Unpacking negative attitudes towards Moroccans: The interactive effect of ethnicity and gender on perceived morality

Isabel Cuadrado[1] , **Marco Brambilla[2], and Lucía López-Rodríguez[1]**

[1]Department of Psychology and Center for the Study of Migration and Intercultural Relations (CEMyRI), University of Almería, Almería, Spain
[2]Department of Psychology, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy

Research on stereotyping has mainly focused on single social categories such as ethnicity or gender. Extending prior work, here we analyse the effects of the intersection of ethnicity and gender on stereotyping considering the descriptive and prescriptive components of positive and negative stereotype dimensions of morality, sociability and competence. We also examine these interaction effects on the stereotypes–emotions–facilitation behavioural tendencies link. Following a 2×2 between-subjects design, Spanish participants evaluated Moroccan immigrant (vs. Spaniard) women (vs. men). We found interaction effects only on descriptive moral character: Moroccan men are perceived as less moral than Spanish men, and less moral and more immoral than Moroccan women. Moreover, (im)morality has a driving role in predicting less facilitation tendencies towards Moroccan men (vs. Moroccan women and Spanish men) via positive emotions. Our findings reveal the primacy of (im)morality in social perception and helping intentions towards targets varying on gender and ethnicity.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Gender; (Im)morality; Positive emotions; Facilitation tendencies.

Most research on stereotyping has focused on evaluations of a single social category such as ethnicity or gender (e.g. Fiske et al., 2002). Yet, previous research has revealed that the intersection of these two social categories has a unique impact on social perception (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Accordingly, the present study aims to extend prior research by testing how the interaction of gender and ethnicity impacts upon the ascription of the three fundamental stereotype content dimensions.

According to the moral primacy model of impression development (Brambilla et al., 2021; see also Leach et al., 2015), group perceptions rely on three different dimensions: morality (e.g. honesty), sociability (e.g. friendliness) and competence (e.g. intelligence). Morality has a more powerful role in shaping responses towards social targets as it is inferentially necessary to define

human goodness (Leach et al., 2015), and establish whether other social targets represent an opportunity or a threat (Brambilla et al., 2021). Such a primacy is mainly driven by its negative traits (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; see Rusconi et al., 2020, for a review). However, prior work has mainly considered positive moral content and shown that individuals are reluctant to ascribe those traits to social targets. In our study, we included negative traits and tested such a negativity effect directly without implicitly assuming that refusing to ascribe positive valence traits to social targets corresponds to ascribing them negative valence traits.

Moreover, morality is the primary predictor of people's willingness to cooperate and help social targets, and this process is mediated by emotions (see Brambilla et al., 2021, for a review). For example, it has been shown

that only moral stereotypes consistently predict facilitation behavioural tendencies towards Moroccans via positive emotions (Cuadrado et al., 2020). However, prior studies have not considered how the intersection of gender and ethnicity influences such a link.

Previous research has also failed to consider the prescriptive component of the morality dimension, even though prescriptive stereotypes—how social groups' members should be—function to maintain status and power differences between groups (Heilman & Caleo, 2018).

Extending prior work, here we tested the primacy of (im)morality in the social perception of targets varying on gender and ethnicity: (a) when considering the descriptive and prescriptive components of positive and negative stereotype dimensions of morality, sociability and competence and (b) when predicting facilitation behavioural tendencies via emotions. For this purpose, Spaniards evaluated men or women of their ethnic ingroup (Spaniards) or Moroccan immigrants, who represent the 15.9% of foreign residents in this country (INE, 2020), and are devalued by Spaniards and by other immigrant groups (e.g. Cuadrado et al., 2016; López-Rodríguez et al., 2013, 2016).

Based on previous evidence, and according to the outgroup male target hypothesis—race bias is targeted primarily towards male targets (Navarrete et al., 2010), we predict that intersection effects will mainly occur on the dimension of (im)morality, Moroccan men being the primary target of negative evaluations on this dimension (H1).

Accordingly, we anticipate that (im)morality evaluations about Moroccan men will lead to less facilitation tendencies towards them compared to other target groups via positive emotions (H2).

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and forty-one residents in Spain, selected from the general population by incidental sampling, volunteered to participate in the study (conducted from 19 February to 15 March 2020). According to pre-established criteria, participants under 18 years of age or who were not born in Spain ($n = 13$) were excluded from the analyses. The final sample comprised 128 participants (57% women) who ranged from 18 to 73 years ($M_{age} = 38.21$, $SD = 13.39$). A sensitivity power analysis (MANOVA special effects and interactions) revealed that our sample had 80% power to detect a minimum effect size of $f^2 = .148$. Most of the participants were in work (64.8%) and had a university education (71.1%). Male and female participants were similarly distributed in each condition, $\chi^2(6) = 3.88$, $p = .692$. The participants that

evaluated Moroccan women had a lower age than those in the other three conditions, $F(3, 127) = 12.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .233$, but this did not affect our results.

