

The weirdest people in the world: The inductive challenge for psychology

Behavioral scientists routinely publish broad claims about human psychology, cognition, and behavior in the world's top journals based on samples drawn almost entirely from members of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies. Researchers assume that either there is little variation across human populations, or that these "standard subjects" are as representative of the species as any other. Are these assumptions justified? I will review the comparative database from across the behavioral sciences which will suggest both that there is substantial variability in experimental results across populations and that standard subjects are particularly unusual compared with the rest of the species—frequent outliers for many key domains. The comparative findings suggest that members of WEIRD societies are among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans. Overall, the empirical patterns suggest that we need to be less cavalier in addressing questions of *human* nature on the basis of data drawn from this particularly thin, and rather unusual, slice of humanity. I will propose some ways to structurally re-organize the behavioral sciences to best tackle these challenges.