

An exploratory study of the complexity and consensus dimensions of stereotypes among Qatari and Bahraini University students

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ABSTRACT

The complexity and consensus dimensions of stereotypes held by 132 male and female university students from Qatar and Bahrain towards themselves and 11 other nationality groups were studied by using a modified Katz and Braly paradigm. The stereotypes held by men were in general less complex than those held by women. Highest consensus appeared for women and the lowest between men. Results are explained in terms of the cultural context and in the case of the men in terms of sectarian differences. In general no significant differences were observed in the strength or frequency of the agreed upon attributions which any two sub-groups made towards a target group.

Stereotypes are attributions of general psychological characteristics to outgroups as well as to one's own group. These stereotypes could vary on the number of traits or attributions which are assigned to the other group as well as in the extent of agreement among those who attribute these traits to the other group. The former is referred to by Vassilliou (Davidson, A. & Thomson, E, 1979) as the 'complexity' dimension of the stereotype and the latter as the 'consensus' dimension. The degree to which several groups agree as to the "traits that characterize a particular object group" is considered as an index of their validity by Brigham (1971) and as evidence for the 'kernel of truth' hypothesis regarding stereotypes. Brigham (1971) refers to this as 'convergence validity.'

Stereotypes are acquired and as such are primarily a function of the direct and/or indirect contact between the respondent and the groups concerned as well as the extent and nature of their familiarity with each other. Triandis (1967) considers the first hand knowledge of the group that is being stereotyped as another important element in this picture. Accordingly, the complexity of the stereotype "could be the result of a greater variation of experience with individual group members" while according to Campbell consensus "would be the natural result of more accurate beliefs about the group as a whole (Davidson & Thomson, 1981)."

According to the above the stereotypes which two or more groups of people have for an object or target group could differ on both the complexity or consensus dimensions. The more similar the two groups in their cultural background and in their exposure to, and contact with, the outgroups the less their differences along the 'complexity' and 'consensus' dimension. This study has been designed to examine the above observations among men and women Ss of two groups of University students from Bahrain and Qatar, two oil producing states in the Arabian Gulf. These two groups are to a very large extent culturally and ethnically similar.

Cultural Background

Qatar and Bahrain are two states in the Arabian Gulf, the former is a peninsula and the latter an island. They are close to each other and have the same climatic conditions. Bahrain was the first to produce oil which it has almost exhausted while Qatar is comparatively a late comer that enjoys large reserves of oil and gas. Hence Bahrain has a longer history of enjoying the benefits of oil specially in the fields of education and health. Bahrain's economy at present is primarily based upon fishing, light industry, commerce and financial services for the area whereas Qatar is still dependent on oil and enjoys a higher per capita income and more opportunities for work than Bahrain. The population of Qatar is almost 200,000 whereas that of Bahrain is a little less than 400,000. Almost half of the population of each of these states is composed of expatriates from different nationalities. The majority of these expatriates come from India and Pakistan. Iranians, until recently, were the third largest group. Arabs from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon come next in order and are followed by smaller communities of Europeans, among whom the

British are the largest and the Americans the smallest group. More recently large groups of S.E. Asians have been added to the picture. These expatriates form the backbone of the work force, specially in Qatar, and are found at all levels from the very menial to the highly technical jobs. Further contact of Qataris and Bahrainis with, and knowledge about, other foreigners has come through the media, commercial contacts as well as foreign travel. Both of these countries were until recently under some form of British tutelage and both gained their independence in 1970. Bahrain and Qatar are both Moslem Arab countries with similar values, customs and traditions. There are, however, slight variations between them, one being the larger proportion of Shiite Moslems in Bahrain, and the other the longer exposure of Bahrainis to aducation.

METHOD AND SUBJECTS

The Katz and Braly (1933) method was used with some modification. Instead of asking our Ss to select ten adjectives and then underline the five they saw most fit for a particular nationality we asked them to select the five traits from the start. The adjective check list used in this study also differed from that of Katz and Braly. It was compiled from the responses of 30 teachers from Qatari schools who were taking a course in Social Psychology. Each teacher was asked to write down ten adjectives which in his opinion described adults in general. The final list was made up of 65 traits which we believe were meaningful to our Ss. All traits were serially numbered and Ss were asked to write the number of each of the adjectives they selected in the five spaces next to each of the following, alphabetically presented, nationality groups which were included in the study :

Americans, Bahrainis, British, Egyptians, Indians, Iranians, Iraqis, Omanis, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Qataris, Saudis and Syrians.

