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# A Contextual Approach to Stereotype Content Model: Stereotype Contents in Context

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## Abstract

The present paper aims to review the strengths and weakness of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, a context sensitive perspective was provided to overcome the shortcomings of SCM. In the first section, contributions of SCM are discussed. Secondly, a special focus is devoted to the competence and warmth dimensions to identify several difficulties of the model. Finally, a context sensitive perspective is suggested to overcome these difficulties. In this perspective, three contextual factors suggested: the kinds of competition, legitimacy of status, and constraints of social reality. Finally, limitations and suggestions for future studies are presented.

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*Keywords:* Competence, Warmth, Intergroup Context, Stereotype Contents;

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## 1. Introduction

Several theoretical attempts at struggling with prejudice and discrimination regarded stereotypes as a significant source of out-group derogation and hostility (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). However, almost none of these approaches offered a comprehensive theory specifically developed to explain how and why stereotypes are developed, maintained, and reflected in individuals' behaviors. Stereotype Content Model (SCM) provided such a framework by suggesting competence and warmth as fundamental dimensions of intergroup perceptions (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). The present review is aimed to enlighten the limits of SCM by providing an elaborative discussion on the nature of the fundamental dimensions. By doing so, a complementary theoretical background is suggested to explain the roots of different kinds of stereotype clusters.

## 2. The content issue in the literature

Even though Katz and Braly's (1933) pioneering study on racial stereotypes mainly focused on the content issue, this emphasis has gradually disappeared in the following literature. In the cognitive orientation, stereotypes are regarded as content-free structures simplifying the excessive amount of information in the environment (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994). The neglect of content issue in the literature stems from the assumption that even

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though contents of stereotypes change across time and culture, the underlying processes stay constant (Fiske et al., 2002). SCM aims to fill the gap in the literature by identifying the fundamental dimensions on which such changes could be systematically studied.

SCM adapted the well-known competence and warmth dimensions of person perception field to the intergroup domain. Competence represents how confident, skillful and efficient members of a certain group are seen. Warmth reflects how friendly, well-intentioned and trustworthy these members are seen. Fiske et al. (2002) identified relative status and intergroup competition as the social structural predictors of these dimensions, respectively. SCM differentiates four stereotype clusters on an orthogonal 2x2 competence vs. warmth space. Two of these clusters represent consistent competence and warmth evaluations toward specific groups, which reflects univalent biases favoring the ingroup on both dimensions (i.e. high competent (HC)/high warm (HW) groups), and derogating not-liked/disrespected outgroups (i.e. low competent (LC)/low warm (LW) groups). The other two clusters depict mixed combinations of competence and warmth. That is, HC/LW toward respected but not liked groups and LC/HW toward not respected but liked groups. Finally, SCM identify the specific emotions for these clusters: envy for HC/LW, pity for LC/HW, admiration for HC/HW, and contempt for LC/LW groups (Fiske et al., 2002)

### **3. The nature of the fundamental dimensions**

Wojciszke (1994, 2005) provided a functional analysis of the fundamental dimensions. He argued that warmth is primary for perception of others, since actors need to anticipate others' intentions. However, agency is more important for the actor, since it has direct consequences for the possessor. Phalet and Poppe (1997) supported his arguments in intergroup domain by showing that competence was seen as more important for in-group and morality for out-groups.

#### *3.1. The correlation between fundamental dimension*

The orthogonal competence X warmth space in SCM implies that when adequate number and kinds of groups are provided, total competence and warmth ratings would not be correlated. In this sense, the correlation would be positive for univalent stereotypes (HC/HW or LC/LW), but negative for mixed ones (HC/LW or LC/HW). Accordingly, Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, and Kashima, (2005) manipulated either competence or warmth of artificial groups. Their findings revealed a negative correlation, showing that higher ratings for the superior group on the manipulated dimension were compensated with lower ratings on the unmanipulated dimension. However, following studies showed that when real groups were rated, a strong positive correlation was observed (Aktan & Güvenç, 2008; Durante, 2008).

