Stereotype accommodation concerning older people

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Abstract

No previous research has addressed the fact that some individuals emigrate and must consequently acculturate into stereotypical beliefs about senior citizens that may differ from the predominant beliefs in their origin cultures. I argue that immigrants can integrate such novel content into preexisting stereotypes facilitating their stereotype accommodation. I here operationalize stereotype accommodation as the (in-)accurate perception of the stereotype prevailing in the host- and origin-cultures. Drawing on two multinational surveys (European Social Survey and World Value Survey), larger cross-cultural differences in the stereotype about older people's warmth predicted more accurate perceptions of the host-cultural stereotype of older people's warmth. I discuss the findings in the context of existing research on the effects of old-age stereotypes and propose possible theoretical bridges to (older) immigrants' socio-cognitive adaptation and well-being due to cultural learning.

Keywords: immigrants, stereotypes about older people, stereotype accommodation, cultural adaptation

Introduction

A typical stereotype about older people is that they are sociable and incompetent (Cuddy, Fiske, Kwan, Glick, Demoulin, Leyens et al., 2009), and, sometimes, such beliefs prevail at the cultural level and represent common knowledge to the local population (Lamont, Swift, & Abrams, 2015; B. Levy, 2009). Though recent evidence suggests that immigrants can incorporate stereotypes learned in the host culture into preexisting beliefs—the stereotype accommodation hypothesis (Stanciu & Vauclair, 2018; Stanciu, Vauclair, & Rodda, 2019)—no previous research has addressed this possibility in view of stereotypes concerning older people. Accommodated stereotypes specify that immigrants have become aware of the beliefs about older people's warmth and competencies that prevail in their host cultures, and that their own stereotype matches or is very similar to what is common among the local population. Stereotype accommodation concerning older people is examined here as the accurate perception of stereotype content existent in host cultures (inaccurate perception of stereotype content existent in origin cultures), which, I expect, to be predicted by factors relevant in the cultural adaptation.

Stereotypes About Older People Across Cultures

The typical stereotype, which sees older people as warm (sociable) and incompetent (Cuddy et al., 2009), follows from perceptions that older people are not competing over societal resources and that they have a low social status. Countries can differ concerning these structural attributes perceived in social groups and consequently in the stereotypical beliefs about the groups. In more modernized societies (Vauclair, Marques, Lima, Bratt, Swift, & Abrams, 2014), for example, the subjective social status of older people is higher than in less-modernized societies, which corresponds to a stereotype of older people as more competent.

Eastern and Western cultures tend to have different beliefs about older people. For example, Confucian teachings in Eastern cultures emphasize values of collective respect and

honoring the elderly among the younger generations, whereas the emphasis in Western cultures is on nurturing independence, which puts the needs of the younger generations at the forefront (Schwartz, 2006). The cultural beliefs associated with the old age seem more positive in Eastern cultures than in Western cultures (Löckenhoff, De Fruyt, Terracciano, McCrae, De Bolle, Costa Jr et al., 2009). However, a recent meta-analysis showed that older people were stereotyped more negatively in Eastern collectivistic cultures (China) than in Western individualistic cultures (United States) (North and Fiske, 2015).

The interplay between subjective and cultural beliefs about older people may also differ cross-culturally. Vauclair, Hanke, Huang, and Abrams (2016) showed, for example, that older people were stereotyped as more sociable and competent in Eastern cultures than in Western cultures, though only with respect to beliefs that were prevailed at the cultural level. With respect to beliefs endorsed by individual members, the stereotype about older people was more negative in Eastern than in Western cultures.

Stereotype Accommodation

Immigrants may be confronted with stereotypes that are novel to them while acculturating in their host cultures. The definition of acculturation as a process of change that occurs when two cultural groups come in contact is widely embraced in the literature (for reviews see Sam & Berry, 2016). However, the perspective assumes that minority groups (immigrants) must assimilate the majority group's culture (local host culture) for stable mental health and functional cultural adaptation and, moreover, it overemphasizes behavioral changes in immigrants (Rudmin, 2009; 2010). Instead, acculturation is better understood as the process of learning a second culture in addition to the origin culture (Rudmin, 2009; 2010). This definition emphasizes the accommodating nature of culture-relevant information. In other words, immigrants experience a process of adapting to their host cultures, enabling them to learn about culture-relevant information that operates here and consequently

incorporate such novelty into preexisting knowledge structures (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013).

