

Considering the roles of Culture and Social Status: The Protestant Work Ethic and Egalitarianism

Considerando el papel de la Cultura y el Estatus Social: Ética Protestante y Egalitarismo

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Abstract

The Protestant work ethic (PWE) is prevalent in many cultures. Abundant work in social psychology, primarily in the U.S., suggests that people use PWE to justify their own prejudice and society's differential treatment of less successful or disadvantaged persons. Recent theorizing suggests that PWE's intergroup meaning can be influenced by people's age, social status, and culture such that PWE not only has an intolerant or "justifier"-of-inequality meaning (disadvantaged persons deserve their disadvantage), but also a tolerant or equalizer meaning (effort is a social equalizer). The main goal of the present investigation was to show that PWE does not necessarily develop a justifier meaning within or across cultures. Past work shows that among the majority group, European Americans, PWE is positively related to egalitarianism among children but less so with increasing age, presumably because the justifier meaning becomes increasingly salient and group relevant (justifies their groups' high status). In Study 1, we show that among the majority group in Colombia, Mestizos, PWE is positively related to egalitarianism (and negatively related to social dominance orientation) across age groups, presumably because the justifier meaning is less salient and relevant in a culture where people tend to blame others less for their disadvantage. In Study 2, we show that among African Americans, who have historically been a

Resumen

La Ética Protestante del Trabajo (PWE) es común en muchas culturas. Investigaciones en psicología social, principalmente en EUA, sugieren que la gente usa la PWE para justificar sus prejuicios y el trato diferencial hacia las personas en desventaja. Teorías recientes sugieren que la edad, el estatus social y la cultura influyen sobre las implicaciones de la PWE, de tal manera que ésta no solo justifica la inequidad (las personas merecen su desventaja), sino también la igualdad (por medio del esfuerzo). Esta investigación evaluó la emergencia de las implicaciones intolerantes de la PWE en dos culturas. Investigaciones pasadas muestran que entre el grupo mayoritario en EUA, Euro Americanos, la PWE se relaciona positivamente con el igualitarismo en niños, pero menos a medida que aumenta la edad, presumiblemente porque las implicaciones justificadoras de la PWE adquieren mayor saliencia y relevancia (justificando el estatus alto de algunos grupos). El primer estudio, sugiere que entre el grupo mayoritario en Colombia, Mestizos, la PWE se relaciona positivamente con el igualitarismo (y negativamente con la Orientación a la Dominancia Social) en todos los grupos de edad, presumiblemente porque las implicaciones justificadoras tienen menos saliencia y son menos relevantes en una cultura donde las personas tienden menos a culpar a los otros por su desventaja. El segundo estudio sugiere que entre

disadvantaged and stigmatized group, PWE is positively related to egalitarianism across age groups, presumably because the justifier meaning is less relevant and salient to their group. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Lay theories, prejudice, SDO, egalitarianism, PWE, Protestant Work Ethic, Social Dominance Orientation

In many cultures, the Protestant work ethic is used by people in their everyday life, often in sayings such as “Madruga y verás, trabaja y tendrás (Wake up early and you will see, work and you will have)”; “the early bird gets the worm”; “By going and coming, a bird weaves its nest.” The Protestant work ethic, or the “lay” theory that people who work hard succeed impacts people’s judgments and behaviors across different facets of life (home, work, play) and thus has been of enduring interest in psychology, economics, social work, political science, sociology, and anthropology (e.g., Crandall, 2000; Furnham, 1990; McClelland, 1961; Weber, 1905). For example, Protestant work ethic (PWE) has long been discussed as a lay theory that helps provide a better understanding of people’s social attitudes and behaviors toward disadvantaged groups in societies; yet, this work has primarily considered the United States context and with a focus on a high status group, European Americans (Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996; Christopher, Franzen, & Keyes, 2006; Christopher & Mull, 2006; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Crandall, 1994; Glover, 1994; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Katz & Hass, 1988; Levy, Freitas & Salovey, 2002; Levy, West, Ramírez & Karafantis, 2006; MacDonald, 1972; Monteith & Spicer, 2000; Quinn & Crocker, 1999; Somerman, 1993; Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995; Williamson, 1974), although there is relevant work in other countries such as Canada (Campbell, Schellenberg, & Senn, 1997), and England (Heaven, 1972; Masser & Abrams, 1999). Within the U.S., PWE has long been discussed in the social psychological literature as a lay theory people can use to justify their own prejudice and society’s differential treatment of a wide variety of less successful or disadvantaged persons including homeless persons, overweight persons, and women (e.g., Crandall, 1994; 2000; Levy, Freitas, & Salovey, 2002; Levy, West, et al., 2006; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). Consistent with this theorizing, among U.S. adults (predominately European Americans), PWE has been shown to relate to stronger anti-