A source of compensation is system justification motivation (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Judd et. al., 2005). In SJT, Jost, Banaji and Nosek (2004) suggest that complementary stereotypes (mixed stereotypes) provide a rationalization tool which ensures that everyone benefits through a balanced dispersion of benefits. However, the arguments regarding to compensation significantly differs from SCM's formulation of social structural predictors

#### *3.2. Social structural predictors of the fundamental dimension*

SCM suggests system justification motivation as a source of status – competence link. Accordingly, Oldmeadow and Fiske (2007) showed that status – competence link was stronger for participants who were high in this motivation. The roots competition - warmth link can be tracked to Sherif's classical studies on intergroup conflict. Sherif and Sherif (1969) illustrated how competition for limited resources resulted in negative morality (warmth) attributions. However, following studies indicated that competition for positive identity or group distinctiveness (i.e. social competition) does not necessarily result in derogation, but lead an unwillingness to favor outgroup (Brewer, 1999). Nonetheless, SCM hold only the realistic conflict as a source of warmth ratings.

That might be the reason why some studies failed to support competition-warmth link (Aktan & Güvenç, 2008; Durante, 2008).

Overall findings and related discussions indicates that (1) fundamental dimensions seem to differ from other dimensions in terms of their compensatory nature; (2) the strength of the relation with social structural predictors seems to differ for competence and warmth

#### **4. Defining the contextual factors and the relationships among them**

As in SCM, status and competition are the main focus of the present arguments. However, what is suggested here is to identify the kinds of the competition and the nature of the status differences to appreciate intergroup context. In this formulation, competitions for limited sources and for positive identity are differentiated. Legitimacy and social reality issues are regarded as the nature of status differences (see Figure 1).

Considering the priority of the warmth dimension (Wojciszke, 2005), competition is suggested as the primary factor shaping intergroup context. Since, status differences is an inevitable part of meritocratic “modern” societies (Jost, Sally, Jeffrey, & György, 2003), legitimacy is suggested as the second factor. In line with Sherif and Sherif (1969), it is suggested that realistic conflict is directly related to the perception of illegitimacy. Finally, social reality is suggested as the last factor shaping stereotypic evaluations. Social reality corresponds to shared beliefs about status of certain groups (Ellemers et al., 1997).

##### *4.1. From contexts to stereotype clusters*

Identifying the contextual factors and their relationships, it is possible to define when specific stereotype clusters emerge. The intergroup perceptions in the realistic conflict context are suggested to be shaped by the illegitimate status attributions (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). In such a context, low status groups would claim more rights on limited resources and they would undermine the privileged position of the high status group (Brewer, 1999). In such a context, if the status differences were not defined by the social reality, both groups’ evaluations would reflect univalent hostility, i.e. ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation. When high status is defined by social reality, however, the low status group would show ambivalent hostility. That is, members of the low status group would rate the high status group as competent, but not as competent as member of the high status group would rate themselves (Aktan & Güvenç, 2008).

When the groups competed for positive identity, the intergroup context could be either legitimate or illegitimate. In the legitimate context, evaluations would be shaped by compensatory stereotypes (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). The distinctive aspect of this context is high status groups’ tendency to admit superiority of the low status group on warmth dimension. When the status was not legitimate, however, both groups’ evaluations would reflect distinctiveness issues. In such a context, outgroup derogation would not be necessary, since ingroup favoritism would sustain positive distinctiveness (Brewer, 1999). When the status differences were defined by social reality, both groups would demonstrate ambivalent favoritism. That is, the groups would not necessarily differ in terms of their ratings toward high status groups’ competence (Ellemers, et al., 1997). Still, low status groups would favor ingroup on warmth dimension to sustain positive distinctiveness. Finally, the lack of social reality, however, would result in univalent favoritism (i.e. favoritism for in group, but not for outgroup).

