HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Perspect Psychol Sci. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2018 September 01.

Published in final edited form as:

Perspect Psychol Sci. 2017 September ; 12(5): 791–799. doi:10.1177/1745691617708204.

Prejudices in Cultural Contexts: Shared Stereotypes (Gender, Age) versus Variable Stereotypes (Race, Ethnicity, Religion)

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Abstract

Some prejudices share cross-cultural patterns, but others are more variable and culture specific. Those sharing cross-cultural patterns (sexism, ageism) each combine societal status differences and intimate interdependence. For example, in stereotypes of sex and age, lower-status groups—women and elders—gain stereotypic warmth (from their cooperative interdependence) but lose stereotypic competence (from their lower status); men and middle-aged adults show the opposite tradeoff, stereotypically more competent than warm. Meta-analyses support these widespread ambivalent (mixed) stereotypes for gender and age across cultures. Social class stereotypes often share some similarities (cold but competent rich v warm but incompetent poor). These compensatory warmth v competence stereotypes may function to manage common human dilemmas of interacting across societal and personal positions. However, other stereotypes are more variable and culture specific (ethnicity, race, religion). Case studies of specific race/ethnicities and religions reveal much more cultural variation in their stereotype content, supporting their being responses to particular cultural contexts, apparent accidents of history. To change stereotypes requires understanding their commonalities and differences, their origins and patterns across cultures.

"Universal" is a dangerous word. During most of 20th century, American research on prejudice seemed to assume that its newly discovered principles applied everywhere. In the author's own review (Fiske, 1998), following the lead of a foundational volume (Allport, 1954), culture does not appear. By its absence, universalism is implied, or at least not questioned. That is, to one reviewer at least, processes seemed universal: Categorizing others occurred everywhere. Implicit ingroup bias was widespread. American White-on-Black racism stood in for all kinds of prejudice.

But the science of prejudice was developing, and culture was entering into consideration (e.g., Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). European research on intergroup relations understood this before American research did. European social psychology generated its own models more sensitive to the European cultural contexts (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010), which then spread to the U.S. For example, European-originated Social Identity Theory posits the relativity of categorization, depending on context, with people aiming for positive and

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By invitation for *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Discourse also presented to Universidad de Granada at the ceremony of Doctora Honoris Causa, 2017.

distinctive identities that reflect their category-based behavior (Brewer, 1991; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1987). An example would be people identified as immigrants versus native-born, each reflecting past and current cultural contexts.

As a field, American prejudice research took awhile to take culture into account. Most people are not Americans, or even WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Our 20th century WEIRD samples do not stand in for human nature. Mea culpa: The lion's share of the references in my own 1998 review were American and European, on the unspoken assumption that our empirical phenomena represented everyone on the planet. Nevertheless, we Westerners as a field eventually came to our senses, realizing that culture is crucial, as this *Perspectives* symposium indicates, and to good effect.

Consider as a case study, my own research trajectory. In our lab, we backed into cultural explorations by serendipity. People from other countries contacted us to use our materials, and their results sometimes supported the generality of our U.S. findings and sometimes not. WE had to take notice of what the data were telling us. This essay makes sense of the patterns that emerged over the last two decades of cultural challenges to our work on stereotype content, as an illustration of what prejudice research can gain from taking account of culture. The essay is a Perspective, with examples from our own research program. Per the editorial invitation, this essay is frankly speculative, but consistent with some data.

Where Should We Have Expected Cultural Differences and Where Not?

Gender and age always appear in cultures describing their salient groups. From one perspective, gender and age perceptions should have developed in fundamentally similar ways across cultures. Both social categories have both biological and social foundations. People usually have in their families both men and women, younger and older people. Humans are delightfully and obligatorily interdependent across gender and age boundaries. No such argument can be made for cross-race relationships. Arguably, racial and ethnic relations are inevitably shaped by cultural and historical context (although they may draw on universal adaptations for detecting alliances).

Consistent with this perspective, several precedents contrast the context-driven nature of race/ethnicity encoding with the inevitability of encoding gender and age. Social dominance theory makes precisely this argument in studies of support for group hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999): Gender (and age) hierarchies appear unavoidable, but race, ethnicity, and religious hierarchies are arbitrary sets. Average sex differences in endorsing social dominance (men more than women) are medium, reliably larger than the average arbitrary-set differences (Whites more than Blacks). To be sure, across-nation variability is considerable and related sensibly to various socio-structural predictors (Lee, Pratto, & Johnson, 2011). But from a broad-brush perspective, patterns for gender are shared across cultures more than are patterns for race and ethnicity.