Stanciu and Vauclair (2018) argued that cross-cultural differences regarding stereotypes are a source of novel stereotype content that facilitates cognitive heuristic adaptation in immigrants. Immigrants can incorporate from the stereotype content learned in the host countries into preexisting stereotypes (Stanciu et al., 2019), a cognitive process termed stereotype accommodation. This approach addresses changes in stereotypes about social groups held by immigrants in general. It can address, for example, how a Romanian immigrant in Germany might modify his/her preexisting stereotypes about older people because of interacting with the German culture.

The Present Research

The present research examines the stereotype accommodation hypothesis in view of stereotypes about older people. Ideally, this is studied in a longitudinal study design, but the approach is oftentimes impractical given the limited resources. I propose an alternative approach that is cross-sectional and originates in work on cultural stereotype content assessed as meta-beliefs (Cuddy et al., 2009; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2012) and in cross-sectional assessments of cultural learning (De Leersnyder, Mesquita, & Kim, 2011; Boehnke & Schiefer, 2016).

Meta-beliefs are beliefs about others' stereotypical beliefs (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2012). In empirical work, probing meta-beliefs facilitates the retrieval of stereotype content prevailing at the cultural level (Cuddy et al., 2009). From the perspective of individual members of a culture, this means an accurate awareness of the stereotype content existent in the culture. Immigrants are exposed to stereotype content prevailing in their origin- and host-cultures and can thereby reproduce both types of content (Stanciu et al., 2019).

Evidence for cultural learning is identified in cross-sectional research when scores on a construct (emotions, values) measured in immigrants are proximal with the average score in the host population. For example, De Leersnyder et al. (2011) calculated the average emotional responses of their participants from the local culture and then correlated with it the emotional responses of their individual immigrants. Boehnke and Schiefer (2016) showed that value preferences of adolescents with an immigration background were similar in absolute terms to the averaged value preferences of the host cultures' class members. Most recently, Stanciu et al. (2019) calculated Euclidean distance scores between immigrants' personal stereotypes and stereotypes in their host and origin cultures and found that Romanian immigrants in Germany and France experienced stereotype accommodation regarding politicians.

I examine here key propositions laid down by Stanciu and Vauclair (2018). According to them, differences in the stereotype content between host and origin cultures must be meaningful (large effect size of the cross-cultural mean difference) for immigrants' stereotype accommodation. The first hypothesis is that cultural differences concerning stereotypes of older people that are meaningful (large effect sizes) will predict a more accurate perception of stereotypical content of the host culture rather than of the origin culture (Hypothesis 1).

Furthermore, duration of stay in the host culture is a core predictor of immigrants' cultural learning, and likewise of their stereotype accommodation (Sam & Berry, 2016; Stanciu et al., 2019). The longer is the stay in the host society, the greater are the chances that immigrants are confronted with situations wherein their preexisting knowledge structure (ways of acting, language, or social skills) is challenged and therefore modified. The second hypothesis is that a longer stay in the host culture will predict a more accurate perception of stereotypical content of the host culture rather than of the origin culture (Hypothesis 2).

Immigrants navigate the host- and origin-cultural elements by means of learning from the latter and accommodating novel elements next to those of the former. Learning host-cultural content is typically associated with an openness to exploring the culture, whereas preserving origin-cultural content is associated with conformity or maintaining the status quo (Sam & Berry, 2016; Wilson et al., 2013). Value priorities (Schwartz, 2012) of immigrants may probe these orientations. According to the Schwartz value theory, individuals cannot attribute similar priorities to contradictory values (antagonistic motivations and goals). For instance, goals related to openness to change (choice, daring, excitement) are incompatible with goals related to conservation (adherence and commitment to norms and self-preservation). The third and fourth expectations of the study are that openness to change will predict a more accurate perception of the host-cultural stereotype rather than the origin-cultural stereotype (Hypothesis 3) and conservation will predict a more accurate perception of the origin-cultural stereotype rather than the host-cultural stereotype (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Data and Analytic Strategy

The hypotheses were tested against data of ESS round 4 (European Social Survey Data Round 4, 2008) and of WVS round 6 (Inglehart et al., 2014). These surveys periodically measure phenomena such as values, attitudes, and societal conditions in multiple countries. Both sources are country representative and together contain data from more than 150,000 participants in more than 60 countries.

The present analyses were conducted with samples of immigrants and specific information stemming from the local population was used for the variable construction. Data were used if information was available regarding both the immigrant's host and origin countries. Immigrant participants who matched the selection criterion were surveyed in 29 countries in the ESS 4 (Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany,

Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Turkey, & Ukraine) and in 15 countries in the WVS 6 (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Brazil, Belarus, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, Ukraine, & Uzbekistan).