#### **5. The limitations of the context sensitive perspective**

The present discussion has several assumptions. First of all, outgroup derogation and the reluctance to favor outgroup are regarded as distinct issues (Brewer, 1999; Doosje, Spears, & Koomen, 1995; Jetten & Spears, 2003). However, it is questionable to draw such a definite line between two kinds of competition. Secondly, it was assumed that mixed and compensatory stereotypes differ in terms of their motivational roots. This assumption is built on two contradictory theories: System Justification Theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and

the Social Reality Concerns (Ellemers, et al., 1997). The present perspective benefits from both theoretical accounts by restricting their suggestions to specific contexts

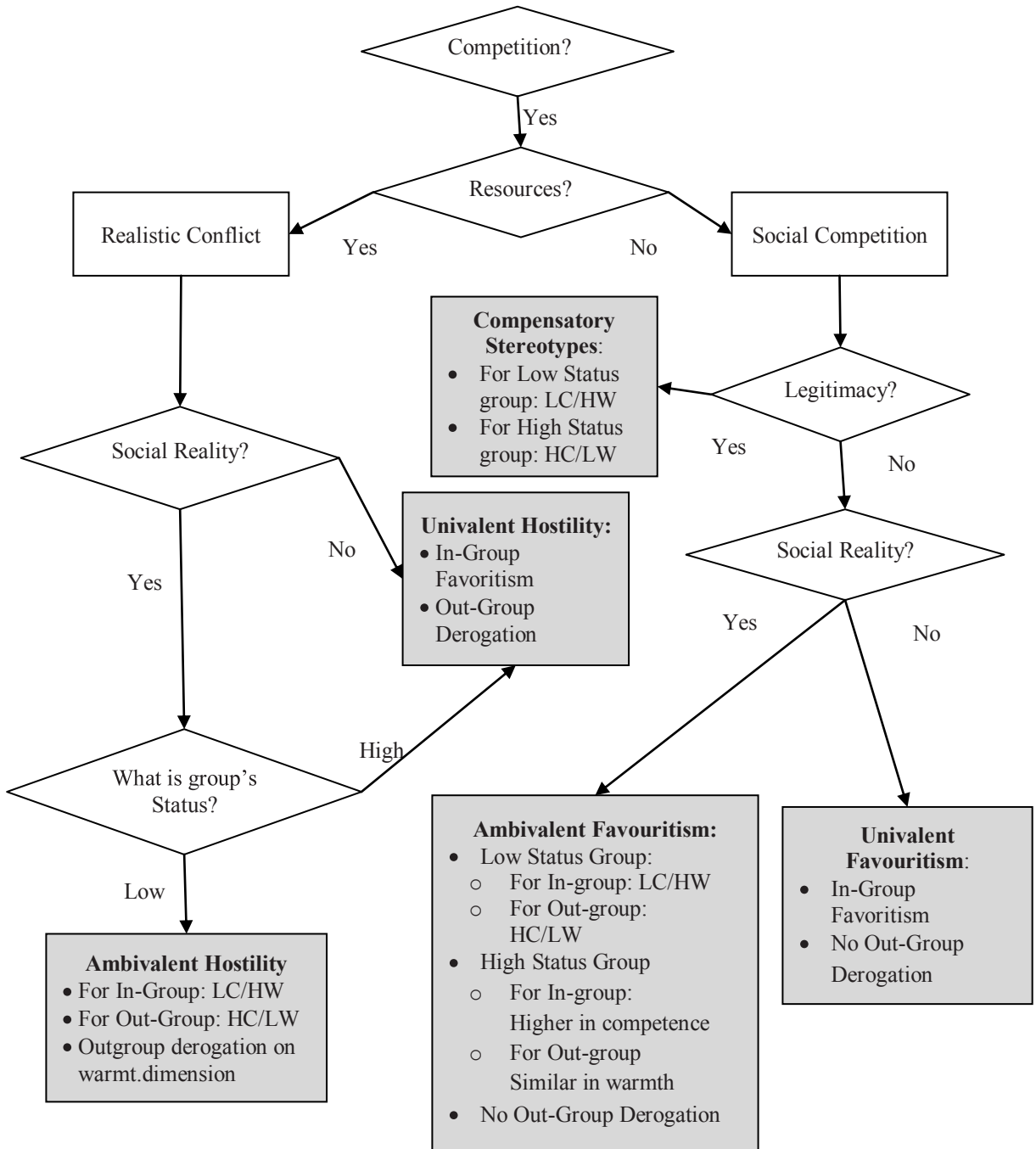


Figure 1. Stereotype contents in differing contexts

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