

Exposure to Benevolent Sexism and Complementary Gender Stereotypes: Consequences for Specific and Diffuse Forms of System Justification

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Many have suggested that complementary gender stereotypes of men as agentic (but not communal) and women as communal (but not agentic) serve to increase system justification, but direct experimental support has been lacking. The authors exposed people to specific types of gender-related beliefs and subsequently asked them to complete measures of gender-specific or diffuse system justification. In Studies 1 and 2, activating (a) communal or complementary (communal + agentic) gender stereotypes or (b) benevolent or complementary (benevolent + hostile) sexist items increased support for the status quo among women. In Study 3, activating stereotypes of men as agentic also increased system justification among men and women, but only when women's characteristics were associated with higher status. Results suggest that complementary stereotypes psychologically offset the one-sided advantage of any single group and contribute to an image of society in which everyone benefits through a balanced dispersion of benefits.

Keywords: gender, complementary stereotypes, benevolent sexism, system justification

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court declared that a fraud and hoax lay behind the slogan "separate but equal." It is unlikely that any court will ever do the same for the more subtle motto that successfully keeps the woman in her place: "complementary but equal."

—Sandra L. Bem & Daryl J. Bem (1970 p. 96)

You let women dictate your actions and they are not competent in this world, though certainly they will be saints in heaven while we men burn in hell.

—Mario Puzo, 1969 (Don Corleone in *The Godfather*)

Social-cognitive approaches to stereotyping and prejudice may have originated to explain the impact that beliefs about social categories have over individual minds (e.g., Allport, 1954; Biernat & Dovidio, 2000; Hamilton, 1981; Tajfel, 1969), but they have also contributed immensely to understanding the *environmental* consequences of stereotypes being culturally available in society. Researchers now know that thoughts, feelings, and behavior are affected by stereotypes at an unconscious level even in the absence of conscious endorsement (e.g., Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996;

Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Stereotypes have the capacity to threaten intellectual and athletic performance just by being "in the air," as Steele (1997) put it (see also Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). There is an aura of presumed consensus that often surrounds racial and other group attitudes, and this perceived social environment serves to maintain and increase prejudice (Crandall, 2002; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). Social stereotypes are indeed powerful environmental stimuli that do not depend on conscious, personal endorsement for their effects to be palpable.

In cases of gender-based stereotyping, attitudes toward the disadvantaged group of women are very often favorable in content and yet prejudicial in their consequences. A program of research by Eagly and Mladinic (1989, 1993) has most compellingly demonstrated that although most people hold flattering stereotypes of women as helpful, kind, gentle, warm, and empathic, these beliefs may actually undercut perceptions of their competence (see also Langford & MacKinnon, 2000). Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) have argued that perceptions of the warmth and competence of social groups are often inversely related and that "benevolent" forms of sexism in which women are seen as warm (but not competent) serve to increase support for the system of gender inequality (see also Glick et al., 2000, 2004). Female stereotypes, they have shown, are comprised of both highly favorable and unfavorable attributes.

These proposals are consistent with three theories that stress the role of stereotyping and ideology in leading members of disadvantaged groups to justify and maintain the status quo: Jackman's (1994) velvet glove theory of protective paternalism, Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) theory of social dominance, and Jost and Banaji's (1994) theory of system justification. All of these perspectives hold that members of subordinated groups are often complicit in their own subordination. In this article, we build on and integrate previous theoretical arguments and provide new experimental ev-

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idence that the enhanced cognitive accessibility of communal and benevolent gender stereotypes—by virtue of their capacity to offset or complement default assumptions concerning men’s superiority in achievement domains—directly increases the tendency to perceive existing arrangements as fair, legitimate, and justifiable.

Complementary Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes of men and women commonly reflect the distinction made in implicit personality theory between agency and communion (e.g., Rosenberg, Nelson, & Vivekananthan, 1968). Men are generally stereotyped as competent, assertive, independent, and achievement oriented—and women are not, whereas women are generally stereotyped as warm, sociable, interdependent, and relationship oriented—and men are not (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Langford & MacKinnon, 2000; Williams & Best, 1982). Masculine and feminine stereotypes are *complementary* in the sense that each gender group is seen as possessing a set of strengths that balances out its own weaknesses and supplements the assumed strengths of the other group (see also Kay & Jost, 2003). This complementarity, we submit, renders them highly acceptable to women as well as men.

