

Managing threats and opportunities: When people holding the same stereotypes harbor very different prejudices

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INTRODUCTION

- From an affordance-management perspective, social perceivers seek to identify the potential opportunities and threats others afford, and then respond to take advantage of these opportunities and remediate the threats.
- Many stereotypes can thus be viewed as representing the *potential* threats and opportunities people from different groups are believed to pose, and many prejudices can be viewed as emotional reactions that help perceivers direct behavior to manage those potential threats and opportunities.^{2,3}
- However, whether stereotypes *actually* imply threats or opportunities should depend on the perceiver's current concerns and vulnerabilities.

Hypothesis

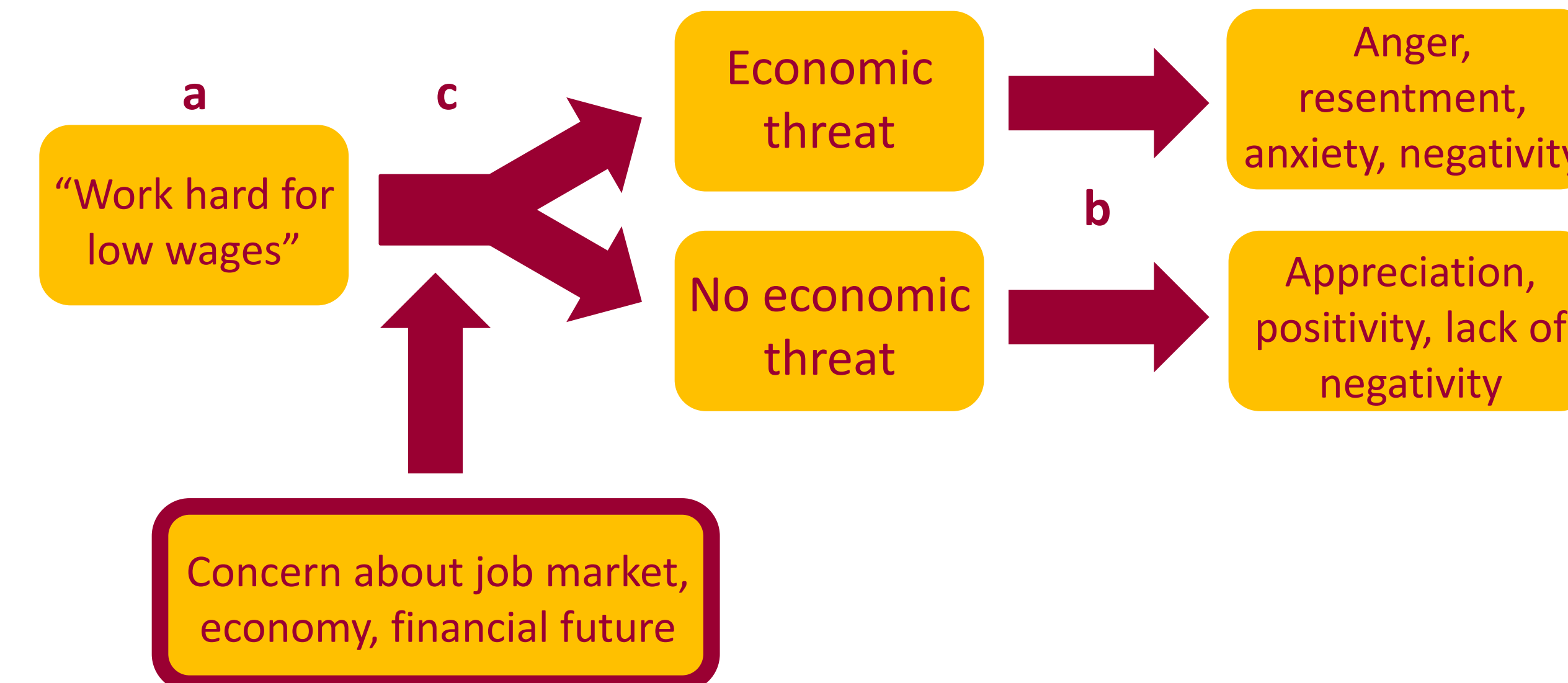
- **Even when holding identical stereotypes about a target group, social perceivers with different needs and vulnerabilities will perceive members of the target group as posing different threats and/or opportunities and will therefore have different emotional (prejudicial) and behavioral (discriminatory) responses to them.**

METHODS

- White MTurk Ps ($N = 192$, 107 females, $M_{age} = 40.17$), whose families have lived in the U.S. for three generations or more, responded to items about Mexican and Asian immigrants. Items assessed:
 - stereotypes,
 - threat perceptions,
 - prejudices,
 - economic concerns and vulnerabilities (e.g., current employment status, perceptions of the U.S. economy, perceptions of favorability of the job market).

