

WANING OF STEREOTYPIC PERCEPTIONS IN SMALL GROUPS: IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND EROSION OF GENDER EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN

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Changes in the gender-stereotypic perceptions of men and women were examined in a prospective study of MBA study groups ($N = 253$). At the outset of the semester, group members perceived women, as compared to men, as more "communal" (other-focused) but equally "agentic" (self-focused). Over the subsequent 9 weeks, gender-stereotypic perceptions of women faded. The extent to which group members individuated one another at the outset of the semester predicted the extent to which they developed appraisals that verified their partners' self-views. These identity negotiation processes, in turn, predicted change in stereotypic perceptions.

On the face of it, it would appear that the life expectancy of stereotypic perceptions of others should be stunningly short. After all, many lead-

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ing theorists have defined social stereotypes as "exaggerated beliefs about others." Given this, it would seem that a little experience with the targets of stereotypes should cause perceivers to recognize just how exaggerated their stereotypic perceptions are and discard them.

Yet evidence that perceivers actually do abandon their stereotypic perceptions of target persons has come almost exclusively from controlled laboratory studies in which the responses of targets are carefully scripted (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Kunda & Oleson, 1997; for a review, see Kunda & Thagard, 1996). As a result, relatively little is known about the nature and mediators of changes in stereotypic perceptions in naturally occurring settings.

To address this gap in the literature, we examine changes in people's stereotypic perceptions within a naturally occurring setting (small groups of MBA students) over a several-week period. We assume that change occurs as perceivers and targets engage in a process of identity negotiation. Perceivers are likely to abandon their stereotypic perceptions insofar as they individuate targets (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). At the same time, targets are most likely to encourage perceivers to abandon their stereotypic perceptions insofar as they behave in a self-congruent manner (Swann, 1983) that clashes with the stereotype. We are specifically interested in changes in gender-stereotypic perceptions triggered by the process of identity negotiation.

GENDER STEREOTYPES

Hacker's (1951) classic exploration of gender stereotypes revealed substantial differences in perceptions of men and women, with men being viewed as especially agentic (e.g., focused on personal gains) and women being viewed as particularly communal (e.g., concerned with other's welfare as well as their own; see Bakan, 1966; Spence, 1984). The sweeping social changes that occurred during the last half of the 20th century altered some of these stereotypes but not others. Research reviewed by Spence and Buckner (2000), for example, suggests that Westerners still believe that women are more communal (e.g., sensitive to other's feelings) than men. In addition, although people now believe that women equal men on forms of agency not involving social dominance (e.g., self-reliance and independence),

they continue to believe that men are more agentic than women on qualities such as leadership and competitiveness (perhaps because ascribing high levels of dominative agency to women would require relinquishing the belief that women are more communal than men; see Rudman & Glick, 2001).

These observations provide hints about the likely gender-related stereotypes of the participants in our research—MBA students. One straightforward prediction is that women should be perceived as more communal (i.e., other-focused) than men. Nevertheless, because female MBA students are more likely to be viewed as career women rather than as possessing *traditional* communal qualities (e.g., maternal traits), we operationalized communal as *other-focused in a business context* (i.e., as possessing traits such as cooperative, fair, and trustworthy). Our predictions regarding perceptions of females' dominative agency were less clear-cut. On the one hand, Rudman and Glick's (2001) findings suggest that people might impute more dominative agency to men than to women. On the other hand, by dint of their position in an MBA program, female MBA students may be perceived as rivaling men in the dominative agency department.

THE IMPACT OF IDENTITY NEGOTIATION ON THE FATE OF GENDER STEREOTYPIC PERCEPTIONS

We suggest that for perceivers to abandon their stereotypes, two conditions must be met. First, perceivers who are relying on stereotypes to understand targets must come to see targets as unique individuals or "individuate" them (e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1993; Mettrick & Cowan, 1996; Monteith, 1993). Individuation is thus a necessary (but not sufficient) condition of abandonment of stereotypes. Second, targets must communicate information about themselves that enables perceivers to see them not only as unique but also as uniquely themselves; that is, targets must bring perceivers to see them as they see themselves (i.e., in a self-congruent manner; see Swann, 1983). In what follows, we elaborate on the contribution of both perceivers and targets to these identity negotiation processes (Swann, 1987).

