

Arab Cultural Influences on Intertemporal Reasoning

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and

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ABSTRACT

All known cultures deal with time. How they understand time is a defining cultural characteristic, especially in contrast to the Western cultural understanding. This paper uses the term *intertemporal reasoning* to refer to the psychosocial and cultural processes engaged when people either integrate past experiences and events or project forward to the future. Available literature (in English) on Arab culture is explored to contrast how that culture reasons about time and events, with respect to Western cultures. A number of themes emerge from this synthesis, including the role that attribution of causality plays in Western culture as a basis for interpretation of the past, and the tendency of Arab culture to integrate events into an associative *gestalt* as a basis for understanding and explanation. The results suggest that Arab culture has traditions that may place less emphasis than Western cultures on temporal sequencing as a key organizing principle, both in terms of cognitive processes and in terms of cultural functions such as storytelling. Furthermore, the poetic quality of Arab culture favors an associative approach to the integration of past and present, as opposed to the causal approach of Western cultures. As a practical matter, it is suggested that Arab cultural traditions concerning time and events may play an important role in how day-to-day experience is both encoded and recalled as part of reconstructing recent personal histories (e.g., where one has been) in terms of the ordering of events in the recent past.

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