RESULTS

Mexican immigrant target group

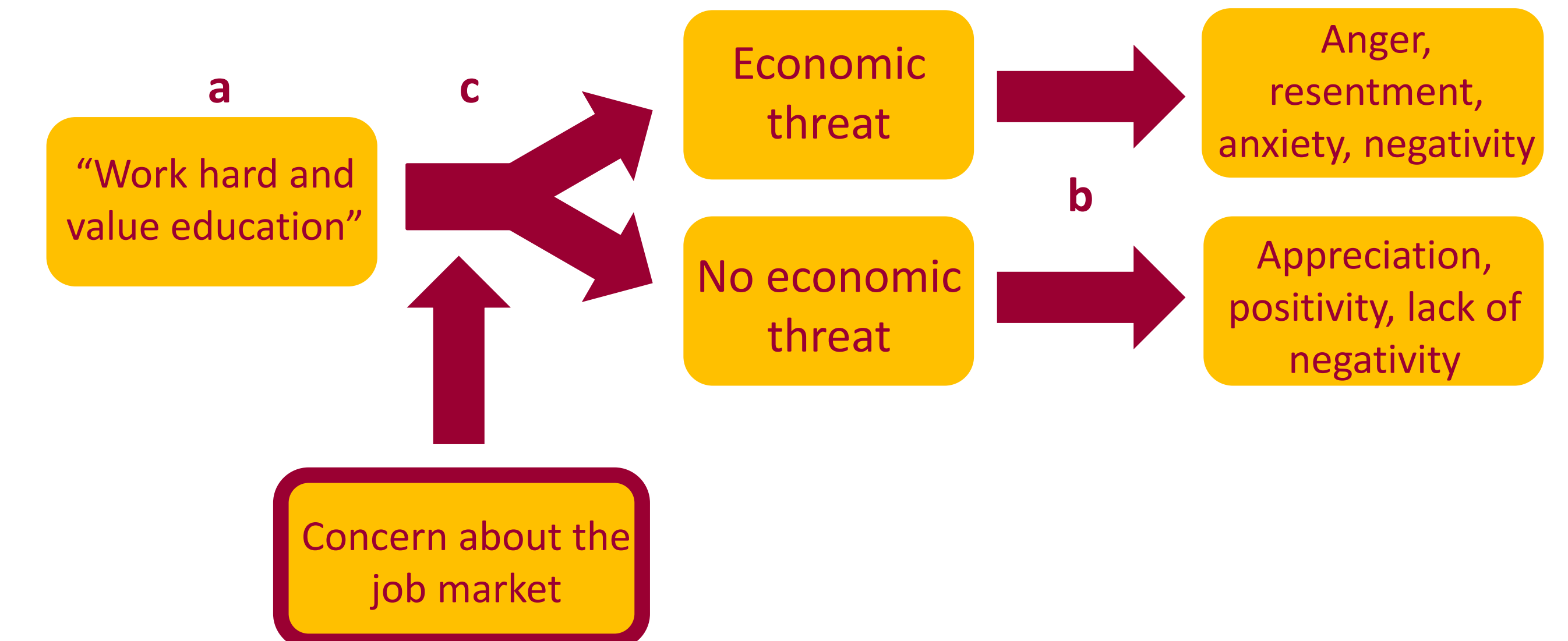


- Ps strongly endorsed the stereotype that Mexican immigrants are “willing to work hard for low wages.”
- Replicating past work demonstrating strong links between perceptions of specific threats and prejudices,¹ Ps who viewed targets as economic threats reported more negative prejudices (see Table 1).
- Controlling for stereotype endorsement, Ps who felt more vulnerable also felt more economically threatened by targets (see Table 2).

Table 1.	Economic threat perception (r)
Anger	.620***
Resentment	.655***
Anxiety	.556***
Negativity	.624***
Appreciation	-.532***
Positivity	-.602***
	*** $p < .001$

Table 2.	Economic threat perception (β)
Job market unfavorability (self)	.249**
Job market unfavorability (others)	.286*
Economic downturn	.420***
Concern about money (future)	.196*
SES (childhood)	-.382**
	* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Asian immigrant target group



- Ps strongly endorsed the stereotype that Asian immigrants “work hard and value education.”
- Ps who viewed targets as economic threats reported more negative prejudices (see Table 3).
- Controlling for stereotype endorsement, Ps who felt more vulnerable also felt more economically threatened by targets (see Table 4).

Table 3.	Economic threat perception (r)
Anger	.619***
Resentment	.671***
Anxiety	.614***
Negativity	.601***
Appreciation	-.358***
Positivity	-.387***
	*** $p < .001$

Table 4.	Economic threat perception (β)
Job market unfavorability (self)	.229**
	** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

- Preliminary evidence suggests that, even in the face of strong, seemingly positive shared stereotypes about a group, people who feel economically vulnerable view the group as more threatening and hold more negative prejudices toward them.
- What counts as a ‘negative’ stereotype will differ across social perceivers, such that the same stereotype can lead both to ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ prejudices.
- Because different vulnerabilities alter the affordance value of stereotypes, individuals whose life circumstances change may have their prejudices also change—even while their stereotypes remain the same. Thus, a white-

collar worker who loses a job, with a specialized skillset no longer in demand, might now see the identically-stereotyped immigrant as competition for scarce work, and resentment may now replace what had been appreciation.

That the same stereotypes can predict different prejudices and discriminatory inclinations depending on perceiver goals runs counter to traditional views of the relationship between stereotypes and prejudices and lends additional support to the affordance management approach to social perception.

References

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- McArthur, L. Z., & Baron, R. M. (1983). Toward an ecological theory of social perception. *Psychological Review*, 90, 215-238.
- Neuberg, S. L., & Sng, O. (2013). A life history theory of social perception: Stereotyping at the intersections of age, sex, ecology (and race). *Social Cognition*, 31, 696-711.