Afroamericanos, un grupo históricamente estigmatizado y en desventaja, la PWE se relaciona positivamente con el igualitarismo, posiblemente porque las implicaciones justificadoras tienen menor relevancia y saliencia para el grupo. Las implicaciones de estos hallazgos son discutidas.

Palabras clave: teorías legas, prejuicio, SDO, igualitarismo, Ética Protestante del Trabajo, Orientación a la Dominancia Social.

African American attitudes (e.g., Katz & Hass, 1988; also see Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996), dislike of overweight persons (e.g., Crandall, 1994), negative attitudes toward homeless persons (e.g., Levy et al., 2002; Somerman, 1993), negative attitudes toward women (e.g., Campbell et al., 1997; Christopher & Mull, 2006; Swim et al., 1995), less desired social distance to African Americans (Levy, West, et al., 2006), less donated money to a homeless shelter (Levy, West, et al., 2006), opposition to a community facility for homeless families (e.g., Somerman, 1993).

However, to justify socially unacceptable and often personally unacceptable levels of prejudice in a society that conveys egalitarian values, a lay theory must appear egalitarian, suggesting that social intolerance is a “fair” response (Levy, West, & Ramírez, 2005). Levy, West, et al. (2006) reasoned that the basic meaning of PWE might actually be closer to supporting an egalitarian, rather than a justifier, of inequality view. Central to the notion of the “American Dream,” and captured by the proverb “Anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps” as well as ever-popular “rags to riches” stories, is the notion that hard work is a social equalizer. As such, PWE is used to motivate children (indeed people of all ages and backgrounds), for example, to work diligently toward valued outcomes. If children, for example, accept the PWE message at face value, they will likely believe that effort is something that equalizes people of different social categories. Hard work is a pathway to success. Thus, Levy, West, et al. (2006) predicted European American children would initially be familiar with the egalitarian meaning of PWE, but then with experience in the U.S., would come to associate PWE with arguments justifying inequality.

Consistent with this, Levy, West et al., (2006; Study 1) first showed that among European American children (ages 10 to 15), PWE relates positively to beliefs in social

equality. An experimental induction of PWE lent further support to this finding (Levy, West, et al., 2006; Study 2). Levy, West, et al. (2006) next tested whether, with experience in the U.S., PWE would come to be associated with intolerance. The intolerant meaning could, for example, arise through repeated exposure to others using PWE to argue that disadvantaged groups and their members, are to blame for their disadvantage. Indeed, American college students who were led to think about past instances of others using PWE in support of such arguments were less egalitarian (reported less support for social equality and donated less money to a homeless shelter) compared to students in a control condition (Levy, West, et al., 2006, Studies 3 and 4).