THE PERCEIVER'S CONTRIBUTION: INDIVIDUATION
VERSUS HOMOGENIZATION

During initial encounters, perceivers may rely on overt characteristics of targets such as appearance (e.g., gender, race, social class) as a basis for making inferences about them. For example, perceivers may use appearance cues, in combination with social stereotypes, as a basis for imputing various qualities to targets. In this way, at first glance, perceivers may come to regard targets as homogenous exemplars of the stereotypes associated with their groups rather than as unique individuals.

Of course, some perceivers move beyond viewing targets in stereotypical terms. Theorists generally agree that the key process through which perceivers move beyond stereotypes is individuation (e.g., Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). That is, whereas some perceivers persist in "painting all targets with the same brush" or homogenizing them, others will come to regard targets as unique individuals. In this article, we assume that the tendency for perceivers to homogenize versus individuate targets will play a critical role in determining whether they abandon their stereotypes in favor of individuated impressions.

Note that because stereotype formation and subsequent individuation are independent processes, the tendency to form stereotypes about targets initially may be unrelated to the tendency to individuate targets later on. That is, the same perceivers who use stereotypes to form impressions of targets upon meeting them may or may not later use individuating information about targets as a basis for revising their opinions of them.

THE TARGET'S CONTRIBUTION: SELF-VERIFICATION AND
ACCURACY PATHWAYS TO SELF-CONGRUENT APPRAISALS

Two theoretical approaches have been advanced to explain how targets bring perceivers to see them in a self-congruent (or, more simply, "congruent") manner. One such approach, self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) assumes that people want others to see them as they see themselves. Two reasons theoretically underlie this motive. First, from an epistemic perspective, self-verifying evaluations will

bolster people's perceptions of psychological coherence by reassuring them that their social relations confirm expectations. Second, self-verifying evaluations will signal people that they are recognized as the persons that they believe themselves to be, which they may take as a sign that their interactions will unfold smoothly ("pragmatic" concerns). For both of these reasons, people may actively strive to bring their interaction partners to see them in a self-congruent manner.

A key assumption underlying self-verification theory is that targets are, at some level, motivated to behaviorally evoke self-congruent reactions. An alternative view makes no such assumption regarding a motive to evoke congruent reactions; instead, targets elicit self-congruent reactions by routinely displaying behaviors that accurately reflect who they truly are. From this vantage point, targets passively display behaviors that perceivers use as a basis for developing accurate perceptions of targets—perceptions that happen to be congruent with targets' self-views (Jussim, 1991).

Whatever the underlying mechanism may be, the tendency for targets to behave in a self-congruent manner is important because it will shape perceivers' impressions of targets. That is, targets who communicate self-congruent information about themselves will help perceivers who individuate them (see targets as unique) to adopt individuated perceptions that verify targets' self-views (i.e., they will come to see targets as targets see themselves). If targets' self-views clash with perceivers' stereotypic perceptions, then their self-congruent actions may induce perceivers to abandon their stereotypic perceptions. In this way, self-congruent behavior may mediate the link between individuation and changes in stereotypic perceptions.

To test these hypotheses, we followed small groups of MBA students over a period of several weeks. We used a round-robin design in which all participants served as both perceivers and targets of perception. Our design therefore provided a unique opportunity to examine, over a several-week period, the impact of identity negotiation processes on changes in gender-stereotypic perceptions.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 423 first-year MBA students at the University of Texas at Austin volunteered. Most participants were male (74%), Caucasian (67%), and U.S. citizens (82%); average age was 27 years. Prior to the beginning of the semester, the School of Business randomly divided members of the incoming class into 83 study groups with four to six members per group, and they remained in these groups for the remainder of their first 15-week semester.¹

PROCEDURE

Overview of Design

Theoretically, identity negotiation processes begin as soon as group members encounter one another. With this in mind, we conducted the first two data collection sessions during the orientation week for entering MBA students. Specifically, we measured self-views 1 or 2 days prior to the groups' initial meeting and impressions of other group members immediately following the groups' initial meeting. We introduced the first session (T1a) by asking students to participate in an investigation of study groups that would involve completing a series of questionnaires over the semester. Participants completed the initial measure of self-views as well as several other measures that are irrelevant to our concerns here.