Groundbreaking work by Eagly and Steffen (1984) first demonstrated with the use of experimental methods that complementary stereotypes are inferred from prevalent assumptions concerning the social and occupational roles held by men and women. Stereotypical attributes, in other words, are derived from information about status and role. This general interpretation was reinforced by the work of Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount (1996), which showed that people ascribe characteristics of agency and communion to employees and other status-differentiated groups on the basis of social roles and other task-related demands that are assumed to accompany group membership (see also Geis, Brown, Jennings, & Corrado-Taylor, 1984; Glick, Wilk, & Perreault, 1995; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Ridgeway, 2001). More than two decades of research has led to the conclusion that, in a number of different but related contexts, people tend to stereotype members of high-status groups as agentic (but not communal) and members of low-status groups as communal (but not agentic).

In an extension and elaboration of the theoretical and empirical literature on complementary gender stereotyping, Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) have proposed that attitudes toward women are “ambivalent.” Female stereotypes, they have shown include both highly favorable and unfavorable attributes. Sexism can involve a strange mixture of hostility and benevolence, as reflected in the opening quotation from *The Godfather*. In the popular imagination, women are simultaneously reviled and revered; they should be subjugated and at the same time placed high on a pedestal.

To capture this phenomenon of ambivalent sexism, Glick and Fiske (1996) developed and validated an instrument for measuring hostile and benevolent sexism as separate but related constructs. They found that the two subscales are positively intercorrelated and that each predicts the endorsement of common gender stereotypes as well as old-fashioned and modern forms of sexism. In a study of ambivalent sexism in 19 different countries, Glick et al. (2000) found that women were at least as likely as men to endorse benevolent forms of sexism. They also found that within each country, (a) the mean sexism scores of men and women were

strongly and positively correlated with one another (suggesting consensual system justification) and (b) both hostile *and* benevolent sexism were at their highest levels in societies in which the degrees of gender equality and female empowerment were lowest. Commenting on these findings, Glick and Fiske (2001) concluded that, “Although sexist antipathy is the most obvious form of prejudice against women, our evidence suggests that sexist benevolence may also play a significant role in justifying gender inequality” (p. 116).

According to Jackman (1994), engaging in stereotypic differentiation between men and women (along agentic and communal lines) accomplishes at least two things that are important for maintaining the system. First, as Hoffman and Hurst (1990) also noted, it treats each gender group as essentially well-suited to occupy the positions and roles that are prescribed for them by society. This type of “role justification” contributes to the perceived legitimacy of the status quo by characterizing cultural divisions of labor as not only fair but perhaps even natural and inevitable (Jost & Hamilton, 2005). Second, it prevents women from withdrawing completely from the system of gender relations in a societal context in which men’s competence is assumed and women’s is not (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Through the cultural ascription of favorable traits (such as warmth and virtue) to women and the assertion that feminine domains are highly valued, Jackman argues that women may be flattered into active cooperation with a patriarchal system. This process of cooptation, unlike role justification, works only on members of subordinated groups and pertains only to socially desirable trait ascriptions.

System-Justifying Effects of Complementary Stereotypes

We propose that, in addition to the factors identified by Jackman (1994), the *complementarity* of gender stereotypes is a third variable that contributes to support for the status quo. From a system justification perspective, the belief that every group in society possesses some advantages and some disadvantages should increase the sense that the system as a whole is fair, balanced, and legitimate. This has been demonstrated with regard to stereotypes of the rich and poor by Kay and Jost (2003). In four experimental studies, Kay and Jost showed that exposing people to complementary “poor but happy,” “poor but honest,” “rich but miserable,” and “rich but dishonest” stereotype exemplars led them to score higher on a general, diffuse measure of system justification than participants in control conditions who were exposed to noncomplementary stereotypes. These effects have been replicated and extended to other types of status differences by Kay, Jost, and Young (2005).