The intolerant meaning of PWE could also develop among U.S. adults in other ways. As another example, as people get older, their educational and career prospects are increasingly being evaluated and compared. Advantaged group members who are motivated to take credit for their own (or their group's) accomplishments, to blame others for their disadvantage, and to ensure that members of disadvantaged groups do not get preferential treatment in college or job placement may be particularly likely to make on their own (or be receptive to) a connection between PWE and justifying inequality (see Levy, West, et al., 2006). Essentially, these examples highlight an associated meaning mechanism. This idea is drawn from the long-standing notion in the social psychological literature: that the same construct can be perceived differently by different people or in different contexts (e.g., Bruner, 1957; Turner & Oakes, 1997). Lewin (1951), for example, noted that children hold a narrow view of the implications of their actions but gain a broader view with experience. We (Levy, West, et al., 2006) have suggested an analogous process, whereby people in some contexts could acquire a growing understanding of PWE's implications. Overall, we (Levy, West, & Ramírez, 2005; Levy, West, et al., 2006, Ramírez & Levy, 2010) have suggested that age, social status, and culture need to be taken into account when considering the impact that the PWE has on intergroup attitudes (also see Crandall & Martínez, 1996, theorizing about culture). The goal of this paper is to provide further evidence that age, social status, and culture indeed are important considerations.

Our starting point is Levy and colleagues' past work, which thus far has shown that PWE not only has a

justifier of inequality meaning in the United States, as other prior work has indicated, but rather PWE has implications for both prejudice and egalitarianism. Levy, West, et al. (2006) also provided preliminary evidence for an associated meaning mechanism, namely that the intolerance implication is linked to PWE through social experience in the United States. This prior work, however, was limited in its ability to address the important issue of lay theory endorsement and use by groups differing on factors other than age. Does the Protestant work ethic develop the "justifier of inequality" meaning for all groups and in all cultures?

Following Levy, West, et al. (2006; also see Crandall & Martínez, 1996) theorizing that people accumulate and refine their understandings of certain lay theories such as the PWE through particular social and cultural experiences; PWE should not accumulate the same meanings in all environments and cultures. Conceiving of culture in broad terms, PWE should not develop the justifier of inequality meaning in cultures where people tend to blame others less for their disadvantage. In Latin American countries such as Colombia, for example, people's beliefs about work traditionally have been connected to other belief systems such as Catholicism, which emphasize the avoidance of temptations of luxury, and happiness in the afterlife through resignation, respect, and love towards God; moreover, work has been thought to represent punishment and expiation, rather than a source of prestige (e.g., Zubieta, 2007). As a consequence, people may be more willing to accept their disadvantage as means to salvation and thus are not directly blamed for it.

Hence, one goal of the present investigation was to show that PWE does not develop a justifier of inequality meaning in all cultures. In Study 1, we aimed to provide evidence of the social equalizer meaning of PWE in a sample of Colombian children and adults (Mestizos, the majority group) with age ranges similar to those in Levy, West, et al. (2006) previous developmental studies with U.S. European children and adults.

Even within cultures such as the United States in which the justifier of inequality meaning of PWE is available, not everyone in the culture may be equally exposed to it and equally use it (Levy, West, & Ramírez, 2005; Levy, West, et al., 2006). European American children's and early adolescents' stronger report of the egalitarian meaning

of PWE suggests the justifier of inequality meaning of PWE is not as prevalent in their immediate environment compared to European American adults. Levy, West & Ramírez (2005), suggested that the justifier of inequality meaning of the PWE also may be less likely to be directly highlighted to members of relatively disadvantaged groups in the U.S. After all, that meaning of PWE justifies advantaged group members' place in society. Members of disadvantaged groups seem more likely to be repeatedly exposed to the social equalizer meaning of PWE by, for example, family and friends because that meaning conveys a positive pathway in society despite their disadvantage. Thus, a second goal of the present investigation was to test the intergroup meaning of PWE among non-majority groups in the United States. Study 2 included samples of African American children and adults with age ranges similar to those in Levy, West, et al.'s (2006) previous developmental studies with U.S. European children and adults.