Design and materials

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four versions of the questionnaire, according to the 2 (Target Ethnicity: Moroccan immigrants vs. Spaniards) $\times$ 2 (Target Gender: men vs. women) between-subjects design. Specifically, depending on the condition, participants were asked to evaluate "Moroccan immigrant men" ($n = 31$), "Moroccan immigrant women" ($n = 31$), "Spanish women" ($n = 33$) or "Spanish men" ($n = 33$) in the following measures, presented in this order:

Descriptive stereotypes

They were assessed by nine positive items (López-Rodríguez et al., 2013) and nine negative items (Sayans-Jiménez et al., 2017). Participants were asked to express their opinion about the characteristics they considered TYPICAL of the target; "To what extent do you think (target) ARE, IN GENERAL?: honest, sincere, trustworthy (morality, $\alpha = .87$); malicious, treacherous, false (immorality, $\alpha = .82$); likeable, friendly, warm (sociability, $\alpha = .87$); shy, cold, reserved (unsociability, $\alpha = .62$); competent, intelligent, skilful (competence, $\alpha = .82$); hopeless, ignorant, uncultured (incompetence, $\alpha = .78$)."

Prescriptive stereotypes

Prescriptive morality ($\alpha = .91$), immorality ($\alpha = .86$), sociability ($\alpha = .88$), unsociability ($\alpha = .64$), competence ($\alpha = .89$) and incompetence ($\alpha = .65$) were measured with the same items used for the descriptive dimensions. Participants were asked to express their opinion about the characteristics they considered DESIRABLE in the target; "To what extent do you think (target) SHOULD BE?"

Emotions

We used eight emotions extracted from Fiske et al. (2002) and Mackie and Smith (2018). The participants were asked to indicate "the extent to which you feel or have felt the following emotions about the target": admiration, understanding, respect, gratitude (positive emotions; $\alpha = .82$); anger, fear, distrust, shame (negative emotions; $\alpha = .83$).

Facilitation behavioural tendencies

The participants were asked to report the extent to which they were willing to behave towards the

target group according to five facilitation tendencies items—for example, Recommend them for a job– (α = .80) of the Intergroup Behavioural Tendencies Scale (López-Rodríguez et al., 2016).

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much*) and the items within each measure were presented in a random order.

Materials, data and syntax are available at https://osf .io/exg7c/?view_only=b4e0f33f3a6747b5b3886ee30

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study was approved by the first and third authors' University Ethics Committee (UALBIO2019/032). All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual adult participants included in the study.

RESULTS

In order to test H1 and evaluate the interactive effect of target ethnicity and gender on the descriptive and prescriptive components of positive and negative stereotype dimensions of morality, sociability and competence (12 dependent variables), a MANOVA was performed

(Bonferroni tests were used to analyse pairwise comparisons). As the participant's sex did not affect the outcomes (.096 $\leq$ ps $\leq$ .955), it was not included in the analyses.

Focusing on interaction, we found a multivariate target ethnicity × target gender significant effect on stereotypes, Wilk's λ = .80, $F(12, 113)$ = 2.31, p = .011, η^2_p = .197. There were inter-subject effects only on two dimensions: descriptive morality, $F(1,124)$ = 4.93, p = .028, η^2_p = .038, and descriptive immorality, $F(1,124)$ = 4.30, p = .040, η^2_p = .034. Pairwise comparisons showed that: (a) perceived morality varied depending on the ethnic group only in male targets, $F(1,124)$ = 11.18, p = .001, η^2_p = .083, but not in female targets (p = .840), and (b) perceived morality, $F(1,124)$ = 19.59, $p < .001$, η^2_p = .136, and perceived immorality, $F(1,124)$ = 12.21, p = .001, η^2_p = .090, varied depending on gender only in Moroccan targets, but not in Spanish targets (p = .172 and p = .533, respectively). Concretely, Moroccan men were perceived as less moral than Spanish men, and less moral and more immoral than Moroccan women (see Figure 1).