I calculated the average meta-beliefs of the local population in the immigrants' host and origin countries (see the Supplement, Table 1 and 2). If an immigrant's origin country was not surveyed in one dataset, I used the scores that were available from the other dataset. For example, I used the WVS 6 scores for the origin-cultural stereotype of Algerian immigrant participants surveyed in the ESS 4. These scores served as indicators of host- and origin-cultural stereotypes and were used for the calculation of perception inaccuracy scores.

The data had a nested structure: Immigrants from specific origin countries were nested in host countries. Decomposition of the explained variance at each level of analysis requires at least 30 macro-units (countries) with at least 30 micro-units (individuals) each (McNeish & Stapleton, 2014). This was not the case here. The alternative procedure, of correcting regression estimators for clustering effects (complex regressions), produces reliable regression estimates when the goal is not the multilevel decomposition of explained variance (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Complex regressions were chosen here also because of the increased flexibility in including singletons (countries represented by only one individual immigrant) in the model estimation (McNeish & Stapleton, 2016).

Distinct complex regressions tested the present hypotheses. Separate models were estimated for each indicator of the dependent variables (friendliness and competence). Data was weighted using the dataset-specific weighting coefficients and listwise deletion was applied to missing values. Data imputation is not recommended here. All measures of interest (perception inaccuracy scores and meaningful cultural differences) were calculated

beforehand with information from local populations, which are not to be estimated. Table 1 presents the full sample description.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of the Immigrant Samples.

	Total	
	ESS 4	WVS 6
Age	49.93 (18.08)	53.97 (17.70)
% Female	56.6%	57.5%
Years of education/Age education completed	12.93 (4.13)	33.87 (18.98)
Openness to change	-.29 (.62)	-.49 (.73)
Conservation	.15 (.63)	.57 (.81)
Duration of stay in host country ¹	5	na
<i>dW</i>	.20 (.38)	-.01 (.23)
<i>dC</i>	-.01 (.38)	-.06 (.35)
Perception inaccuracy W	-.06 (.34)	-.04 (.23)
Perception inaccuracy C	.01 (.01)	-.02 (.35)

Note. ¹Mode reported, 5=arrived in host country more than 20 years ago. Parentheses represent standard deviations. *dW* and *dC*=meaningful cultural differences regarding stereotypes about older people's warmth and competence. Perception inaccuracy W and C=inaccuracy in the reproduction of host- over origin-cultural stereotypes of older people's warmth and competence.

Measurement ESS 4

Meta-beliefs. Meta-beliefs were defined as participants' responses regarding how people over 70 were viewed in their societies [e.g., Portugal] in terms of their friendliness and competence (0 = *not at all likely to be viewed that way*, 4 = *very much likely to be viewed that way*). The data collection procedure for both the ESS and the WVS followed strict guidelines that ensured equivalent measurement and translations across countries.

Migration status. Participants indicated whether they were born in their current country of residence (where the data collection took place) or in another country. Those who self-reported being born in a different country were coded as immigrants.

Country of birth. Country of birth was self-reported.

Perception inaccuracy. Separately for warmth and competence, the meta-belief score of the individual immigrant was subtracted in absolute terms from the average meta-belief score calculated for the local population in his/her host country and then separately from the

average meta-belief score calculated for the local population in his/her origin country. The higher were the scores on these indices, the greater was the inaccuracy (i.e., deviation from the mean) in perceiving the respective cultural stereotype. Finally, the perception inaccuracy score was created by subtracting the former (origin) index from the latter index (host). Higher scores (positive) indicate a less accurate perception of the host-cultural stereotype (or more accurate perception of the origin-cultural stereotype). Lower scores (negative) indicate a less accurate perception of the origin-cultural stereotype (or a more accurate perception of the host-cultural stereotype).

Meaningful cultural differences. For each participating immigrant—individual-level indicator—Cohen's *ds* were calculated for the difference in meta-beliefs of the local population in immigrants' host and origin countries. Separate scores were calculated for warmth and competence.

Duration of stay in host culture. Participants born in other countries had to report how long ago they first came to live in their current country of residence (1 = *within last year*, 2 = *1 to 5 years ago*, 3 = *6 to 10 years ago*, 4 = *11 to 20 years ago*, and 5 = *more than 20 years ago*). Two dummy variables are created and used in the analyses: short stay (categories 1 and 2 vs. category 5) and medium-length of stay (categories 3 and 4 vs. category 5).