Study 1

The main goal of Study 1 was to show cross-cultural differences in the meaning of PWE. As a first step in addressing whether PWE develops the justifier of inequality meaning for all groups and in all cultures, we considered how culture in a broad sense (one's society) shapes the PWE. In this study, we explored the possibility that PWE would not develop an intolerant meaning with experience in Colombia, a culture in which less successful people are less often held personally responsible for their life situation. Indeed, prior work suggests, that Latin American adults tend to blame others less for their disadvantage or stigma (being overweight, failing at a task) than U.S. adults (e.g., Betancourt & Weiner, 1982; Crandall & Martínez, 1996). We examine three age groups of the majority group in Colombia, Mestizos, roughly similar to our previously collected data with European Americans so that we could make a direct comparison. Unlike prior developmental findings among European Americans, we predicted the PWE to be positively associated with egalitarianism across different age groups among the Colombian sample.

In our previous work with European Americans, we assessed social dominance orientation (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) as a comparison lay theory that in contrast to our theorizing about the shifting intergroup meanings of PWE among European Americans, would have an unequivocal, stable relation to non-egalitarianism.

SDO (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) intrinsically prescribes the non-egalitarian view that some groups are inherently superior to others; further, a consistent demonstration of research findings across cultures supports this relation (e.g., Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). We found no across age differences for European Americans, and we expected again to find no age difference among Colombian Mestizos. Accordingly, across the different age groups, SDO should be negatively correlated with egalitarianism.

Method

Participants

European American participants were drawn from a previously published study (Levy, West, et al., 2006, Study 1). Colombian participants were matched as closely as possible to the European American sample. Consistent with the European American sample, participants were recruited from middle-income suburban environments. Because this study was intended as a comparison study to European Americans, who are the numerical majority group in America, we limited Colombian participants to those in the numerical majority group, Mestizos. To increase the generalizability of the results, participants in each of the three age groups were recruited from three schools. These three schools were in Bogota, the capital of Colombia and were chosen to represent the average socioeconomic status. The oldest age Colombian sample included 36 males and 56 females, aged 17 to 19 years ($M = 17.45$). The middle Colombian sample included 64 males and 45 females, and one unidentified, aged 13 to 15 years ($M = 14.03$). The youngest Colombian sample included 35 males and 27 females, aged 10 to 12 years ($M = 10.97$).

As reported in Levy, West, et al. (2006), the oldest European American sample included 23 males and 82 females, aged 17 to 25 years ($M = 20.64$); the middle European American group, aged 14 to 16 years ($M = 15.01$), included 37 males and 97 females, and the youngest European American group, aged 9 to 12 years ($M = 10.48$), included 47 males and 60 females.

It is important to note that we conducted analyses in which we restricted the age range of the previously collected European American sample to more closely match the Colombian sample, and the results did not differ. For consistency, we report the results using the original

sample from the previously published European American sample (Levy, West, et al., 2006). The original European American sample is also used in the current Study 2.

Measures

The measures of PWE, egalitarianism, and social dominance orientation that were used in Levy, West, et al.'s (2006, Study 1) developmental study of European Americans, were translated into Spanish by the first author and then back translated into English by a bilingual expert. We used the same items as the American sample except that we removed 2 items of the social dominance orientation measure. Examples of the items in English include: "If people work hard, they can get a very good job" (PWE); "Some groups of people are not as good as other groups of people" (SDO); "Everyone should be treated equally

because we are all human" (egalitarianism). We also reduced the 6-item response scale used in the American sample for PWE and egalitarianism and 7-item response scale for SDO to 5-items for all measures in the Colombian sample (1 = don't agree at all, 2 = agree a little, 3 = agree a medium amount, 4 = agree a lot, 5 = agree very, very much). For each scale, participants' responses to all items (reverse-scoring when needed) were averaged to create three separate indices such that higher scores indicated greater agreement with the construct.

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities of the measures. For comparison and because the American data were previously published, all Colombian responses were recalculated on the response scales of U.S. sample. The internal reliabilities of the measures are similar among the American and Colombian samples.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Reliability of Measures According to Age Group, Studies 1 and 2.