In order to test H2, and since perceived morality is different depending on the ethnic group in male targets, but not in female targets, we examined if target ethnicity could have an indirect effect on facilitation behavioural tendencies through descriptive morality and emotions (acting serially) and if this effect varied by the target gender. Thus, we tested two moderated serial mediation models (model 83 PROCESS; Hayes, 2018) using target ethnicity (0 = Spaniards; 1 = Moroccans) as the predictor variable, target gender as the moderator variable
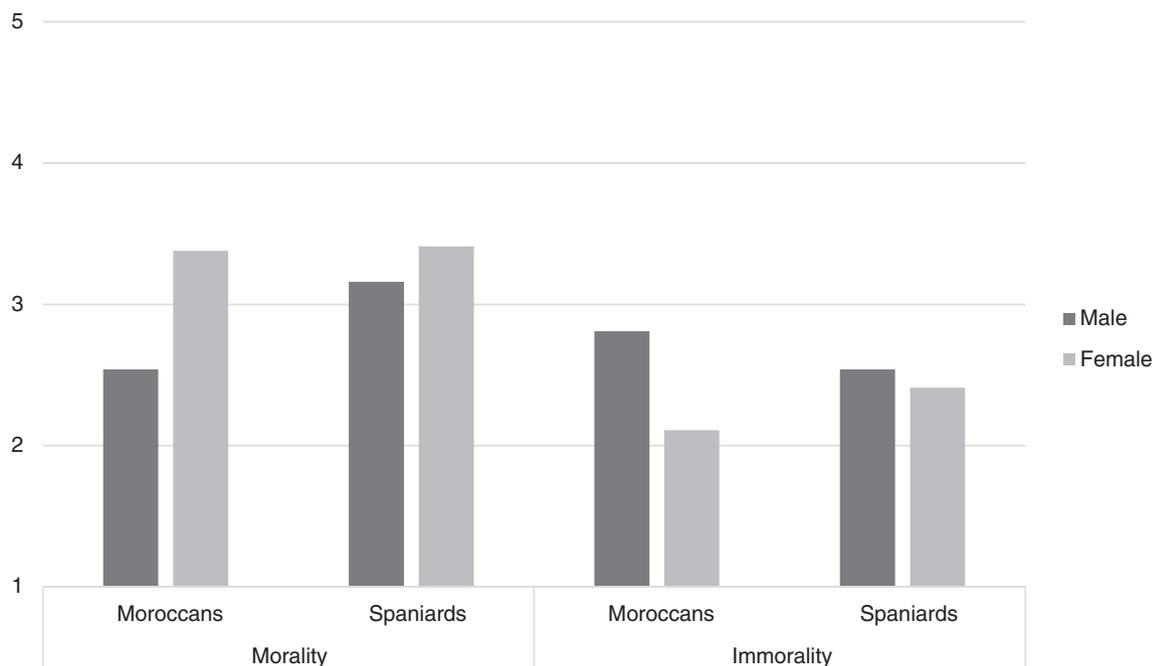

Figure 1. Target ethnicity and gender interaction on descriptive morality and immorality. *Note:* According to one-sample t-tests against the scale midpoint (3), perceived immorality is significantly low for all targets, except for Moroccan men, which is medium. The morality of women (either Moroccans or Spaniards) significantly exceeds the scale midpoint, whereas it is moderate for Spanish men and significantly low for Moroccan men.
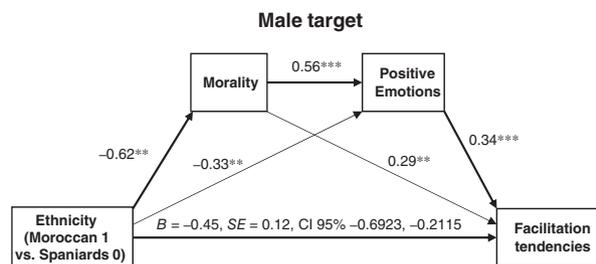
Male target

Figure 2. Effect of target ethnicity on facilitation tendencies through descriptive morality and positive emotions in male targets. $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

(0 = male; 1 = female), facilitation tendencies as the dependent variable, morality as first mediator, and emotions (positive or negative) as second mediator.

The regression model including morality and positive emotions as mediators accounted for 44% of the variance, $F(3,124) = 32.45$, $p < .001$. The index of moderated mediation was significant, $B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, CI 95% 0.0077–0.2498. Thus, participants showed less facilitation tendencies towards Moroccan men than towards Spanish men through a reduction in the perception of morality and positive emotions, $B = -0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, CI 95% −0.2414 to −0.0311 (see Figure 2). This indirect effect was not significant for Moroccan and Spanish women, $B = -0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, CI 95% −0.0883 to 0.0645.