Above and beyond the use of stereotypes to rationalize specific roles such as homemaker and to flatter individual women into embracing the sexist status quo, then, we propose that communal and benevolent gender stereotypes serve system-justifying ends by counterbalancing men’s presumed advantages in terms of agency and status. This possibility was suggested by Bem and Bem (1970), who observed that gender stereotypes bolster the system by portraying men and women as “complementary but equal”:

Many people recognize that most women do end up as full-time homemakers because of their socialization and that these women exemplify the failure of our society to raise girls as unique individuals. But, they point out, the role of the homemaker is not inferior to the role of the professional man: it is complementary but equal. . . . The

ideological rationalization that men and women hold complementary but equal positions in society appears to be a fairly recent invention. In earlier times—and in more conservative company today—it was not felt necessary to provide the ideology with an equalitarian veneer. (pp. 94–96)

Thus, building on previous work, we hypothesize that in lay thinking the most just social order would be one in which no single group enjoys a monopoly over valued attributes and that every group would have something going for it (see also Kay et al., 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003). To anticipate and head off potential misunderstandings, we wish to clarify the fact that we are not claiming that gender stereotypes contribute to system justification *only* because of their complementary character. On the contrary, system-justifying effects of stereotype complementarity are expected to operate in conjunction with processes of role justification and are assumed to make the cooptation of subordinates more effective. These three mechanisms, in other words, are not mutually exclusive. It is for several related reasons that we hypothesize that communal and complementary gender stereotypes should be especially effective at increasing ideological support for the status quo.

It is important to point out that in prior research, the rationalization function of gender stereotypes has been assumed from the existence and contents of the stereotypes themselves. That is, the fact that men (and other high-status groups) are stereotyped as agentic, whereas women (and other low-status groups) are stereotyped as communal has been taken as *prima facie* evidence that such stereotypes serve to justify the unequal division of labor (e.g., Conway et al., 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Jackman, 1994). However, there were no independent measures of support for the status quo administered in any of these studies. Hoffman and Hurst's (1990) experiments were intended to capture the process of rationalization by focusing on the emergence of *new* stereotypes of fictional groups, but it is difficult to rule out the possibility of assimilation to preexisting gender stereotypes. Similarly, it is not clear in correlational studies by Glick et al. (2000, 2004) whether hostile and benevolent sexism are causes or effects of the justification of gender inequality in society. Thus, the methodological limitations of previous studies hamper one's ability to draw causal conclusions about the link between stereotypes and the rationalization of inequality. A more direct, experimental approach is needed.

To the extent that complementary gender stereotypes serve to increase satisfaction with the status quo, it should be possible to increase the accessibility of these stereotypes and measure subsequent levels of support for the system. That is, if prevailing gender stereotypes serve system-justifying ends for women as well as men, then activating these stereotypes should produce observable differences in support for the status quo. Although the burgeoning social-cognitive literature has documented numerous effects of stereotype activation on a wide range of judgments and behaviors (see Wheeler & Petty, 2001), there have been no attempts to measure the effects of the activation of benevolent or communal gender stereotypes on support for the system of inequality. In other words, the social-cognitive formulation of the system maintenance hypothesis has never been directly assessed. We seek to overcome methodological limitations of previous approaches by experimentally manipulating exposure to specific gender stereo-

types and measuring the degree of system justification following exposure.

Effects of Stereotype Exposure Versus Endorsement on Specific and Diffuse Support for the System

Most previous studies of the justification function of stereotyping and prejudice have focused on the degree of personal endorsement of various types of beliefs (e.g., Glick et al., 2000; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This is an intuitively sensible approach, and it is consistent with an individual differences approach to predicting support for the system (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998; Crandall, 2000; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Lambert & Raichle, 2000; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Much research suggests, however, that stereotypes do not need to be endorsed to be influential. The priming or activation of stereotypes increases their impact on subsequent judgments and behavior, in some cases even when they are not personally endorsed at an explicit level of awareness (e.g., Bargh et al., 1996; Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Steele, 1997; Wheeler & Petty, 2001). Building on these approaches, we propose that merely *reminding* people (and thereby activating and increasing the accessibility) of culturally prevalent, complementary gender stereotypes serves to increase the degree to which they will endorse a system of inequality that may not necessarily be in their best interest.