Value priorities. Values were measured with the PVQ-21 instrument (Schwartz, 2003) [a 10-items version in WVS 6]. Study participants read 21 descriptions of a fictive person in terms of value importance and then indicated how similar the fictive person was to them [e.g., Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him/her. He/She likes to do things in his/her own original way] (1 = *very much like me*, 6 = *not like me at all*). Six items [3 items in WVS 6] pertaining to self-direction, stimulation and hedonism made for the openness to change index (immigrant sample $\alpha = 0.77$ [$\alpha = 0.62$ in WVS 6]). Six items [3 items in WVS 6] pertaining to security, conformity, and tradition made for the conservation

index (immigrant sample $\alpha = 0.72$ [$\alpha = 0.64$ in WVS 6]). A scale correction (MRAT; Schwartz, 2003) was applied whereby (1) each participant's average response was calculated on all value items and (2) from it the participant's answer on each individual value item was subtracted (MRAT procedure; Schwartz, 2003).

Covariates. *Gender* was self-reported as female or male. The *chronological age* of participants was recorded in years. *Education* was assessed in years of full-time education [age when education was completed in WVS 6].

Measurement WVS 6

Unless otherwise specified, all measurements were identical to the ones in the ESS 4 dataset.

Country of birth. Immigrants' country of birth was not readily available. A proxy was created whereby the immigrants' self-identification as a member of an ethnic group was cross-tabulated with the first language spoken at home. Tabulations valid and intuitive at the face value-level were used to classify immigrants' home cultural belongingness. Discarded were tabulations of African/Black ethnicity and English spoken at home for immigrants in the US. Accepted were tabulations of White/Caucasian ethnicity and Russian spoken at home as a proxy for Russia as the home culture for immigrants in Ukraine.

Results

Estimation of stereotype accommodation was controlled for participants' chronological age, education, and gender. Results are presented in Table 2.

ESS 4. There was evidence for hypothesis 1—namely, meaningful cultural differences predicted smaller perception inaccuracy on warmth attributes of older people. Hypothesis 2 received no support: duration of stay in the host country had no systematic contribution to perception accuracy. There was supporting evidence for hypothesis 3 and no support for

hypothesis 4. Smaller perception inaccuracy was predicted by a greater prioritization of openness to change.

WVS 6. There was evidence for hypothesis 1—namely, meaningful cultural differences predicted smaller perception accuracy on warmth. Hypothesis 2 could not be tested due to limitations on data availability. No evidence could be found regarding hypotheses 3 and 4.

Table 2.

Inaccuracy in the Perception of Host- over Origin-Cultural Beliefs of Older People's Warmth and Competence.

	ESS 4		WVS 6	
	W	C	W	C
Age				
Female				
Education years / Age education complete				
Short stay in host country (vs. long stay)			na	na
Medium length stay in host country (vs. long stay)			na	na
Openness to change		-.13 (.06)*		
Conservation				
<i>dW</i>	-.17 (.08)*	na	-.44 (.15)**	na
<i>dC</i>	na		na	
<i>R</i> ²	3.6%	1.4%*	20.2%	3.8%
<i>N</i>	3,360	3,385	529	513

Note. Significant, and standardized beta coefficients shown. Standard Errors (SE) in brackets. W=Warmth, C=Competence. *dW* and *dC*=meaningful cultural differences in terms of stereotypical beliefs about older people's warmth and competence. na=not applicable. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Discussion

Using two multinational survey datasets, I examined whether immigrants experienced stereotype accommodation concerning senior citizens' warmth and competence. Specifically, I proposed that stereotype accommodation might manifest as accuracy in the perception of the host-cultural stereotype compared to the origin-cultural stereotype. One constant finding across the datasets was that more meaningful cross-cultural differences in the stereotype of

older people's warmth contributed to stereotype accommodation regarding older people's warmth, even after controlling for age, education and gender.

(In-)Accurate Perception of Host- and Origin-Cultural Beliefs About Older People

Immigrants seem better able to reproduce the stereotype about older people in host cultures where the stereotype is more positive than in their origin cultures. A positivity bias is probably the reason. Socioemotional selectivity theory posits that older people are more likely to remember, pay attention, and engage with positive rather than negative information because time restrictions can shift goal focus from experiencing novelty in the younger age to achieving emotional stability in the older age (Reed, Chan, & Mikels, 2014). Older immigrants seem to optimize their well-being by selectively engaging with positive rather than negative stereotypical beliefs. Recent evidence suggests that it is not the chronological age per se that is associated with a positivity bias but rather the actual perception of time restrictions. Under imagined time restrictions, for example, when responding to a psychological questionnaire that brings to mind the limitations of old age, even younger people can show increased selectivity for positive information (Barber, Opitz, Martins, Sakaki, & Mather, 2016); a possibility supported by the present findings.