From another empirical precedent, an arbitrary coalition (teammates) easily overrides race but not sex (Kurzban, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2001; see also van Bavel & Cunningham, 2009).

Likewise, our own paradigms easily override race encoding by manipulating context (Wheeler & Fiske, 2005). All this evidence fits with a cultural-context-driven approach to race/ethnicity.

Moving beyond perception to stereotypes, as this review will show, our research programs turn out to support shared gender and age stereotypes across cultures, consistent with their possibly functioning to support obligatory interdependence—but in contrast, we find much cultural variability of race/ethnicity stereotypes. To this mix, our recent data suggest social class stereotyping may have cultural commonalities—and perhaps also a response to dilemmas shared across cultures (but not within families). This essay thus reviews stereotype content that is more nearly universal (gender, age, possibly class) versus more culturally variable (race, ethnicity, religion).

Cross-Cultural Similarities: Gender, Age, Class

This section presents evidence consistent with the notion that gender and age stereotypes (and maybe class stereotypes) share many features across cultures. To be clear, these are stereotypes, not necessarily accurate descriptions of groups or their individual members.

Gender Stereotypes

Ambivalent Sexism Theory (AST; e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996) hinges on the tension between biologically obligatory male-female interdependence and essentially universal male dominance in societies. AST developed to explain how people manage this dilemma by holding prescriptive stereotypes about men and women, not just how the genders are (descriptive), but how they should be (prescriptive). Two forms of sexism follow, depending on whether women cooperate with prescriptive gender roles. (A parallel analysis holds for anti-male stereotypes, but sexism is more at issue for women because of male societal power; Glick & Fiske, 1999.)

Hostile sexism (HS) reflects the familiar form of stereotypes against women, mainly targeting women who do not cooperate with traditional forms of male-female interdependence: resenting women who violate prescriptive gender roles: by competing with men at work, by being sexually controlling, or by rejecting intimate heterosexual relationships. HS targets career women, feminists, and lesbians, for example (Glick et al., 1997), and it openly denigrates such challenging women. HS stereotypes uncooperative women as relatively competent but cold (Eckes, 2002).

The other form of prejudice, benevolent sexism (BS), is AST's innovation, mainly expressed as patronizing affection for women who cooperate with traditional male-female interdependence; they adhere to prescriptive gender roles: by remaining subordinate to men at work, by being sexually subservient to male requirements, or by embracing prescriptive heterosexual relationships. Subjectively positive for the perceiver, BS subordinates secretaries, cheerleaders, and housewives. Because BS beliefs report cherishing such women, putting them on a pedestal, BS seems benign, but it demonstrably undermines female autonomy and achievement (e.g., Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007). BS stereotypes cooperative women as warm but incompetent.

As two modestly correlated dimensions, HS and BS serve complementary functions: HS punishes women who resist prescriptive gender interdependence, while BS rewards women who comply. This dynamic reinforces both male-female interdependence and male dominance, so it solves our human two-pronged predicament. As such, ambivalent sexism likely was not invented yesterday. (For precedents in the psychology literature, see Glick & Fiske, 1996.)

We cannot administer the ASI back in time—to see how timeless it might be—but we can compare more and less developed countries in the present. What is striking is the cross-national similarity, albeit with some diminished sexism as nations develop. Across 19 nations and about 15,000 respondents, HS and BS each show reasonable separation and internal coherence in by-country factor analyses and reliabilities (Glick et al., 2000). HS and BS correlate significantly less among men than among women. More sexist people and nations in general show less correlation, more independence of the two dimensions. Perhaps more egalitarian people and places recognize BS as sexism, so they reject both: HS together with BS.

Distinct patterns replicate across countries: Men always score higher than women, especially on HS. The gender gap in BS is smaller because women do not reject it as much as they do HS. Across nations, BS predicts protective but demeaning stereotypes of women who comply with prescriptive gender roles (tender, warm, sweet, sensitive), whereas HS predicts resentment of women who resist prescriptive limitations (jealous, sly, touchy, selfish).

Besides the HS-BS correlations, a few cultural differences do emerge: In more sexist countries, women accept BS relatively more than do women in more egalitarian countries. Perhaps when surrounded by HS, the BS pedestal looks good. If less surrounded by HS, women recognize BS as patronizing and reject it to a greater degree.