According to system justification theory (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Hunyady, 2002), stereotypes serve not only to rationalize specific aspects of intergroup relations (e.g., Tajfel, 1981) but also to bolster the overall sense that the system as a whole is fair, legitimate, and justifiable (see also Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, system-justifying effects of stereotype activation may be either domain specific or more general. In the former case, gender stereotypes may be expected to increase the tolerance for gender-specific inequality and support for the current state of gender relations in society. However, the second case is a more ambitious test of the system justification hypothesis (see also Kay et al., 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003). It suggests that, if our theory of gender stereotyping is correct, exposure to complementary stereotypes may produce "carryover" effects to the system as a whole (and not just to gender-related aspects of the system). Thus, in the studies reported here, we investigated effects of stereotype endorsement and activation on both gender-specific and diffuse forms of system justification.

Overview of Research

In three experimental studies, we investigated the hypothesis that activating complementary gender stereotypes would increase the perception that extant inequality is fair, legitimate, and justifiable. Several different methodologies have been used in research on construct activation (e.g., Higgins, 1996). These range from subliminal and/or supraliminal primes of construct-related words and/or pictures to explicit, overt "reminders" of relevant cultural stereotypes. All of these different methodologies serve the same general purpose, namely to expose participants to a schema and therefore to implicitly activate its mental representation (e.g.,

Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). Because we sought to activate particular types of gender stereotypes (e.g., communal vs. agentic traits), rather than gender differences or beliefs in general, we exposed participants to specific stereotype contents with the use of explicit questionnaires (although the connection to subsequent measures was implicit). This method allowed us to remind participants of relevant stereotypes (through exposure) and also to control for the specific content of the stereotypical association being activated.

In the first two studies, we predicted that people who were first exposed to benevolent or communal stereotypes of women would subsequently show increased support for the status quo compared with people in control conditions. In Study 1, men and women were given the opportunity to endorse agentic stereotypes of men, communal stereotypes of women, complementary stereotypes of each group, or no stereotypes at all. They subsequently completed a measure of gender-specific system justification. In Study 2, we activated benevolent and hostile (rather than communal and agentic) stereotypes; directly compared stereotype exposure versus endorsement conditions; added a neutral, favorable but nonstereotypical control condition; and measured the effects of these different types of gender-related beliefs on diffuse—rather than gender-specific—system justification.

In the third study, we sought to determine whether stereotypes of men as agentic could also serve system-justifying functions in a context in which women were assumed to be superior because of their communal qualities. Therefore, we manipulated whether men or women were generally assumed to be better managers because of their agentic or communal characteristics, respectively, and then exposed participants to stereotypes of men or women that either did or did not result in perceived complementarity. We then measured diffuse system justification to investigate the interactive effects of context and stereotype content. This enabled us to more directly assess our hypothesis that complementary stereotypes lead to stronger support for the status quo in comparison with non-complementary stereotypes.

Study 1

Method

Research participants. One hundred participants (51 men and 49 women) were recruited through advertisements and flyers posted on and around the campus of Stanford University. Most (but not all) were undergraduate or graduate students. Each was paid \$20 for participating in group testing sessions that involved completing written materials for several different studies.

Materials and procedure. Following past precedent in the social cognition literature, the experiment was conducted under the guise of two separate questionnaire studies (e.g., Higgins et al., 1977). Participants were first asked to complete questionnaires ostensibly intended to measure their “beliefs about the characteristics of men and women.” This task allowed us to manipulate the type of stereotype to which participants were exposed. Following stereotype exposure, we administered a scale of gender-related system justification. To increase the perception that these materials came from two different studies, we varied font type and size as well as study headings and response scale formats. The suggestion that these two questionnaires were unrelated was made more credible by the fact that they were, in fact, embedded in a series of different and unrelated study materials.