Writing the number rather than the adjective made scoring easier and avoided the arrors associated with poor handwriting. The data was collected in small groups ranging from 6 to 30 at a time.

Subjects : Four groups of Ss were included in the study-Qatari Males (QM) N = 32; Qatari females (QF) N = 40; Bahraini males (BM) N = 40 and Bahraini females (BF) N = 20. All Ss were Sunni Moslems except the

BM's in which over 92 percent of the sample were Shiite Moslems. All our Ss were students at the University of Qatar. Women Ss were younger than the men, but not significantly so.

Education at the University of Qatar is free and all Qataris and Bahrainis receive a generous monthly stipend in cash and those living in the dormitories, like our Bahraini Ss, also receive free board and room.

RESULTS

An adjective which was selected for a nationality group by 20 per cent or more of our Ss was included in the stereotype of that group. Table I shows the range and median number of traits selected by each of our groups for all the nationalities. Table 2 shows the number of traits on which any two groups agreed expressed as a proportion of the total number of different traits selected by the two groups for a particular nationality. For example Qatari males and females selected twelve different traits for the Americans and agreed upon 4 of them thus giving them an agreement or consensus index of .33. Table 3 shows the attributed traits on which all four sub-groups agreed for the nationalities included in the study. As an example all of our four groups agreed that the Americans were an industrial nation whereas only the QM's and QF's agreed on their being scientific. The X^2 test was used to determine whether the frequencies with which the agreed upon traits between any two groups were significantly different. When two groups agreed on one trait the difference between proportions was tested. Out of a total of 52 comparisons (4X13) only three were significantly different.

DISCUSSION

Complexity :

Since complexity of a stereotype refers to the number of traits attributed to a group we can see from the results in Table (1) that the stereotypes held by our male Ss were less complex than those of the females. The median number of attributions held by our QM's for the 13 nationality groups was 5 with a range of 4-5; the QF's had a median of 7 with a range of 7-12; BM's had a median of 6 with a range of 3-11 while the BF's had a median of 8 with a range of 6-11 attributions. In the case of our Qatari Ss

the male stereotypes are consistently less complex than those of the females for all the groups included in the study, whereas in the case of the Bahrainis 8 of the 13 national stereotypes held by the males are less complex than those of the females, four are more and one equal. In the sign test for k independent samples (Ferguson, 1971) the result 3.16 with 2 degrees of freedom was not significant. The trend of less complex stereotypes held by males than females is clear. When we allowed ourselves to violate one of the assumptions of the chi square, i.e. frequencies of less than 5 in some cells the trend was more apparent with X^2 of 6.18 significant at the .05 level of confidence. The low median and narrow range of our QM's seems to reflect the homogeneity of this group and hence the commonality of their experience with the different nationality groups. They do not only come from the same religious and socio-economic background but being males enjoy greater freedom of movement and travel than the females. They can establish more contacts with others outside the family circle, a freedom which is denied to the women. The same argument could be applied to the Bahraini males whose median is lower than that of the females. This group (BM's) however, was more varied in its composition than the QM's - they were predominantly Shiites and came mostly from rural areas. Furthermore, their financial resources were less than those of the QM's which could have imposed some restriction on their travel and on their contact with foreigners who live predominantly in the capital. The female Ss for both groups are similar and also different. Both are restricted in their freedom of movement in comparison to the men but the Bahraini women, specially the urbanites enjoy relatively more freedom than the Qatari women which could account for their lower median. These results raise the question as to whether contact contributes to a less complex stereotype. Our results present some indications that this could be the case. The most striking example is the case of the Omani group. Except for one female Omani student on campus when the study was conducted all Omani Ss were males who lived in the dormitory. We can assume our female Ss had no chance to get to know Omanis-hence the difference in complexity - five attributions in the case of our QM's and BM's and eleven in the case of the female groups. The stereotype of the British is a second example - men are free to mix with foreigners, whereas women are not hence the difference, four attributions for both of the male groups and 10 and 11 attributions in the case of the QF's and BF's respectively. The exception to this is clearly marked in the case of the stereotypes which the