When negative emotions were included as second mediator the model was not significant, $B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, CI 95% −0.0416 to 0.0681. Based on differences found depending on gender on perceived morality/immorality in Moroccan targets, but not in Spaniard targets, and to test H2, we examined if target gender could have an indirect effect on behavioural tendencies via descriptive morality or immorality and emotions (acting serially), and if this effect varied by the target ethnicity.

The regression model including morality and positive emotions as mediators accounted for 38% of the variance, $F(3,124) = 25.12$, $p < .001$. The index of moderated mediation was significant, $B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.08$, CI 95% 0.0166 to 0.3141. That is, participants showed more facilitation tendencies towards Moroccan women than towards Moroccan men through an increment in the perception of morality and positive emotions, $B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.08$, CI 95% 0.0707–0.3825 (Figure 3a). This path was not significant for Spanish women and men, $B = 0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, CI 95% −0.0112 to 0.1619.

The moderated mediation was not confirmed when negative emotions were included as second mediator, $B = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, CI 95% −0.0765 to 0.0115.

The regression model when the first mediator was immorality and the second mediator positive emotions accounted for 35% of the variance, $F(3,124) = 21.82$,

$p < .001$. The index of moderated mediation was significant, $B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.06$, CI 95% 0.0066–0.2428. Thus, participants showed more facilitation tendencies towards Moroccan women than towards Moroccan men through a reduction in the perception of immorality and an increment in positive emotions, $B = 0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, CI 95% 0.0376–0.2662 (Figure 3b). This indirect effect was not found when assessing Spanish women and men, $B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.03$, CI 95% −0.0378 to 0.1043.

The moderated mediation was not confirmed when negative emotions were included as second mediator, $B = -0.06$, $SE = 0.05$, CI 95% −0.1870 to 0.0160.

DISCUSSION

Our findings show that the intersection effects occur only on the descriptive stereotype dimensions of morality and immorality: Moroccan men are perceived as less moral than both Spanish men and Moroccan women, and more immoral than Moroccan women. These results support H1 and extend those about the established primacy of morality (e.g. Brambilla et al., 2021; Leach et al., 2015) and immorality (Rusconi et al., 2020) in social perception by approaching the gender and ethnicity intersection. They also confirm the relevance of considering both positive and negative moral qualities on social perception (Rusconi et al., 2020; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Our study further shows that Moroccan men are the most devalued target on such a dimension, according to the outgroup male target hypothesis (Navarrete et al., 2010). These findings also have practical implications for improving the perception of Moroccans in Spain. Thus, increasing the visibility of Moroccan women may be an efficient strategy, since they are perceived as equally moral as Spanish women, and as more moral and less immoral than Moroccan men. This would facilitate the association of the category "Moroccans" with women (rather than men) and, consequently, improve the valuation of the category as a whole.

The lack of interaction effects on prescriptive stereotypes might be due to the fact we asked participants to evaluate the targets without reference to any particular context. For instance, gender stereotypes are widely prescriptive in working environments (e.g. Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Thus, future studies may test the interactive contribution of gender and ethnic prescriptive stereotypes in more specific contexts.

Moreover, we found that participants displayed less facilitation behaviours towards Moroccan men compared to Spanish men and Moroccan women through perceived (im)morality and positive emotions. These findings support H2 and, by addressing the interaction effects, extend the research about the importance of (im)morality in predicting people's willingness to help social targets through positive emotions (Brambilla et al., 2021; Cuadrado
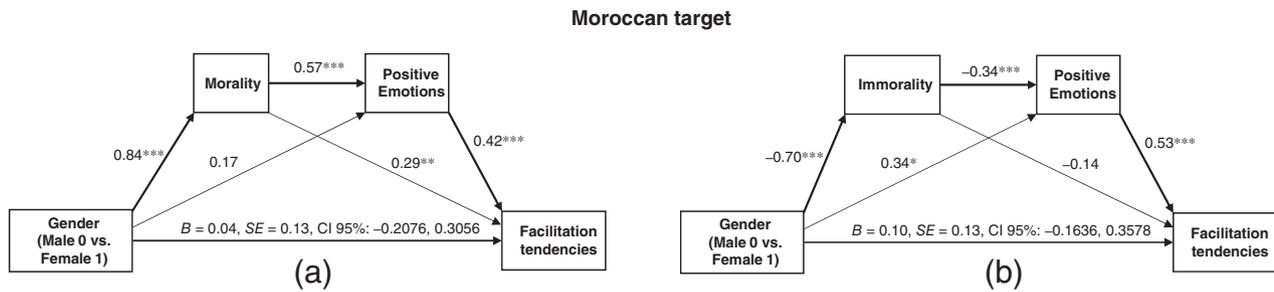
Moroccan target

Figure 3. (a) Effect of target gender on facilitation tendencies through descriptive morality and positive emotions in Moroccan targets. (b) Effect of target gender on facilitation tendencies through descriptive immorality and positive emotions in Moroccan targets. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

et al., 2020). We do not confirm previous patterns with negative emotions, which is advantageous for improving intergroup relations, since behaviours triggered by positive emotions have long-term beneficial effects, contrasting to behaviours generated by negative emotions that are immediate (Fredrickson, 2013).