Stereotype exposure conditions. There were four different stereotype conditions. In one condition, participants were asked to indicate whether

five communal traits (“considerate,” “honest,” “happy,” “warm,” and “moral”) applied more to women or to men and to what degree. In another condition, participants were asked to indicate whether each of five agentic traits (“assertive,” “competent,” “intelligent,” “ambitious,” and “responsible”) applied more to women or to men. In a third condition, participants made ratings on both communal and agentic traits. In all three experimental conditions, participants gave their responses on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (e.g., *Women are more considerate than men*) to 9 (e.g., *Men are more considerate than women*). We also included a control condition in which participants were not exposed to gender stereotypes of any kind during the first part of the experiment.

Gender-specific system justification. In the second phase of the experiment, all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that was designed to assess gender-specific system justification. The questionnaire contained eight opinion statements regarding the current state of gender relations and sex role division. Items were based on general system justification items developed by Kay and Jost (2003) that had been reworded so as to focus on gender inequality: (a) “In general, relations between men and women are fair,” (b) “The division of labor in families generally operates as it should,” (c) “Gender roles need to be radically restructured,” (d) “For women, the United States is the best country in the world to live in,” (e) “Most policies relating to gender and the sexual division of labor serve the greater good,” (f) “Everyone (male or female) has a fair shot at wealth and happiness,” (g) “Sexism in society is getting worse every year,” and (h) “Society is set up so that men and women usually get what they deserve.” Participants were asked to indicate the strength of agreement or disagreement with each of these items on a 9-point scale. Responses were coded in such a way that agreement with Items a, b, d, e, f, and h and disagreement with Items c and g resulted in higher scores on gender-specific system justification. An overall index ($\alpha = .65$) was calculated by taking the mean of responses to all eight items following recoding.

Results

Check on stereotypic differentiation. We first checked to see whether women were indeed stereotyped as more communal than men and men as more agentic than women. Collapsing across participant gender and the three experimental conditions, we found that the genders were differentiated in terms of agentic and communal traits as expected. Participants who were exposed to communal trait comparisons believed that such traits were more characteristic of women than men; the mean rating of 3.71 ($SD = 0.97$) differed significantly from the scale midpoint of 4.5, $t(53) = 5.99$, $p < .001$ (collapsing across communal and complementary conditions). Participants who were exposed to agentic trait comparisons believed that agentic traits were more characteristic of men than women ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.94$), a difference that also deviated from the scale midpoint, $t(51) = 2.29$, $p < .03$ (collapsing across agentic and complementary conditions). Thus, when given the opportunity, respondents generally endorsed the “women are communal” and “men are agentic” complementary stereotypes.¹

¹ We also conducted additional tests to see whether male and female participants differentially endorsed these stereotypes. Consistent with patterns of self-interest and group-interest, we found that female participants were marginally more likely to agree that women are more communal than men, $F(1, 52) = 2.99$, $p < .09$ ($\eta_p^2 = .05$), and male participants were marginally more likely to agree that men are more agentic than women, $F(1, 50) = 2.85$, $p < .10$ ($\eta_p^2 = .05$). Thus, neither respondent group

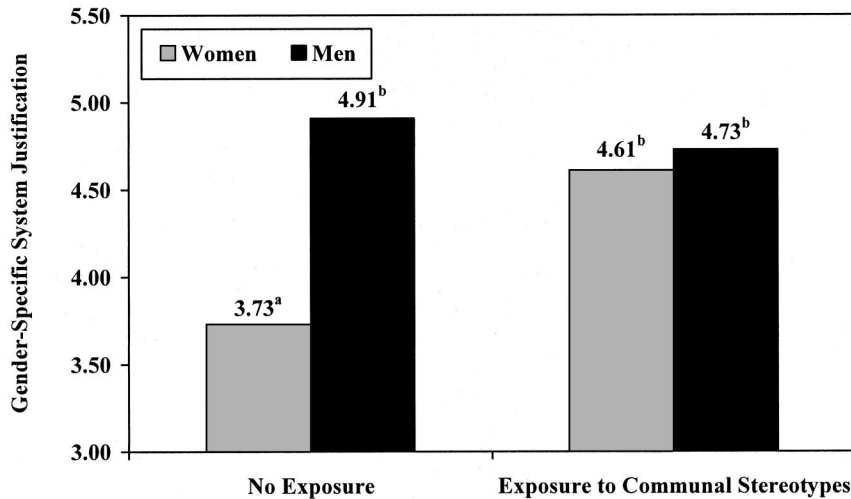


Figure 1. Means with different superscripts differ from one another according to pairwise t tests ($p < .05$).