BM's have towards the Saudi Arabs and the Iranians with 10 and 11 attributions both being more complex than the stereotype held by the females. This probably reflects the sectarian compositions of the BM's in which Shiites predominated over the Sunnites. Shiites, in general, are negatively tuned to the Saudis whereas the Bahraini Sunnites are less accepting of the Iranians - both being a manifestation of the demographic and political conditions in Bahrain - a condition which could contribute to variations in contact with these groups. Although we have no details about the sectarian composition of the BF group the proportion of Sunni urbanite Bahraini women students on campus is more than that of the Shiites. If the above explanation is valid we can consider the possibility that increased contact contributes to a less complex stereotype.

Consensus :

Consensus, as used in this study, refers to the extent to which any two sub-groups QM-QF; BM-BF; QM-BM and QF-BF agree among themselves in the attributions they made to the different nationalities. The number of traits on which these sub-groups agreed is expressed, in Table 2, as a proportion of the total number of traits these two groups selected for each nationality, to the satisfaction of our 20 per cent criterion. The table also shows, at the bottom of each column the median for the index of agreement for each pair of groups. We can see from this table variations within each nationality group i.e. QM's vs QF's, BM's vs BF's etc. and variations between these groups vis-a-vis particular nationalities. The lowest index of agreement in the case of the QM's and QF's is .08 for the Bahrainis and the highest for the Iranians, .57. Quite the opposite appears in the case of the BM's and BF's, lowest agreement index is for the Iranians and Iraqi's .13 each and the highest is for the Bahrainis, an auto-stereotype index of .50. QM's and BM's seem to agree least on the Qatari's .08 and most on the British .60, while QF's and BF's agree least on Iraqi's, .08 and most on Iranians .55. What contributes to the magnitude of these agreements? There is no doubt that contact plays an important role but it is not the only one. Theoretically for example BM's and QM's are more free than the women to contact outside groups yet they have the lowest median of agreement. .25 whereas QF's and BF's show the highest median .36. Could it be the nature of the contact as some suggest or are there other factors? Unfortunately the results do not provide us with a definitive answer but could point to some possible clues.

Why for example is the agreement between QM's and BM's for the Qataris .08 and Bahrainis .25 while that between QF's and BF's .38 and .31?

An examination of the consensus medians for the 13 target groups in table 3 shows that the highest .36 is between the QF's and BF's, followed in order of magnitude by QM's and QF's .32, BM and BF .27 and QM and BM .25. Women appear to be more in agreement than men irrespective of nationality. This probably reflects again a common cultural factor which limits the contacts of women with outgroups and restricts it to their own sex. The low index of agreement between the men is probably due to the difference in the sectarian compositions of the two samples to which we have already alluded. Even though sex and sect appear to be responsible for the above differences further research is needed for a more definitive answer. It is probably sex, sect, and nationality combined that make for these differences.

When consensus occurs between two groups are there differences in the frequencies - strength - with which such traits are selected? To answer this question the χ^2 test was used to find out whether such frequencies were significantly different, when two sub-groups agreed on only one trait the differences between the proportions was tested.

Out of 52 such tests between QM's and QF's; BM's and BF's; QM's and BM's and QF's only three significant differences were found. Qatari and Bahraini males who had agreed on only one trait for each of the Qataris and Indians, "generous" for the first and "poor" for the second differed at the .05 level of confidence in both cases. More QM's attributed generosity to themselves than the BM's attributed to them, and more BM's attributed "poverty" to the Indians than did the QM's. The difference between QM's and QF's was again related to the Indians, both groups having agreed that Indians were poor and cowardly, with more females than males attributing "poverty" and more males than females attributing "cowardice" to the Indians. The difference between the QM's and BM's may represent projections of the self image for the autostereotype generosity was part of the self image of the QM's but not the BM's, whereas "poor" was part of the BM's self image but not the QM's. In an unpublished exploratory study on sex stereotypes Qatari males appear to attribute 'sensitive feelings' more to females and 'courage' more to males. If this finding is substantiated by further studies it could provide some explanation for the difference