Over the next 2 days, participants returned to indicate their initial measures of impressions of other group members (T1b). At the start of this session, participants learned of their group assignments and then interacted with the other group members for 10 minutes. Afterwards, participants recorded their impression of each of the other members of the group. Because the T1a and T1b sessions took place within 2 or 3 days of one another, we will henceforward refer to both as the "initial or early session."

1. Three earlier papers reported data from this data set (Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002; Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000), but none examined gender stereotypes or their erosion.

The next session (T2 or "later session") occurred 9 weeks into the semester. Participants completed the same measures of self-views and impressions of other group members during each session.

MEASURES

Initial Impressions of Group Members

Participants rated themselves and each of the other members on six gender-stereotypic and five gender-neutral traits. Ratings were made relative to other first-year MBA students in the university on graduated-interval scales ranging from 1 (bottom 5%) to 10 (top 5%). Three items composed the index of perceived communality: cooperative, fair, and trustworthy (α s = .71, .87, initial and later sessions, respectively). Three items composed the index of perceived dominative agency: leadership, competitiveness, and intelligence (α s = .54, .78, initial and later sessions, respectively). Several items (creative and/or artistic ability, perceived worth, likable/competent, hard worker) were not included in either the communality or agency scales on an a priori basis because they seemed at best weakly related to communality or dominative agency. Social skills/social competence was excluded because including it in the communality scale reduced the coefficient α . Finally, although perceived sport competence might seem related to agency, we conceptualized agency as emphasizing self-focus and many of the sports activities in which our MBA students were involved were communally oriented.

Individuation and Homogenization

Most past measures of individuation have required that participants possess knowledge about the distributions of the in-group and out-group (Linville, Fischer, & Salavey, 1989; Park & Judd, 1990). Because such measures were incommensurate with our goal of measuring individuation in a naturally occurring setting unobtrusively, we adapted a measure that Boldry and Kashy (1999) recently developed to assess *out*-group homogeneity. Computationally, Boldry and Kashy's measure utilizes Kenny's (1994) Social Relations Model (SRM). SRM is analogous to a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) design that allows researchers to decompose the variance in a given rating into three components: perceiver, target, and relationship. Perceiver, target, and

relationship variance are computed in ways that parallel the computation of main and interaction effects in conventional ANOVA except that SRM corrects for the bias due to the total N (without this correction, increments in the number of perceivers produce spurious increments in target variance; see Appendix B of Kenny, 1994). The perceiver variance is the amount of variation in the ratings that can be explained by characteristics of the perceivers—the tendency for perceivers to “paint all targets with the same brush” or homogenize them. In contrast, the target and relationship variance is the amount of variation in the ratings that can be explained by the characteristics of the targets, either alone (target variance) or in interaction with perceivers (relationship variance). Both the target and relationship variance can therefore be viewed as manifestations of individuation, because both reflect the impact of target characteristics on the impressions of perceivers. These measures of homogenization and individuation are computed at the group level.²

For the ease of comparison across items, results are reported in terms of the relative variance; that is, any one variance component is divided by the sum of the total variance, and thus the sum of relative perceiver variance, relative target variance, and relative relationship variance is 1. The amount of both perceiver variance ($M = 43\%$) and relationship variance ($M = 46\%$) were significant for all 11 items, but the target variance ($M = 11\%$) was not significant for 5 out of the 11 items. The minimal amounts of target variance presumably reflected the fact that targets and perceivers had been acquainted for 10 minutes only, which did not give targets an opportunity to establish the widely shared consensual impression of themselves needed to produce substantial target variance. This explanation of the low target variance is supported by the fact that target variance was significant for all 11 items at Time 2. In any event, the nonsignificance of nearly half of the target variance items at Time 1 prompted us to exclude them from the measure of individuation, because Kenny (1995) indi-