Our work has some limitations. Indeed, we employed a small sample size. Thus, future studies should replicate our findings, especially the moderated mediations paths, by considering more powerful samples. Likewise, the ingroup–outgroup bias might affect the interpretation of our results. In this vein, further studies should explore whether participants' identification with the ingroup and their prejudice towards the outgroup moderate the findings. It would also be interesting to test our predictions by considering a wider set of outgroups in order to increase the ecological validity and see how historical relations between outgroups might affect the pattern of results.

Despite the limitations, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating the primacy of perceived im(morality) in social perception of targets varying on gender and ethnicity, and the key role of this dimension in shaping prosocial behaviours when considering the Spanish–Moroccan/women–men relations.

REFERENCES

Brambilla, M., Sacchi, S., Rusconi, P., & Goodwin, G. (2021). The primacy of morality in impression development: Theory, research, and future directions. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *64*, 1–76. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2021.03.001

Cuadrado, I., López-Rodríguez, L., & Constantin, A. (2020). "A matter of trust": Perception of morality increases willingness to help through positive emotions. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *23*, 462–480. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430219838606

Cuadrado, I., López-Rodríguez, L., & Navas, M. (2016). La perspectiva de la minoría: Estereotipos y emociones entre grupos inmigrantes [The minority's perspective: Stereotypes and emotions between immigrant groups]. *Anales de Psicología*, *32*, 535–544. https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.32.2.205341

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 878–902. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878

Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). Positive emotions broaden and build. In P. Devine & A. Plant (Eds.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 3–46). Academic Press.

Ghavami, N., & Peplau, L. A. (2013). An intersectional analysis of gender and ethnic stereotypes: Testing three hypotheses. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *37*, 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312464203

Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2th ed.). Guilford Press.

Heilman, M. E., & Caleo, S. (2018). Gender discrimination in the workplace. In A. J. Colella & E. B. King (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of workplace discrimination* (pp. 73–88). Oxford University Press.

INE (2020). *Avance de la Estadística del Padrón Continuo a 1 de enero de 2020. [Advance of the Continuous Census Statistics at January 1, 2020]*. https://www.ine.es/prensa/pad_2020_p.pdf

Leach, C. W., Bilali, R., & Pagliaro, S. (2015). Groups and morality. In M. Mikulincer, P. R. Shaver, J. F. Dovidio, & J. Simpson (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 123–149). APA.

López-Rodríguez, L., Cuadrado, I., & Navas, M. (2013). Aplicación extendida del Modelo del Contenido de los Estereotipos (MCE) hacia tres grupos de inmigrantes en España [Extended application of the stereotype content model (SCM) toward three immigrant groups in Spain]. *Estudios de Psicología*, *34*, 197–208. https://doi.org/10.1174/021093913806751375

López-Rodríguez, L., Cuadrado, I., & Navas, M. (2016). Acculturation preferences and behavioral tendencies between majority and minority groups: The mediation role of emotions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *46*, 401–417. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2181

Mackie, D. M., & Smith, E. R. (2018). Intergroup emotions theory: Production, regulation, and modification of group-based emotions. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *58*, 1–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2018.03.001

Navarrete, C. D., McDonald, M. M., Molina, L. E., & Sidanius, J. (2010). Prejudice at the nexus of race and gender: An outgroup male target hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *98*, 933–945. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017931

Rusconi, P., Sacchi, S., Brambilla, M., Capellini, R., & Cherubini, P. (2020). Being honest and acting consistently: Boundary conditions of the negativity effect in the attribution of morality. *Social Cognition*, *38*, 146–178. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2020.38.2.146

Sayans-Jiménez, P., Rojas, A., & Cuadrado, I. (2017). Is it advisable to include negative attributes to assess the stereotype content? Yes, but only in the morality dimension. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *58*, 170–178. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12346

Skowronski, J. J., & Carlston, D. E. (1987). Social judgment and social memory: The role of cue diagnosticity in negativity, positivity, and extremity biases. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 689–699. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.4.689