between QM's and QF's regarding the Indians. The sensitive feelings of females could explain their greater attribution of 'poverty' to Indians and the 'courage' of men could explain their perceptions of Indians as cowards. This could be the case if we consider the fact that the majority of cooks, servants, maids and drivers in Qatari homes are Indians and hence under the mercy of their employers as far as work and residence permits in the country are concerned. However, the possibility that the above differences are spurious cannot be ruled out. As a tentative conclusion we can say, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that when our Ss agree on an attribution to the target groups included in his study they do so to the same degree irrespective of their nationality or sex.

Consensus, however, could become more meaningful if we look at it in terms of actual attributions on which all of our Ss agree. These traits are summarized in Table 4. From this table we can see that our four sub-groups QM's, QF's, BM's and BF's agree on five traits for the Saudis, three for each of the Pakistanis and the Palestinians, two for each of the British, Iranians and Omanis, and one each of the Americans, Indians, Syrians, Qataris and Iraqis. There were no agreements on Egyptians and Bahrainis. Do these agreements represent as Triandis (1967) suggests "first hand knowledge" of the target groups and the nature of their relationship to them? Saudis are described as religious, fanatics, generous, rich and consumers. Many Qataris and some Bahrainis-including the ruling families - trace their origins to Saudi Arabia. Inter-marriage is not uncommon, hundreds of Saudis flock to Bahrain over the week ends, and many Qataris and Bahrainis go regularly to Saudi Arabia either for the pilgrimage or on business. At the political level Saudi Arabia's influence is strongly felt in the area - it is the most influential of the Gulf states at the international level - and has recently been instrumental in the organization of the Gulf Co-operation Council. It is the richest of the states, its foreign aid programme is strongly felt in Bahrain (generosity) while its fundamentalist approach to religion has permeated the area. It represents the bastion against political and religious heresies.

The relationship of our Ss with the Pakistanis are somewhat different. The Pakistanis are among the largest foreign nationals in Qatar and Bahrain. They are Moslems by religion and come from poor economic and educational backgrounds and in general they occupy the more menial manual jobs, labourers, cooks and servants - hence the stereotype; religious,

poor and patient. The Palestinians, though much smaller in numbers are more influential both in the public and private sectors. Besides being primarily Moslems, they are also ethnically and linguistically similar to both Qataris and Bahrainis. There is more contact between them and the nationals who, at the official and individual levels are supportive of the Palestinian cause - which is again reflected in their attributions of rebellious, oppressed and patient to this groups. The third category in which our four sub-groups agreed on two attributions for each : the British, Iranians and Omanis represents a variety of relationships. Although numerically fewer than the Iranian and Omanis in the area, the British were politically and economically more powerful until the early seventies. Being in power and being religiously and ethnically different, contact with them was limited. Until recently British products flooded the market which could account for the attribution of "industrial" and "self dependant." The attribution of "religious" and "rebellious" to the Iranians represents a reaction to the present conditions in Iran. These traits, in a study started in 1976 and still in progress, did not appear until 1979. Iranians are among the oldest and largest expatriate communities in both Qatar and Bahrain, and although many of our subjects speak the Persian language, contact with the Iranians, except for some of the Bahrainis, is limited to the marketplace-most shop keepers, bakers and grocers are Iranians. This limit in contacts and meaningful relationship may be due to a sectarian difference. All of our sub-groups agreed that Omanis were modest and generous. Contact with Omanis has until recently been on a very small scale. Few Omanis were allowed to leave their country and fewer foreigners were allowed into Oman; and until the present ruler took over, Oman's involvement in Arab Gulf politics was at a minimum. Even though the contacts of our Ss were primarily with Omani students at the University they reflected a common opinion about this groups. The countries to which our four sub-groups agree on a single attribution are in a sense self-explanatory. Americans are industrial; Indians are poor; Syrians are educated - a large number of teachers in both Qatar and Bahrain are Syrians and Syria was one of the earliest Arab countries to admit Bahrainis and Qataris to its national university; Qataris are generous - our Bahraini Ss were all receiving free fully paid education in Qatar; Iraqis are strong - probably a reflection of the current Iraqi-Iranian war. The absence of consensus on at least one single trait regarding the Bahrainis and the Egyptians is interesting but difficult to explain especially since the contact with these groups is quite extensive. Bahrainis agree among themselves on four attributions - (auto-stereotype);