Men's hostile sexism correlates with United Nations indices of gender development—women's health, education, and welfare—and gender empowerment—women being in elite professions and government positions. As the dominant group, men's hostility constrains women more than women's hostility to some women constrains either men or women. Male BS correlates with gender development indices as well, but less so. In maintaining male societal dominance, male hostility to female prescription-violators matters more than male benevolence toward female prescription-adherents.

The gender-development/sexism correlation means that the constraints of male-female interdependence, plus male societal dominance, especially shape less gender-developed societies. Ambivalent sexism's correlation with gender development suggests that this dynamic can change as male dominance decreases and economic development offers opportunities to men and women alike.

But the twin dimensions, HS and BS, will likely persist, for two reasons: Despite alternative reproductive technologies and childcare for hire, children usually result from and often thrive through parental interdependence, which is usually heterosexual. And as social role theory recognizes, male-dominant, traditional gender roles partly follow from biological factors such as male upper-body strength and female parental investment, as well as from

more culturally malleable social structural factors (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Gender stereotypes reflect pervasive human contexts, so ambivalent sexism's patterns remain common across countries, although with cultural variations.

Age Stereotypes

People of all ages also depend on each other, and people routinely have family members across the age spectrum. Prescriptive stereotypes characterize ageism (North & Fiske, 2012, 2013a) for many of the same reasons that hold for prescriptive sexism. In the case of age, the interdependence tensions revolve around control over resources and the timing of when elders step aside for the next generation.

Prescriptive stereotypes of older people mandate their resource sharing: Elders who comply are praised; elders who resist are derogated. The contested resource domains include orderly succession (family wealth, job seniority, political power), pooled consumption (healthcare costs, retirement subsidies), and generational identity (music, styles). The role of intergenerational tension appears in evidence of younger raters (as opposed to middle-aged or older ones) most resenting noncompliant elder targets (as opposed to noncompliant targets of other ages). Likewise, youth most reward compliant elders (versus other ages). Individual differences in prescriptive ageism (Succession, Identity, Consumption; North & Fiske, 2013b) predict polarized responses to complying versus resisting elders.

These prescriptive stereotypes also appear in the default elder stereotype, absent information about individual compliance. Just as the default woman is compliant, so is the default elder. General old-person stereotypes describe elders as doddering but dear: incompetent but warm (Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005), that is, not a threat. This ambivalent stereotype resembles the default female one, both driven by the prescriptions of interdependence that subordinate one group to the needs of the other, with some mandated reward contingent on cooperating, all in the context of status asymmetry.

This age-based interdependence appears pervasive across cultures, so our data find elders to be disrespected as incompetent, but liked as warm, in samples around the world (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). The only samples that admire their old people are African Americans (Fiske, Bergsieker, Russell, & Williams, 2009) and Native Americans (Burkley, Durante, Fiske, Burkley, & Andrade, 2016).

Contrary to popular wisdom that Eastern cultures revere their elders, but as the ageist resource-tensions theory predicts, meta-analysis shows the derogation of elders everywhere and by perceivers of all ages (North & Fiske, 2015). Across 23 countries (21,090 participants), elders are most derogated in Asian cultures (especially East Asia, compared with South Asia), compared to Western ones. In the West, elders are most derogated in non-Anglophone Europe, least derogated in Anglophone Europe and other Anglophone Western regions. Consistent with the resource-tension perspective, ageism seems to be a function of a nation's growing elder population, controlling for industrialization. Resource tensions matter because we are intimately interdependent across age categories.

To be sure, North and I address only anti-elder stereotypes here, saving anti-youth stereotypes for future work. When mentioned, children are universally viewed as high warmth, low competence. But young people are sometimes just moderate on both dimensions (in Canada, England, Kenya, New Zealand, Sweden; Durante et al., 2017), perhaps collapsing over polarized subtypes that combine protected children and contemptible youth. Several youth subtypes at least sometimes appear simply negative (Emos, Goths, Boy Racers, all low-low in New Zealand, as are teens in the US). In other places, young people are the high-high hope for the future (Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey) (see also Kervyn et al., 2015 US data). More systematic work remains to be done.

The takeaway for elder stereotypes is how prevalent prescriptive ageism appears to be, and how much it reflects resource tensions resulting from cross-age interdependence. But regions do vary, depending on aging populations that strain resources. Like sexism, ageism is a near-universal stereotype, with cultural variations.

