

# Special Section on Stigma in Perspectives on Psychological Science: Group Differences, Not Deficits

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Psychological scientists are faced with the arduous task of identifying distinctions between humans without stigmatizing groups of people based on these differences. In this special section of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, experts present reasons for why differences in gender, race, sexual orientation, and culture should not be framed as deficits within the field of psychology.

## [Stigma From Psychological Science: Group Differences, Not Deficits—Introduction to Stigma Special Section](#)

*Morton Ann Gernsbacher*

Stigma occurs when individuals are devalued by others for having a different trait or attributes. Gernsbacher introduces this special section on stigma within psychological science research by observing that psychological scientists have a tendency to frame individual and group differences as deficits, which enables stigma and may lead to biased interpretations of research data.

## [Venus and Mars or Down to Earth: Stereotypes and Realities of Gender Differences](#)

*Susan T. Fiske*

Psychological scientists often think in categorical dichotomies, dividing a broad population into two groups—for example, contrasting men and women and exaggerating differences between the genders. Gender entails two fundamental dimensions that characterize intergroup stigma: perceived warmth and perceived competence. These dimensions identify groups that are viewed with ambivalence and they often force trade-offs (e.g., professional women are seen as competent but cold). The dimensions add a more nuanced view of stigma—groups can be stigmatized even if they are viewed positively on one dimension and, by implication, negatively on the other dimensions.

## [Sexual Orientation Differences as Deficits: Science and Stigma in the History of American Psychology](#)

*Gregory M. Herek*

For much of the 20th century, sexual-orientation differences were treated as deficits by Psychology

(defined here broadly to include psychiatry and mental health professions), and it wasn't until 1973 that homosexuality was removed from the DSM. Although Psychology is now dedicated to challenging sexual stigma through research, teaching, and advocacy, the differences-as-deficits assumption is still evident in public debates about sexual orientation and sexual minorities. Psychology still has an important role to play in eliminating sexual stigma, not only by correcting falsely held beliefs but also by addressing the underlying framework that perpetuates stigma.

### [I'm White and You're Not: The Value of Unraveling Ethnocentric Science](#)

*James M. Jones*

Research that stigmatizes specific human groups is destructive, but there are numerous historical examples of psychological research that was designed to demonstrate the inferiority of Blacks and Native Americans. Many psychological ideas explored in the lab arise from observations and experiences of the scientists themselves—in this way, having diverse scientists and psychology faculty may result in more diverse research being pursued.

### [Culture and the Home-Field Disadvantage](#)

*Douglas Medin, Will Bennis, and Michael Chandler*

There is a home-field disadvantage for cultural studies: The scientist conducting the research often uses his or her own culture as a starting point and basis of comparison with other cultures. This may result in formation of cultural differences that are not based in reality and also affects whether a group's cultural practices seem normal or deficient. Collaborative research and taking multiple perspectives are two ways that may help overcome the home-field disadvantage.