2. Therefore, although it may be somewhat nonintuitive for some people to conceptualize these effects across levels of analysis, we believe that at the end of the day the important point is that the logic on which these analyses are based is sound, the data support our conclusions, and although it would have been nice to have a more intuitive analytical approach, our approach was uniquely well suited to addressing the questions that we sought to address.

cates that non-significant effects are uninterpretable (however, target effects were controlled for in the computation of perceiver and relationship variance).

The exclusion of target variance from our analyses left us with perceiver variance as the index of homogenization and relationship variance as the index of individuation. There was a strong negative correlation between these two indices ($r = -.92$). This substantial correlation, together with the fact that we wanted to create an index that would be analogous to previous, single-index measures of individuation (e.g., Linville et al., 1989; Park & Judd, 1990), led us to compute the ratio of the perceiver variance to the relationship variance (which we multiplied by -1 to ease interpretation). This index of homogenization-individuation (hereafter simply "the individuation index") was internally consistent across the 11 dimensions on which perceivers rated targets, $\alpha = .81$ (as were the α s for the individual indices—.83 for the perceiver variance index and .77 for the relationship variance index), leading us to use the average of the 11 dimensions (a more restrictive index based only on the 6 items in the agency-communality indices was highly correlated with the general index [$r = .93$] and yielded a similar pattern of results). The mean of the individuation index was 1.20 ($SD = 1.42$). Low values on the individuation index indicated substantial amounts of homogenization, and high values on our individuation index indicated substantial amounts of individuation. Note that in virtually all instances, analyses of the component indices (i.e., perceiver and relationship variance) confirm the conclusions based on the individuation index.

To obtain the amount of the perceiver and relationship variance on each of gender-stereotypic and gender-neutral traits, we used Kenny's (1995) SOREMO software package. Because SOREMO requires that there be no missing data, we included only those groups that had (a) complete data, (b) only a few missing data from a particular set of ratings, or (c) complete data except that one individual rated all but one or two group members. For this reason, the final sample size consisted of 57 groups (253 persons). Deleting these participants seemed unproblematic because a series of independent t -tests on all our variables indicated that the excluded groups did not differ from the groups that were included.

Congruence Indices

Congruence was the extent to which the appraisals of perceivers, assessed after 9 weeks, agreed with the self-views of targets, assessed at the beginning of the semester. To index the amount of congruence enjoyed by individual targets or group of targets, we first computed the absolute value of the difference between a given initial target's self-views (at T1a) and the average of perceivers' later impressions of that target (at T2). We then averaged these congruence scores across the 11 dimensions to arrive at an overall congruence score for each target. The congruence score for each group was the average congruence score of all members of that group.

It might seem worrisome that the T1b measure of appraisals was used for three measures (change in stereotypic beliefs, congruence, and individuation). Nevertheless, shared method variance is not problematic because: (a) different variables comprised the measures of belief change and congruence, (b) the individuation measure was based on variance and the other indices were not, and (c) the components of the individuation measure (i.e., perceiver and relationship variance) were computed after controlling for target variance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THE NATURE AND FATE OF PERCEIVERS' INITIAL GENDER-STEREOTYPIC BELIEFS

At the outset of the semester, perceivers saw women as more communal ($M = .37$) than men ($M = -.13$), $t(251) = 3.30, p < .01$, but equally agentic, $t(251) = 1.56, p > .05$. Moreover, these effects were uncorrelated with sex of the perceiver, $r_s(252) -.04$ to $.02, p > .05$.³ Overall, these findings are compatible with Spence and Buckner's (2000) evidence that stereotypes about female communality have persisted. They also confirm our suspicion that female MBA students might be subtyped as "career women" and consequently be thought to rival men in dominative agency.