Class Stereotypes

Social classes have predictable stereotypes that do not vary much by culture. As background, consider that a comprehensive map of stereotype content arrays each society's social groups in a warmth X competence space. Warmth (trustworthy, friendly) describes groups' stereotypic intents for cooperation. Competence (capable, agentic) describes their stereotypic ability to act on their intentions (Fiske, 2015; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Across dozens of societies, these two dimensions differentiate among social groups (Cuddy et al., 2009; Durante et al., 2013; Durante et al., 2017): a country's own citizens and middle class are stereotyped as high on both, in contrast to the poorest people (refugees, undocumented immigrants, and homeless people), stereotyped as low on both dimensions. The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) innovation is the ambivalent combinations: Rich people for instance are stereotyped as competent but cold, and as noted, older people are stereotyped as warm but incompetent.

The same two social structural dimensions appear for class as for age and gender. Perceived warmth comes from interdependence: perceived cooperative or competitive and exploitative threat determine stereotypic high or low warmth (Fiske et al., 2002; Kervyn, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2015). Middle-class and old people seem warm because they are cooperative, but homeless people and rich people take away resources from others, so they do not seem so warm. In impressions, warmth perceptions (trustworthy, moral) appear to be primary in judgment speed (Willis & Todorov, 2006) and in accounting for variance (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998).

The other main dimension, stereotypic competence, follows from status. All societies rank their members (Fiske, 2010), often by resources, such as income, wealth, education, job prestige, or titles. The status dimension confers competence on higher-class stereotypes and incompetence on lower-class ones (Fiske, 2011). This pattern holds across cultures: Perceptions of the rich as cold but competent are pervasive, as are perceptions of the poor as warm but incompetent (Durante, Tablante, & Fiske, 2017).

Why is this rich-versus-poor contrast so consistent? Logic parallel to pervasive patterns of sexism and ageism would suggest a role for prescriptive classism: The poor should know their warm but (in)competent place. Rich people have a stake in maintaining their advantage, so perhaps their rewarding compliance and punishing resistance would apply here, although the interdependence is not as intimate as for age and sex.

Conversely, feelings of justice may be served by granting competence to the rich but denying them warmth/honesty. Speculation aside, the poor but warm/honest stereotype and rich but cold/dishonest stereotype have been invoked in system justification (Kay & Jost, 2003) and particularly in supporting societal inequality (Durante et al., 2013).

Granted, some cultural variants occur in class stereotypes. More unequal societies display more ambivalence, as if they have more explaining to do: Rich and poor are more divided, but that inequality may seem more acceptable because it is not just about status. Some poor seem stereotypically deserving (older people, those with disabilities), and some seem not (immigrants, welfare recipients) (Fiske et al., 2002). Likewise, some rich seem stereotypically deserving (doctors, professors), and some seem not (lawyers, CEOs) (Fiske & Dupree, 2014).

More equal societies show less ambivalence, enfolding together the ingroup poor (welfare recipients), the middle class, and all citizens into the high-high (warm, competent) cluster and excluding as low-low only the outgroup poor (asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants). Everyone else is in the homogeneous ingroup social safety net, where competition is not competent (Durante et al., 2013). The next section elaborates these points.

Summary of Gender, Age, and Class Stereotypes

Pervasive patterns of sexism, ageism, and classism invoke ambivalent stereotypes that tradeoff warmth and competence, warmth to the subordinated group and competence to the higher-status group. These consistent patterns apparently emerge across cultures, with some variations. For sexism and ageism, which involve interpersonal interdependence, the ambivalent stereotypes are prescriptive. For classism, the prescriptiveness evidence remains to be gathered, but societal stability may depend on the shared ambivalent stereotypes under inequality.

Cross-Cultural Contrasts: Race, Ethnicity, Religion

Unlike sex, age, and class, more socially constructed societal groups—such as race, ethnicity, and religion—are less likely to operate through prescriptive stereotypes that typify face-to-face interdependence. People's lives are more segregated by race, ethnicity, and religion than by gender and age. People have different ages and genders in their families more often than different race/ethnicities and religions. Because intimate interdependence occurs less often between races, ethnicities, and religions, people have less need for shared prescriptive stereotypes that control interdependence across status divides. Unlike distinct genders and ages, different ethnic groups do not have to cooperate. Intergroup patterns across race/ethnicity and religion are solving different cultural problems across different contexts, so cultural similarities should diminish. The next section explores preliminary

patterns across cultures for race/ethnicity/religion generally and then illustrates with specific cases.