Measure	Mean (standard deviation)			Internal reliability		
	Age group 1	Age group 2	Age group 3	Age group 1	Age group 2	Age group 3
Mestizo Colombian sample (Study 1)						
PWE	3.78 (.95)	3.82 (.77)	3.65 (.80)	.80	.72	.73
SDO	1.43 (.34)	2.12 (.52)	1.44 (.30)	.56	.57	.49
Egalitarianism	4.31 (.69)	3.94 (.70)	3.92 (.62)	.80	.69	.69
European American Sample (Levy, West, et al., 2006)						
PWE	4.58 (.87)	4.25 (.65)	3.78 (.77)	.79	.76	.81
SDO	2.64 (.67)	2.62 (.66)	2.78 (.76)	.64	.79	.81
Egalitarianism	4.91 (.71)	4.32 (.67)	4.09 (.73)	.76	.82	.80
African American Sample (Study 2)						
PWE	4.15 (1.00)	--	3.53 (.53)	.89	--	.71
Egalitarianism	4.10 (.93)	--	4.14 (.74)	.85	--	.76

Note. PWE = Protestant work ethic; SDO = social dominance orientation.

Procedure

Consistent with the procedure used by Levy, West, et al. (2006) with the American samples, two Colombian experimenters tested the Colombian participants in classrooms of 25 to 35 students. For privacy, students

were asked to separate their desks or sit one seat apart while completing the survey. Prior to their participation, schools were informed about the purpose of the study and asked for consent, and students were instructed that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to leave the study at any point.

Results

We began by testing our main hypothesis, PWE would have a consistently egalitarian meaning across age groups in Colombia, unlike our prior findings showing that PWE does not have a consistent intergroup meaning with age (experience) among European Americans. In separate simultaneous regression analyses, we regressed participants' egalitarianism on variables representing PWE, participants' age groups, culture, the PWE X age group interaction, age group X culture interaction, the PWE X culture interaction, and the PWE X age group X culture interaction. As predicted, the three way interaction was significant, $F(1, 608) = 4.05, p < .05, h_p^2 = .007$. Follow-up analyses on the Colombian sample revealed, a significant PWE main effect, $F(1, 262) = 3.92, p < .05, h_p^2 = .015$, and no other significant effects (all $F_s < 1$). The correlations between PWE and egalitarianism were virtually identical across the age groups ($r_s = .33, .35, .35$, all $p_s < .01$). As reported in Levy, West, et al. (2006, Study 1), in the European American sample, by contrast, there was a significant PWE X age group interaction. As depicted in Figure 1, with increasing age, the relation between PWE and egalitarianism was consistently and significantly positive with age among Mestizo Colombians, whereas the relation between PWE and egalitarianism went from significantly positive to nonsignificant among European Americans.

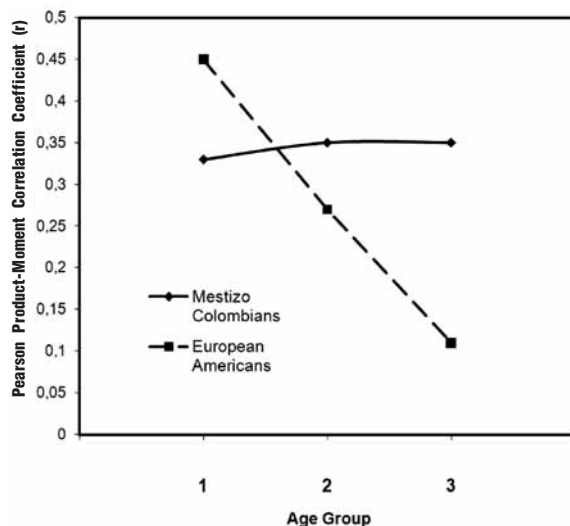


Figure 1. Correlation of Egalitarianism with the Protestant Work Ethic among European Americans and Mestizos. Note: PWE = Protestant Work Ethic; Age Group 1 = 10- to 12-year-olds; Age Group 2 = 13- to 16-year-olds; Age Group 3 = 17- to 25-year olds. European American data were taken from Levy et al. (2006, Study1).