Correlations between communal and agentic stereotype endorsement. For those participants who were assigned to the complementary stereotype condition, endorsement of agentic stereotypes and endorsement of communal stereotypes were positively intercorrelated, $r(27) = .37$, $p = .06$. Thus, people who believed that men are more agentic than women also tended to believe that women are more communal than men.

Effects of stereotype exposure on system justification. To assess the system maintenance hypothesis, we conducted a 2 (participant gender: male vs. female) \times 2 (exposure to female communal stereotype: yes vs. no) \times 2 (exposure to male agentic stereotype: yes vs. no) between-participants analysis of variance (ANOVA) on participants' gender system justification scores. The analysis yielded evidence of one main effect and one interaction. A significant main effect of participant gender indicated that men perceived the system of gender relations to be significantly more justified ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.28$) than did women ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.91$), $F(1, 92) = 7.79$, $p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .08$).

The analysis also yielded a significant interaction between gender and exposure to communal stereotypes, $F(1, 92) = 5.85$, $p < .02$ ($\eta_p^2 = .06$). As illustrated in Figure 1, men scored consistently high on gender-specific system justification, whereas women differed according to the type of stereotype to which they had been exposed. For men there was no effect of exposure to communal stereotypes, $t(49) = 0.49$, $p = .63$. Women who were exposed to communal stereotypes, however, scored considerably higher on gender system justification ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.91$) than did women who were not exposed to such stereotypes ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .63$), $t(47) = 3.74$, $p < .001$. Indeed, women assigned to the communal stereotype exposure condition endorsed the legitimacy of the existing system of gender relations to the same degree as

men did. There were no significant effects of being exposed to male agentic stereotypes, probably because these stereotypes are already part of the presumptive societal context.

Correlations between stereotype endorsement and system justification. We also inspected correlations between the degree of personal endorsement of gender stereotypes and system justification scores, aggregating data from the three experimental conditions. Endorsement of agentic stereotypes was unrelated to system justification, $r(52) = .03$, $p = .81$, as was endorsement of communal stereotypes, $r(54) = -.18$, $p = .19$. Correlations were also nonsignificant when calculated for each gender group separately ($p > .2$ in all cases). In general, findings from Study 1 suggest that sheer exposure to communal and complementary stereotypes is sufficient to increase support for the system of inequality, possibly because almost everyone accepts common gender stereotypes on an implicit (if not explicit) level (see also Bem & Bem, 1970; Jost, Pelham, & Carvalho, 2002).

Discussion

Our first experiment provided evidence that activating communal gender stereotypes served to increase women's degree of support for the existing system of gender relations. For men, gender-related system justification was consistently high and unaffected by stereotype activation. To our knowledge, this study is the first to demonstrate that a causal connection exists between exposure to specific gender stereotypes and subsequent support for the system. We sought to elaborate and expand on these findings in five ways in our second experiment.

First, we investigated the consequences of exposure to hostile and benevolent sexism, as operationalized by Glick and Fiske (1996). These were generally expected to follow patterns for agentic and communal stereotypic differentiation, respectively. Second, we considered the possibility that stereotype activation would exert carryover effects to general or diffuse system justification and not just to gender-specific system justification. Third, we also addressed a methodological ambiguity that existed in Study 1. Because participants assigned to the complementary

perceived the stereotypical statements to be more credible or persuasive overall. When we conducted t tests to compare endorsement scores of male and female participants within each of the three experimental conditions, none of the comparisons attained conventional levels of significance ($p > .13$ in all cases).

stereotype condition were exposed to twice as many stereotypes (10) as participants in the communal or agentic conditions (5), increased system justification in this condition could be attributable either to the *number* of stereotypes that were presented or to the fact that the stereotypes were complementary. In Study 2, the number of stereotype items was kept constant across experimental conditions.