Ethnicity and Race in General

Across 38 countries and more than 4,000 respondents, Durante et al. (2017) mapped each country's own groups on stereotypic warmth and competence and assessed the degree of ambivalent stereotypes (mixed combinations). Most, or at least equal, numbers of groups land in the ambivalent clusters, compared with univalent ones. As noted, the warmth-competence tradeoff identifies stereotypically deserving poor (e.g., allegedly warm but incompetent disabled people and pitied ethnicities, such as Irish and Italians in the US, at some times; Bergsieker et al., 2012). And the tradeoff also differentiates them from the stereotypically undeserving poor (each nation's homeless, nomads, refugees, or undocumented migrants, which vary by country, but are seen as low on both dimensions; Mexican migrants in the US and Roma in Spain illustrate at this time). At the other extreme, the tradeoff identifies the deserving well off (usually the dominant ethnic group; Whites illustrate in the US and Spain), seen as high on both dimensions. And the tradeoff also differentiates them from the allegedly undeserving well off (usually outsider entrepreneurs; Asians illustrate in the US and Spain currently). Each country's specific history locates different ethnic groups in each stereotype quadrant (but see below for some sporadically similar patterns). Many racial, ethnic, and religious stereotypes are accidents of history.

As to what predicts ambivalence, as noted earlier (Durante et al., 2013), income inequality (Gini coefficient) correlates with a country's use of ambivalent stereotypes, as if inequality requires more explanation (Durante et al., 2017, replicates this effect with an expanded dataset). Under inequality, deserving and undeserving rich and poor may make the system seem fairer (the US and Latin American countries illustrate this pattern). Under income equality, in contrast, most groups lodge within a more unified national identity, everyone sharing the social safety net, except for resident foreigners (Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries illustrate). Fewer ambivalent stereotypes thus reflect national equality.

Then, using the Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Durante et al. (2107) measured each nation's relative peace-conflict, discovering two ways to an unambivalent, unified national identity. First, peaceful, equal countries, such as Switzerland and Scandinavia, are unified by harmonious shared identities, favoring the in-group and excluding outsiders, such as refugees, nomads, and undocumented immigrants.

The other way to national unity is conflict (regardless of equality). In conflict-ridden war zones, such as the Middle East, groups band together against other groups for a united cause. In Pakistan, for instance, the in-group comprises Muslims in general and educated people, but Christians are foes. These stereotype patterns reflect conflict but enforce overall unity.

Countries intermediate on peace-conflict (regardless of equality) include the United States and Latin America, with our mix of indigenous people and long-term flows of immigrants, which together produce more ethnic diversity. Mixed ethnicities and backgrounds challenge intergroup relations in these regions. Intermediate peace-conflict requires a more complex

story that includes ambivalence. Nevertheless, if external conflict arises, the country unifies, as during a world war or major terror attack.

In sum, the ambivalence-inequality correlation is linear: more inequality, more ambivalence. The ambivalence-peace/conflict relationship is curvilinear: both the extremes of peace and conflict minimize ambivalence, but the intermediate levels show ambivalence in stereotype content. Ethnic, race, and religious stereotypes depend on historical moments more than on long-term patterns of interdependence and status.

Case Studies of Religious Groups

Some religions appear commonly, which allows a descriptive comparison across cultures. The comparisons suggest that religions have contextually variable stereotypes, consistent with being arbitrary sets.

Jews—Generally, when salient in a country, Jewish people are stereotyped as low-warmth, high-competence (US over time; Bergsieker et al., 2012; also Chile, England, Jordan, Mexico, Spain in Durante et al., 2013, 2017). Their stereotypic warmth is never high (low in Peru, Iraq; medium in Canada, Italy, Spain, French and Italian Switzerland). Stereotypic competence is low only in Iraq. Jews in diaspora have often filled roles as outsider entrepreneurs, and merchant classes' stereotypes generically land in this competent-but-cold quadrant. (Their self-rating in Israel is high-high.)