Next, hoping to show conditions in which a consistent intergroup meaning would be found for both European Americans and Colombians, we analyzed the relation between SDO and egalitarianism across the three age groups and two cultures. In separate simultaneous regression analyses, we regressed participants' egalitarianism on variables representing SDO, participants' age groups, culture, the SDO x age group interaction, age group X culture interaction, the SDO X culture interaction, and the SDO X age group X culture interaction. SDO was significantly related, in line with our predictions (and past work), to egalitarianism, $F(1, 607) = 5.19, p < .05, h_p^2 = .009$, showing that SDO was significantly related to less egalitarianism. There were no other significant effects, except a significant effect for culture, $F(1, 607) = 9.73, p < .01, h_p^2 = .016$, showing that SDO was more strongly negatively associated with egalitarianism among European Americans relative to Colombians. Nonetheless, among Colombians, the correlations between SDO and egalitarianism were similar across the age groups ($r_s = -.27, -.20, -.24$, all $p_s < .05$). As reported in the Levy, West, et al. (2006), among the European Americans, the correlations between SDO and egalitarianism were virtually identical across the age groups ($r_s = -.57, -.55, -.56$, all $p_s < .001$).

Discussion

Prior work has shown that among the numerical majority group in the U.S., European Americans, PWE tends to have different intergroup meanings as a function of age or experience in U.S. culture. European American children tend to endorse the egalitarian meaning of PWE more than European American adults, who presumably have more social and cultural experience with PWE as a justifier of inequality, and a greater motivation to use that meaning to justify their relatively more advantaged place in U.S. culture.

In this study, as a contrast and as predicted, among the numerical majority group in Colombia, the correlation between PWE and egalitarianism was significantly positive across the age groups. This finding suggests that among these age groups PWE appears to consistently relate to egalitarianism and that PWE does not appear to have dual intergroup meanings, among the numerical majority group in Colombia. Nonetheless, PWE may still represent an important lay theory in Colombia; however, people's exposure to this lay theory does not appear to develop the same justifying implications over time.

In this study, we also found, as predicted, that the correlation between social dominance orientation and egalitarianism was consistently negative among Colombians. This suggests that Mestizo Colombians, across age groups, seem to see social dominance in a similar way. The consistent negative relation across ages was also found in previous research with European Americans (see Levy, West et al., 2006). Social dominance orientation, then, does not appear to have different intergroup meanings across these age or cultural groups. However, given the low reliability scores of the SDO scale among the Colombian sample, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Study 2

In Study 2, we continued to pursue whether age, social status, and culture need to be taken into account when considering PWE's intergroup meaning. The main goal of Study 2 was to explore within-culture differences including age and social status. Even within cultures such as the U.S. in which the justifier of inequality meaning of PWE is available, not everyone in the culture may be equally exposed to it or equally able to use it (e.g., Jayaratne, Gelman, Feldbaum, Sheldon, Petty & Kardia, 2009). We anticipated racial and ethnic group differences in PWE within cultures in which the two meanings of PWE existed. Namely, the intolerant or justifier meaning of PWE should be more strongly endorsed among the racial and ethnic groups who benefited more from intolerance in society, that is, the groups who are more socially and economically advantaged. Members of disadvantaged groups will likely not utilize the justifier meaning of PWE since it is tied to advantaged group members' denial of the persistence of racism and of the need for policies to protect historically discriminated against groups and their members (see Levy, West & Ramírez, 2005). The egalitarian meaning of PWE however is generally applicable to all groups in suggesting a positive pathway (work) to success and thus, is expected to be endorsed by African Americans. We examine two age groups of African Americans roughly similar to the youngest and oldest age groups of European Americans from Levy, West, et al. (2006) so that we could make a direct comparison. Hence, unlike prior developmental findings among European Americans, we predicted the PWE to be positively associated with egalitarianism across different age groups of African Americans.

