

Contextualized and decontextualized use of social categories:
Comparisons of Australians and Japanese on group-based trust and cooperation

Toshio Yamagishi, Margaret Foddy, Yohsuke Makimura, Masafumi Matuda,
and
Michael Platow

Generalized trust in strangers affects people's willingness to enter into new and potentially risky relationships that may nevertheless be beneficial to them. Shared group membership increases trust by generating positive evaluations of fellow ingroup members and expectations of generalized reciprocity. However, the salient type of "group" may differ across Eastern and Western cultures, and the stereotypes associated with each group may be differentially important. Comparison of results of two experiments in Japan and Australia (a social dilemma and an "allocator choice" paradigm) showed that simply sharing category membership (e.g., same country, same university) was sufficient to generate higher trust in ingroup members in a Western, but not an Eastern culture. In the latter, the valence and content of the group stereotype were more important. The pattern of trust in Australia is "decontextualized" because it is activated by shared membership in abstract categories and seems independent of the valence and content of that category's stereotype; in Japan, simply sharing category membership did not generate trust, but group stereotypes and the history of inter-group relations were important. In both experiments, when mutual knowledge of shared group identity was absent, expectations of group-based fair treatment by others were blocked; both Australians and Japanese were influenced by the valence and content of the group stereotypes.