Muslims—National politics drive stereotypes of Muslims as admired high-high groups, in places where they form the societal reference group (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey). Elsewhere, at least some Muslims are apparent adversaries, viewed as either low in both warmth and competence (Denmark, Greece, Kenya, Spain, German-Switzerland) or low in warmth and moderate in competence (Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, India, New Zealand, French-Switzerland, US). Muslims are moderate on both dimensions in only four samples (Italy, Northern Ireland, Sweden, Uganda). Two nations explicitly sub-group them by Sunni/Shia (Afghanistan, Iran). Social context clearly drives Muslim stereotypes.

Christians—As with the two previous religions, when they are a dominant religious ingroup, Christians are stereotyped as high on both dimensions (Australia, Canada, England, Greece, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain, German Switzerland, Uganda, US, and unaccountably, Iraq). But Christians stereotypically appear more moderate in Egypt, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, and (for other historic reasons) Bolivia, all places where they are less numerically dominant. Subgroups (Catholics, Protestants) usually appear where the generic group does.

Case Studies of Races

Asians—Besides Jews, another group filling an outsider entrepreneurial role in diaspora, Asians (when mentioned, also specific Asian nations when mentioned) are generally stereotyped as low-warmth, high-competence (US over time, Bergsieker et al., 2012; Kervyn et al., 2015; Canada, England, Jordan, Spain). In a few places, they appear neutral on both

dimensions (perhaps due to subtyping in Australia and New Zealand, which have large Asian populations, though not in Northern Ireland). Asians' own self-ratings are neutral, consistent with cultural modesty norms. Besides the outsider-entrepreneur role driving stereotype content, self-ratings also respond to cultural context.

Blacks—Black people generically appear moderate on both dimensions (Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Portugal, Northern Ireland, Spain, German Switzerland, US), but in the US at least this conceals divergent subtypes of poor Blacks (low-low) versus Black professionals (high-high; Fiske et al., 2009). South Africa differentiates Africans (high-high) from Black foreigners (low-low). These seem likely to be culture-specific creations as well, with the patterns of subgroups distinctive to each country.

Indigenous—Indigenous people are stereotyped as low low (Canada, Australia) or low on competence but moderate warmth (Peru) or high warmth (Mexico). Neutral ratings in the US (Fiske et al., 2002) may conceal divergent subtypes (Burkley et al., 2016) that reflect social roles.

Mestizos—Clearly a case of culture-specific construction, Mestizos range from admired reference group (Bolivia) to neutral (Peru) to abhorrent low low (Fascist Italy; Durante et al., 2010).

Whites—When the dominant racial group (Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italian Switzerland, US), or a historically powerful one (Bolivia, Kenya), Whites appear high on both dimensions.

Conclusion about Race, Ethnicity, and Religion Stereotypes

Why do different races, ethnicities, and religions end up with differing stereotypes? Historical accidents by national circumstances and immigration serendipity seem to explain the cultural variability of these stereotypes. But of course this is speculation.

A final example illustrates apparently arbitrary social construction of commonly stereotyped groups: rural and urban dwellers often appear respectively as warm but incompetent versus cold but competent (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). Farmers are warmer in Costa Rica, Greece, Iran; city-dwellers are more competent in Bolivia, England, Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon.

What Did We Learn from Cultural Comparisons?

Some stereotype content is pervasive across cultures, with variations in intensity but not patterns: Women and older people who comply with prescriptive stereotypes are cherished as warm but incompetent; those who resist are resented as competent but cold. This helps solve the interpersonal dilemma of intimate interdependence coupled with asymmetrical societal dominance. In a more societal interdependence, lower and higher social classes might have parallel stereotypes of being deserving or not, depending on their abiding by class prescriptions. Stereotype content across cultures suggests these gender, age, and class stereotypes plausibly serve a common adaptation to disparities in societal rank, when coupled with some degree of interdependence.

Specific religious and racial/ethnic groups have stereotypes that vary more dramatically by culture, suggesting the importance of historical and current cultural context to these groups, who are less interdependent. Their stereotypes are less prescriptive.

Overall, however, cultures vary in their use of ambivalent stereotypes, depending on their inequality (more ambivalent) and extremes of peace and conflict (more unity, less ambivalence). More unequal and the most intermediately conflictual societies, such as the US and many Latin American countries, have more explaining to do, and their intergroup relations are complicated, as in the US ethnic heterogeneity. Across cultures, however, gender, age, and perhaps social class display shared prescriptive stereotypes that solve common human dilemmas. If we understand the culturally shared and distinctive forms of stereotypes, perhaps we can change them.

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