3. These means were based on the target and perceiver effects from SRM, which correct for potential bias introduced in ratings due to the use of different perceivers in rating any given target (Kenny, 1994).

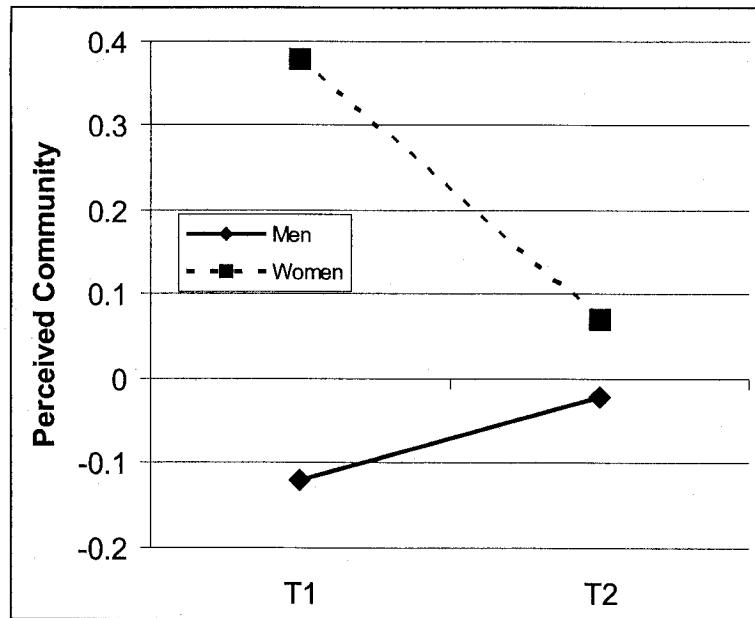


FIGURE 1. Changes in perceptions of men and women's communality over time.

Perceivers' stereotype-based impressions of women eroded over time. The findings plotted in Figure 1 show that after 9 weeks of interaction, the tendency for perceivers to view women as more communal than men disappeared. That is, at T2, perceivers rated men and women as equally communal, $t(251) = -.29, ns$ (as earlier, perceivers imputed equal amounts of agency to women and men, $t(251) = 1.33, ns$). Two trends contributed to the fading of these stereotypic perceptions: Women came to be seen as less communal, and men came to be seen as more communal. Table 1 shows how perceptions of men and women changed over time for each of the components of the agency and communal scales.

The number of women in the study groups had no impact on the fading of stereotypic beliefs about communality. That is, when we divided the sample into two groups based on whether there were one or two women in the groups (only one group had three women and none had more), there were no differences in the extent to which

TABLE 1. Correlations between Gender and Perceptions of Perceivers (Based on the SRM Target Effect Estimates) for the Early and Later Session

	Early	Later
Intellectual/academic ability (Agency)	-.13*	-.10
Social skills	.21*	.11
Creative and artistic ability	.32*	.14*
Leadership (Agency)	.03	-.07
A hard worker	.06	.15*
Competency at sport	-.37*	-.30*
Trustworthy (Communality)	.21*	.08
Cooperative (Communality)	.16*	-.00
Fair (Communality)	.11	-.03
Competitive (Agency)	-.14*	-.04
Likable and competent in general	.10	-.02

Note. $N = 253$. In all cases we set gender = 1 if female, 0 if male. A positive correlation represents that women were seen as higher than men on that dimension, and a negative correlation represents that women were seen as lower than men on that dimension.

gender-stereotypic beliefs about communality faded in the two groups ($t < 1$, $M_s = -.59, -.40$, respectively).