Fourth, because of the specific nature of the stereotype contents that we were attempting to activate in Study 1, we used a questionnaire procedure to manipulate stereotype activation. Although this method allowed us to create relatively subtle differences in the specific contents of gender stereotypes that were activated between experimental conditions, it also confounded the stereotype activation manipulation with the opportunity for personal endorsement. The fact that personal endorsement of stereotypes failed to correlate with subsequent system justification scores in the first study suggests that the results were not due to stereotype endorsement per se, but this issue could be addressed most directly with the use of an experimental manipulation. Thus, in Study 2 we used a manipulation that allowed us to better distinguish between incidental exposure and endorsement. From our perspective, either possibility would be of theoretical and practical interest. The goal, simply, was to be more precise about the nature of the process of stereotype activation that is responsible for the effects on system justification.

A fifth question that remains is whether the activation of *any* favorable opinions about women as a group would be sufficient to trigger an increase in system justification or whether these effects depend on the activation of culturally available, preexisting stereotypes of the kind we have identified. To address this issue more directly in Study 2, we included an additional (favorable but nonstereotypical) control condition that was adapted from materials by Hoffman and Hurst (1990). This allowed us to distinguish between the system-justifying effects of culturally available benevolent stereotypes, on one hand, and those of nonstereotypical but favorable beliefs about women, on the other.

Study 2

Method

Research participants. Participants were 99 male undergraduates and 116 female undergraduates who were recruited either at the University of California at Santa Barbara or at Stanford University. They were approached by the experimenter and offered a lottery ticket (cash equivalent \$1) in exchange for their participation.

Materials and procedure. With this procedure we introduced five changes from the previous study: (a) participants were exposed to items from Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) rather than stereotypic traits regarding agency and communion, (b) a new control condition was added in which participants were exposed to favorable but nonstereotypical statements about women, (c) an exposure versus endorsement manipulation was included, (d) system justification was measured generally (and not just in relation to gender inequality), and (e) participants in all experimental conditions were exposed to the same number of items.

Stimulus items. In the first part of the study, participants were asked to read and respond to one of four possible sets of stimuli. In one condition, they read four items that were drawn from the Benevolent Sexism subscale of the ASI: (a) "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess," (b) "Men are incomplete without women," (c) "Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility," and (d) "Women,

compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste." In another condition, participants encountered four items that were drawn from the Hostile Sexism subscale of the ASI: (a) "Women are too easily offended," (b) "Most women do not fully appreciate all that men do for them," (c) "Women exaggerate problems they have at work," and (d) "Many women get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances." In a third condition, participants were confronted with two benevolent sexist items and two hostile sexist items.

In a fourth condition, participants were exposed to a set of four traits taken from Hoffman and Hurst's (1990) gender-neutral control condition: "resourcefulness," "creativity," "tactfulness," and "realism" (p. 201, Footnote 1). Pretesting by Hoffman and Hurst indicated that none of these traits differed significantly from the neutral midpoint of their scale; the traits were therefore neither especially masculine nor feminine in content. Items were worded similarly to the benevolent sexist items described above: (a) "Many women have a quality of resourcefulness that few men possess," (b) "Men are less creative than women," (c) "Women, compared to men, tend to be more tactful," and (d) "Women, compared to men, tend to be more realistic." We also included a control condition in which participants were not exposed to gender-related statements of any kind.

Exposure versus endorsement manipulation. In addition to varying the stimulus content, we manipulated whether participants were asked to endorse the stereotypical items or were incidentally exposed to them. Participants assigned to the endorsement condition were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the stereotypical statements on a scale ranging from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Participants assigned to the exposure condition read the same statements under proofreading instructions asking them to indicate the degree to which they thought that the sentences were "ambiguously worded." Specifically, they were asked to rate each item for clarity on a scale ranging from 0 (*not worded clearly at all*) to 5 (*worded perfectly clearly*).

