Folsociology explains ethnic reasoning better than Folkbiology does

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Did humans evolve psychological adaptations for reasoning about variation in ethnic group membership and other traits?

- Humans universally cognize themselves into culturally evolved ethnic groups.
- Social learning has been critical in producing behavioral variation in humans.

Folkbiological constraints or Folsociological adaptations?

- Folkbiological constraints: Ethnic groups have some structural similarities with biological species (e.g. category-based endogamy, descent-based membership). Therefore, humans can use existing psychological mechanisms for reasoning about social traits (Premack 1994), including ethnic categories.
- Folsociological adaptations: Selection for reasoning about human groups has produced separate psychological mechanisms for reasoning about social traits (Premack 1994), including ethnic categories.

Predictions derived from a functionalist account of a well-designed folsociological cognitive system:

About Group Membership Inheritance
- People will not expect group membership to be biologically transmitted.
- Social institutions that affect segregation, cultural introdiction, or acquiring the rights of group membership will affect perceptions of identity inheritance.

About Individual Variation in Other Traits
- People should expect others to manifest less along highly forbiddable dimensions.
- And expect beliefs to be transmitted through social channels.

Previous work suggests that reasoning about the inheritance of social identity and traits evolved from folkbiology.

- Cross-cultural research suggests adults and children expect social group identity to be biologically inherited (Bedford 1999, Legro 2001, but see Atran et al. 2000).
- Adults in several cultures report family traits are biologically inherited and beliefs are socially inherited (Palencia et al. 1993, Maitland 1960, Atran et al. 2000).

Method

- Participants in the US, Peru, and Fiji were told a story about a child whose parents die in infancy and social adaptation, see for parents.
- They were then asked whether the child will be the same as the biological or adoptive parent along the following dimensions:
  1. Social category membership, 2. morphological/traits, 3. personality, 4. skills, and 5. beliefs.

Sites

- Participants: (US): All adult participants were recruited online.
- Peru: All adults were recruited in the paper/pencil test of the University of British in the Andes.
- Fiji: The test is in the Vagacu dialect of the Fijian language.
- Fiji: The participants were in the following age range of test: 12 to 20 years old.
- Fiji: The social categories across the five ethnic groups were: 1. Indigenous Fijian, 2. Indo-Fijian, 3. Kula Fijian.

The social categories which the child was adopted by, by city:

- US: Rural, regional categories.
- Peru: Western, regional categories.
- Fiji: Western, regional categories.
- Fiji: Indigenous, regional categories.

The social categories which the child was adopted by, by city:

- Indigenous Fijian: Hitaika vs. Western Fijian.
- Indo-Fijian: Hitaika vs. Western Fijian.
- Kula Fijian: Hitaika vs. Western Fijian.

References