The effects however, were notable only concerning warmth attributes. This may be the case because people first identify intentions in others (perceptions of warmth) before evaluating their agentic behavior (perceptions of competence) (Richetin, Durante, Mari, Perugini, & Volpato, 2012). As a consequence, immigrants may be more prone to adapt to local contexts their beliefs about older people's warmth.

Value priorities were not reliable for probing immigrants' cultural learning orientation. One explanation is that stereotype accommodation regarding older people is context sensitive. Each value typology has specific goals that motivate behavior independent of contexts and situations (Schwartz, 2012). Cultural learning, on the other hand, is highly

context-specific and therefore would require an adequate assessment. Immigrants can experience the acculturation process distinctly across domains of life, such as in the areas of social contacts and religion/spirituality (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2004). When it comes to gaining a sense of the beliefs about social groups prevailing in the host culture, it must be acknowledged that each social group is embedded distinctly across life domains. Recent work suggests that eight life domains, such as social contacts and religion/spirituality, are relevant in the construction of stereotypical evaluation of older people (Kornadt & Rothermund, 2015). It is still possible that immigrants' cultural learning orientation influenced their stereotype accommodation regarding older people. It may have done so, however, in a different manner across domains of life whose effects cancelled each other out in general terms.

Implications of the Study

Cultural beliefs about older people can impact the psychological and physiological health of older people (B. Levy, 2009; Lamont et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the case of immigrants has not been considered, so far. Immigrants are special populations in the sense that they are socialized into the cultural beliefs of their origin cultures and they subsequently acculturate into the cultural beliefs of their host cultures. This suggests that the health of older immigrants might be affected by their accuracy in reproducing (their awareness of) host- over origin-cultural stereotypes.

The findings can extend the theoretical considerations of the stereotype embodiment theory (B. Levy, 2009) and the theory of age-based stereotype threat (Lamont et al., 2015) with its evidence that a positivity bias regarding stereotypes of older people might exist in acculturating immigrants. Local populations may have fewer choices than immigrants in selectively internalizing or being imprinted with their local culture's beliefs about older people. Local individuals are born into the local stereotype. Whether the stereotype is

internalized into self-views or it poses threats to local senior citizens are, according to the aforementioned theories, not realistic options because the stereotype is present in their minds in a latent form and is thus always at risk of being activated. Immigrants, on the other hand, acculturate into the local stereotype of the host cultures as individuals with preexistent latent stereotypical beliefs who, as the present findings would suggest, seem to incorporate more positive rather than negative content.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study takes a cross-sectional approach and operationalizes immigrants' stereotype accommodation as perception inaccuracy. This approach has been previously applied in the literature (Boehnke & Schiefer, 2016; De Leersnyder et al., 2011), though it cannot test for causality. It is not unlikely that there may have been a pre-migration fit between the stereotype of older people held by immigrants and the host-cultural stereotype. In value research, for example, a fit between immigrant adolescents' values and the values prevailing in their host cultures is associated with better cultural adaptation (Schiefer, Möllering, & Daniel, 2012).

A related issue is that the available datasets contained information regarding only *meta*-beliefs and thus it was impossible to test how proximal (similar) subjective beliefs held by immigrants were to the common beliefs of local population (Stanciu et al., 2019). Meta-beliefs probe the stereotype content that is latent in people's minds and not whether the individuals also endorse it (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2012). This distinction might be particularly intriguing to address further because new evidence suggests that subjective beliefs held by people are not necessarily consistent with beliefs prevailing in their cultures (Vauclair et al., 2016). One way that future work might challenge these limitations is to repeatedly measure stereotypes about older people held by immigrants before and at various times after arriving into their host cultures.

The ESS and WVS datasets were not designed for testing the present hypotheses, which might explain the inconsistency of the evidence. Much of the data had to be discarded for incompatibility reasons and in some instances this led to using single cases in the model estimation. Furthermore, there was insufficient information to decompose the explained variance in variance due to individual level differences and due to cultural level variation. Moreover, for the WVS, the critical variable “country of origin” had to be approximated based on available information on immigrants’ language spoken at home and ethnic belongingness and thus it is possible that study participants originated in other countries after all.

Conclusion

Immigrants are more likely to reproduce the host-cultural stereotype about older people if its content is more positive than the one in their culture of origin. As an implication of the present study, new venues for old age research in the immigrant population are discussed—namely, one that considers the effects of both origin and host cultural stereotypes about old people.

Ethical Compliance Section

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare they have no conflict of interest.

Informed consent

Not applicable.

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