In principle, the convergence of perceivers' perceptions of the communality of women and men over time could have reflected regression to the mean (e.g., Campbell & Kenny, 1999). If regression to the mean explains our finding, however, those groups who showed the largest stereotype erosion effects (the highly individuating groups) should have started off with particularly high ratings of female communality and particularly low ratings of male communality. Contrary to this possibility, the correlations between individuation and perceivers' perception of communality early in the semester were nonsignificant for both female ($r = .18, p > .05$) and male targets ($r = -.12, p > .05$). Furthermore, if changes in perceivers' perceptions were merely statistical artifacts, they should not be systematically related to individuation and congruence. We test this possibility next.

INDIVIDUATION OF TARGETS AT THE INITIAL SESSION AND EROSION OF STEREOTYPIC PERCEPTIONS

We correlated individuation early in the semester with changes in perceptions of communality (dominative agency was ignored here

because perceptions of this quality did not change). Inspection of the correlations within each target gender indicated that individuation predicted the erosion of stereotypic perceptions of male as well as female targets. That is, those groups who individuated their group members came to see men as more communal, $r(56) = .39, p < .05$, and those groups who individuated their group members came to see women as less communal, $r(52) = -.29, p < .05$ (the *df* are relatively low because these analyses were conducted at the group level).

Further analyses showed that although early individuation predicted abandonment of stereotypic perceptions, some time needed to elapse for it to have this effect. That is, at T1, individuation was correlated with neither perceived agency, $r = .04, .02, ns$, nor perceived communality, $r = -.19, .11, ns$, women and men respectively. Apparently, perceivers needed substantial experience with targets before their tendency to individuate targets began to erode their stereotypic perceptions of targets. The data presented next support this idea.

INCREASES IN CONGRUENCE OVER THE SEMESTER

Evidence that congruence increased was apparent in that perceivers' perceptions of targets' communality were independent of targets' communality ratings initially but significant later in the semester, $r_s(252) = .04$ and $.18$, respectively, although this increase was only marginally significant, $t = 1.67, p < .10$. Perceiver's perceptions of target's agency and target's agency ratings were correlated both at the outset and later on, $r_s(252) = .15, .49$, both $p_s < .05$, and this increase was significant, $t(251) = 5.23, p < .001$.

CONGRUENCE MEDIATES INDIVIDUATION AND THE EROSION OF STEREOTYPES

To test whether congruence mediated the effect of individuation on changes in stereotypic conceptions, we first averaged the congruence scores across the 11 dimensions to arrive at an overall congruence score for each target (see methods described earlier for further details). Next, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) steps for testing mediation. As noted previously, individuation (the predictor)

was related to erosion of stereotypic perceptions (the criterion). Moreover, individuation was related to congruence (the mediator), $r(56) = .55, p < .001$. Furthermore, congruence was related to erosion of stereotypic perceptions for both male targets, $r(56) = .45, p < .05$ (i.e., congruence fostered apparent communality), and female targets, $r(52) = -.30, p < .05$ (i.e., congruence diminished apparent communality). Finally, the results of Baron and Kenny's (1986) modified Sobel tests indicated that the magnitude of the relation between individuation and stereotype erosion was significantly reduced when congruence was included in the equation, $Z_s = 1.96, 2.03$, for men and women, respectively, $ps < .05$. Thus, perceivers who individuated targets tended to provide targets with congruence. Congruence in turn, predicted erosion of stereotypic perceptions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the past decade or so, concerns about the deleterious effects of gender stereotypes have triggered a flurry of efforts to counter these effects. Buttressed by supportive empirical evidence, some have argued that the key is to provide perceivers with individuating information (e.g., Fiske, 2000; Mettrick & Cowan, 1996). Our findings not only lent support to this conclusion in a naturally occurring setting, but they also showed that the link between individuation and erosion of stereotypic perceptions was mediated by congruence (Swann, 1983). That is, perceivers who individuated targets at the beginning of the semester tended to bring their appraisals into accord with targets' self-views, and such congruence was, in turn, associated with erosion of stereotypic perceptions.