Method

Participants

European American participants were drawn from a previously published study (Levy, West et al., 2006, Study 1), which was described in Study 1 of this article. African American participants were matched as closely as possible to the youngest and oldest European American samples. Because this study was intended as a comparison study to the European American sample who were drawn from the New York area of the United States, our African American sample was likewise drawn from the same New York area. The older sample of African Americans were drawn from the same university as the European American sample were, and the younger sample were drawn from a local New York public school similar to the school the European American children attended (both schools were racially/ethnically homogenous schools; mostly African American or mostly European American, respectively). Although it would have been ideal to obtain a middle age group of African American participants, we were unable to do so. The oldest age African American sample included 13 males and 34 females, aged 18 to 25 ($M = 20.87$). The youngest African American sample included 28 males and 27 females, aged 11 to 13 years ($M = 11.62$).

Measures

The measures of PWE and egalitarianism were the same as those used in Levy, West, et al.'s (2006, Study 1) developmental study of European Americans. In the lower half of Table 1 are means, standard deviations, and internal reliabilities of the measures for the African American samples.

Procedure

Consistent with the procedure used by Levy, West, et al. (2006) as well as Study 1 of this paper, two experimenters tested the participants in classrooms of approximately 25 students. For privacy, students were asked to separate their desks or sit one seat apart while completing the survey.

Results

We began by testing our main hypothesis, PWE would have a consistently egalitarian meaning with age among African

Americans unlike our prior findings showing that PWE does not have a consistent intergroup meaning with age (experience) in the United States. In separate simultaneous regression analyses, we regressed participants' egalitarianism on variables representing PWE, participants' age groups, race, the PWE x age group interaction, age group X race interaction, the PWE X race interaction, and the PWE X age group X race interaction. As predicted, the three way interaction was significant, $F(1, 313) = 4.87, p < .05, b_p^2 = .016$. Follow up analyses on the African American sample revealed, a significant PWE main effect, $F(1, 101) = 22.81, p < .001, b_p^2 = .189$, and no other significant effects (all F s < 1.55). The correlations between PWE and egalitarianism were similar across the younger and older age groups (r s = .44, .51, all p s $< .01$). As reported in Levy, West, et al. (2006, Study 1), in the European American sample, by contrast, there was a significant PWE X age group interaction. As depicted in Figure 2, with increasing age, the relation between PWE and egalitarianism was consistently and significantly positive with age among African Americans whereas the relation between PWE and egalitarianism went from significantly positive to non-significant among European Americans.

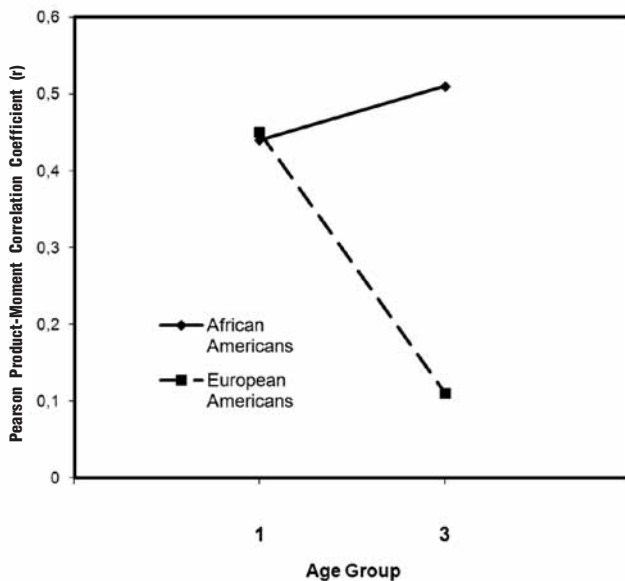


Figure 2. Correlation of Egalitarianism with the Protestant Work Ethic among African Americans and European Americans. Note: PWE = Protestant Work Ethic; Age Group 1 = 9- to 13-year-olds; Age Group 3 = 17-to 25-year olds. European American data were taken from Levy et al. (2006, Study1).