and only on two for the Egyptians - whereas Qatari males and females agree on one attribute for the Bahrainis and on three for the Egyptians. This could again reflect the rather heterogeneous composition of our Bahraini groups as well as the ambivalent attitude towards the Egyptians that has resulted from the Camp David agreements.

Conclusions

There are some indications that the complexity and consensus dimensions of stereotypes held by Qatari and Bahraini University students are determined by sex rather than by nationality, stereotypes held by males are less complex than those held by females - Consensus, as defined in this study, appears to be stronger among women and weaker among the men - The former was explained in terms of a common cultural factor which controls the contacts of women vis-a-vis out groups while the latter was attributed to the different sectarian composition of the two male groups. Further research is needed with larger samples and better control of the sectarian factor. Control of this factor is difficult because of the sensitivity of the issue to most Qatari and Bahraini University students.

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TABLE 1
NUMBER OF ATTRIBUTIONS MADE
BY EACH SUB-GROUP

Target Groups	Qatari Males	Qatari Females	Bahraini Males	Bahraini Females
Bahrainis	5	9	5	7
Iraqis	5	9	3	6
Omanis	5	11	5	11
Qataris	5	11	8	9
Saudis	5	11	11	7
Iranians	4	7	10	7
Egyptians	4	9	6	10
Palestinians	5	7	9	9
Surians	5	12	9	8
Indians	4	9	8	6
Pakistanis	5	8	6	7
Americans	4	10	4	11
British	5	11	6	9
Range	4-5	7-12	3-11	6-11
Md.	5	9	6	8

TABLE 2
Consensus index between
different sub-groups

TARGET GROUPS	QM - QF			QM - BM			BM - BF			QF - BF		
	a	b	c	a	b	c	a	b	c	a	b	c
Bahrainis	1	13	.08	2	8	.25	4	8	.50	4	13	.31
Iraqis	2	12	.17	1	7	.14	1	8	.13	1	13	.08
Omanis	4	12	.33	2	8	.25	3	13	.23	6	16	.38
Qataris	4	12	.33	1	12	.08	5	12	.42	5	13	.38
Saudis	5	11	.45	5	11	.45	5	12	.42	6	12	.50
Iranians	4	7	.57	3	11	.27	2	15	.13	5	9	.55
Egyptians	3	10	.30	2	8	.25	2	13	.15	5	14	.36
Palestinians	8	9	.33	3	11	.27	6	13	.46	4	12	.33
Syrians	4	13	.31	4	10	.40	4	13	.31	3	17	.18
Indians	2	11	.19	1	11	.09	3	11	.27	4	11	.36
Pakistanis	4	9	.44	3	8	.38	4	9	.44	3	12	.25
Americans	4	12	.33	2	9	.22	3	12	.25	7	14	.50
British	3	11	.27	3	5	.60	3	12	.25	1	13	.08
Median Consensus			.32			.25			.27			.36

Column (a) Number of attributions agreed upon by two groups
 (b) Number of different attributions used by two groups
 (c) Proportion of agreement between a and b

TABLE 3
Attributions agreed upon by
QM's, QF's, BM's and BF's

Nationality	Attribution
Iraqis	Strong
Omanis	Modest Generous
Qataris	Generous
Saudis	Generous Religious Fanatics Rich Consumers
Iranians	Rabellious Religious
Palestinians	Rebellious Oppressed Patient
Syrians	Educated
Indians	Poor
Pakistanis	Poor Religious Patient
Americans	Industrial
British	Industrial Self-dependant

N. B. The four sub-groups did not agree on a single trait for the Bahrainis and Egyptians.