One intriguing question raised by our research concerns how active targets were in encouraging perceivers to see them congruently. That is, when the women in our study brought others to see them congruently, they may have been doing so actively, out of a desire to have perceivers verify their self-views, or they may have been relatively passive in the process, behaving in a routine fashion while perceivers actively developed more accurate conceptions of them (Jussim, 1991). The question, then, is whether our evidence of increases in congruence is more appropriately conceptualized in terms of self-verification or of accuracy processes.

The accuracy and self-verification formulations require that distinct assumptions should be met. Whereas an accuracy interpretation requires that targets' initial self-views were accurate, a self-verification interpretation requires that targets were actively motivated to verify their self-views. Although a case can be made for the validity of either assumption, neither is airtight. In favor of the accuracy of self-views, there is evidence that at least some self-views are related to objective criteria (Swann, 1996). In favor of the notion that targets work to verify gender-related self-views, there is evidence that targets actively elicit self-verifying reactions from perceivers after being tagged with labels that clash with their self-perceived dominative agency (Swann & Hill, 1982) or communality-related qualities such as likability (Swann & Read, 1981). In support of both positions, in a related analysis of our MBA data set, Swann, Milton, and Polzer (2000) tested the accuracy hypothesis on the one dimension for which accuracy information was available ("intelligence") and discovered that self-verification effects persisted when the effects of accuracy (as indexed by [GMAT] scores) were partialled out. This suggests that, for the intelligence dimension at least, accuracy and self-verification processes may operate in a complementary fashion.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL CAVEATS

Although our findings provide evidence of the erosion of stereotypic perceptions of specific individuals, they provide no evidence that the stereotypes themselves faded. It is quite possible that our participants clung to their beliefs about the relative communality of men and women in general. Moreover, our decision to study changes in stereotypic perceptions in a naturally occurring setting required the use of a correlational design. Although the fact that we measured individuated impressions at the beginning of the semester and self-verification after 9 weeks strengthens our causal claims, temporal ordering does not ensure causality. Thus, future researchers should attempt to identify more definitively the causal direction of our effects.

The context of this study—MBA study groups—is unique in several respects that could have exaggerated the extent to which

perceivers abandoned their stereotypic conceptions. For example, from the perspective of the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew, 1998; Prentice & Miller, 1999), the conditions in our MBA groups were highly conducive to change (e.g., equal status, contact that was sanctioned by authority). These conditions may rarely be met in settings that are more typical of those encountered in, for instance, the business world. Similarly, role constraints (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000) in MBA study groups may inspire women to work hard to bring others to see them as competent. After all, women in such settings might fear that signs of communality might indicate incompetence or invite exploitation (Kelley & Stahleski, 1970). For these reasons, female MBA students may systematically encourage others to impute low levels of communality to them. This could explain why perceivers came to see women as less communal in our sample (it could not, however, explain why this change was mediated by congruence).

FADING OF STEREOTYPES: FOR BETTER OR WORSE?

The fading of stereotypic perceptions in our study is consistent with recent suggestions that stereotypes fizzle when perceivers encounter actual target persons. For example, both Deaux and Lewis (1984) and Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, and Hepburn (1980) have argued that perceivers quickly abandon stereotypic perceptions of targets when they encounter actual behavioral evidence. In fact, Locksley et al. went so far as to conclude that "a single instance of moderately diagnostic behavioral information is sufficient to swamp the effects of social category information" (p. 830). Although our findings do not support the strong claims made by Locksley et al., they are consistent with the idea that stereotypic perceptions fade over time. For those who wish to create a truly egalitarian society in which gender-related stereotypes are absent, it would appear that our findings are encouraging.

Yet the erosion of stereotypic perceptions that we report here could represent something of a mixed blessing for women. That is, for the women in our sample, freedom from traditional gender stereotypes meant that they were less apt to be seen as communal. As mentioned before, being regarded as low in communality could be adaptive in a

business environment, because in such settings being seen as communal could act as a liability. On the other hand, fostering low perceptions of communality could be costly insofar as perceivers associate female communality with social attractiveness (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Such findings leave us with a question: When it comes to bearing the costs associated with changes in gender stereotypes, is it women, or is it men, who pick up the tab?

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