Discussion

In this study, as predicted, among a disadvantaged group in the U.S., African Americans, the correlation between PWE and egalitarianism was significantly positive across age groups. This finding suggests that PWE does not appear to have dual intergroup meanings among African Americans as it does for European Americans. PWE seems to have a social equalizer meaning for African Americans.

General Discussion

The Protestant work ethic (PWE), the belief that hard work leads to success, is a fundamental belief across many cultures, impacting people's social attitudes and behaviors. In the United States with mostly studies of the majority and higher status group of European Americans, researchers have highlighted that the PWE can be used to justify prejudice toward disadvantaged groups such as homeless persons, women, and African Americans (e.g., Crandall, 1994; 2000; Somerman, 1993). Recently, PWE has been shown to also have an equalizer meaning (effort is a social equalizer) among European American children (Levy, West, et al., 2006), and PWE's relation to tolerance has been theorized to depend upon people's age, social status, and culture (Crandall & Martínez, 1996; Levy, West & Ramírez, 2005). In this paper, we have provided additional evidence of the roles of age, social status, and culture on intergroup meaning of PWE. We showed that PWE's connection to tolerance goes beyond European American children. Following from prior work, we consider the important role of age within culture, but we also consider differences across and within cultures.

In Study 1, we showed that among the majority group in Colombia, PWE was positively related to egalitarianism (and negatively related to social dominance orientation) across age groups, presumably because the justifier meaning is less salient and relevant in a culture where people tend to blame others less for their disadvantage. In Study 2, we showed that among African Americans, who have historically been a disadvantaged and stigmatized group, PWE is positively related to egalitarianism across age groups, presumably because the justifier meaning is less relevant and salient to their group.

Limitations and future directions

These studies have some notable limitations that are important to acknowledge. First, participants from only one region of Colombia (Study 1) and only one region of United States (Studies 1 and 2) were recruited; thus, whether the findings are generalizable to other regions is unknown. Future work needs to consider other regions of these countries as well as larger samples of each of the age groups to draw firmer conclusions about within and cross cultures differences in the intergroup meaning of PWE. Furthermore, studying other groups besides Mestizos within Colombia and besides African Americans and European Americans in the United States is crucial to have a fuller understanding of the roles of culture, social status, and age in PWE's intergroup meanings. The non-experimental nature of these studies restricts our ability to draw causal conclusions about the relation between PWE and egalitarianism in the present studies. Although prior work on PWE (e.g., Levy, West, et al., 2006) has provided evidence for a causal role of PWE in intergroup attitudes, future experimental work is needed to draw firm conclusions about the direction of the effects. The between subjects comparison design employed in our studies is limiting in that it allows us to only approximate the evolution of PWE's meaning over time. A longitudinal within-subjects design, which could be used in future studies, would allow us to draw firmer conclusions about how PWE's meaning shifts or does not shift over time for individuals. Because our studies were mostly conducted in classroom environments, our study measures needed to be brief. Although most of our measures demonstrated good internal reliability, future work should incorporate additional measures especially of egalitarianism and tolerance that are relevant to the study of cross-cultural and cross-age research.

Conclusión

In this paper, we provide further evidence that the Protestant work ethic, a prevalent lay theory, that has long been highlighted as a justifier of inequality, also has a social equalizer meaning (hard work is a social equalizer). PWE was positively related to egalitarianism across three age groups of Colombian Mestizos and two age groups of African Americans. These findings, along with other findings and theorizing, suggest that future work should continue to investigate how the intergroup implications of the PWE can vary by people's age, status, and culture.

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