, with the Spanish mothers appearing more positive in general, except perhaps in the period immediately following birth, when the Dutch scores are slightly greater.

The second two factors are distinguished by a statistical interaction between Site and Time. In both cases – reflecting negative dimensions of irritable loneliness and mental fatigue – the US scores decline slightly, but each of the other two sites show an apparent curvilinearity on at least one of the factors. The Dutch mothers report average levels of irritable loneliness and mental fatigue similar to or lower than the other mothers, but show a distinct increase in distress at the last time-point, 2 months post-partum. The Spanish mothers are unique in reporting heightened mental fatigue in the two-week period following delivery, but not otherwise.

## Discussion:

Future analysis of interviews with these mother will contribute to our understanding of this pattern of results, but ethnographic results to date suggest several important considerations. First, Dutch mothers generally receive broad emotional and practical support from the extended family and the national health care service, including assistance in home care during the first week or two after birth; subsequent diminution of the special supports may contribute to the rise in negative mood at the 2-month period. Second, many US mothers experience increased isolation during the peripartum period, which may contribute to the relatively negative US results. These preliminary results demonstrate the necessity of understanding the mother's "developmental niche" in order to understand her peripartum emotions.