Diffuse measure of system justification. In the second part of the study, all participants indicated their degree of ideological support for the system by indicating (on a 9-point scale) their agreement or disagreement with each of eight items that were used by Kay and Jost (2003, p. 828) to measure general or diffuse system justification. Sample items include: "In general, the American political system operates as it should," "Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness," and "American society needs to be radically restructured" (reverse scored). An overall index was calculated by taking the mean of responses to all eight items following recoding ($\alpha = .79$). In terms of empirical validity, Kay and Jost (2003) found that diffuse system justification scores correlated significantly with (a) scores on Lipkus's (1991) Global Belief in a Just World Scale ($r = .67, n = 117, p < .001$), (b) Quinn and Crocker's (1999) Protestant Work Ethic Scale ($r = .45, n = 50, p < .001$), and (c) a measure of general beliefs concerning needs for "balance" and "complementarity" in the social world ($r = .37, n = 117, p < .001$).

Experimental design. In summary, there were nine different conditions altogether, according to a 2 (exposure vs. endorsement condition) \times 4 (stereotyping condition: benevolent vs. hostile vs. complementary/both vs. nonstereotypical control) between-participants factorial design, with an additional control condition in which no trait comparisons were presented. The effects of participant gender were also investigated.

Results

Effects of endorsement versus exposure. First, an ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of participant gender, type of stereotype content, and endorsement versus exposure on diffuse system support. There were no reliable main or interaction effects involving endorsement versus exposure, indicating that it did not matter whether people had read the stereotypical items to determine personal agreement or were simply exposed to them as part

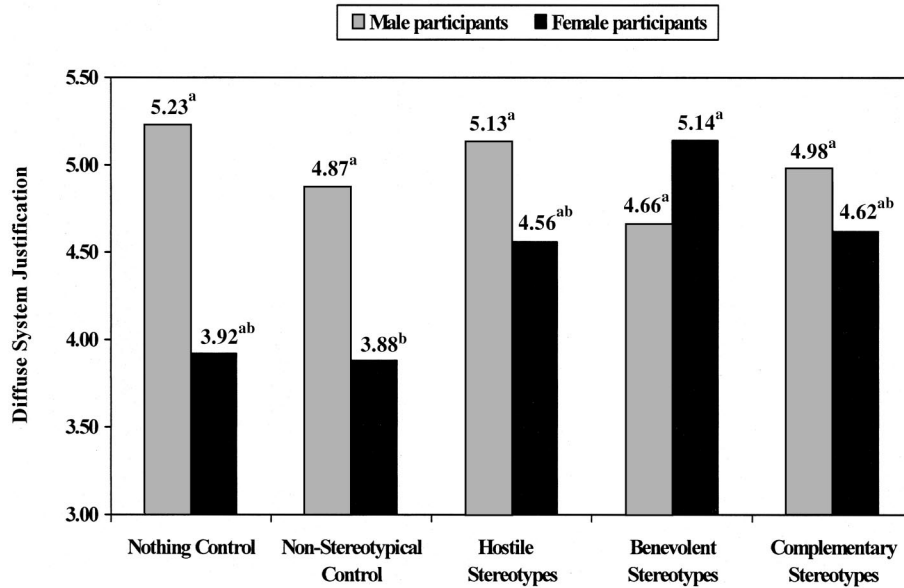


Figure 2. Means with different superscripts within each gender group differ from one another according to Tukey's tests of multiple comparison ($p < .05$).

of a proofreading task. This variable was omitted from further analyses, and the model was rerun without it.

Effects of gender and stereotype content. A 2 (participant gender: male vs. female) \times 5 (stereotype content: benevolent vs. communal vs. complementary vs. favorable/nonstereotypical control vs. "nothing" control) ANOVA was then conducted on general system justification scores, collapsing across exposure and endorsement conditions. A significant effect of gender was again obtained, $F(1, 205) = 7.00, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .03$), indicating that men perceived the American system to be more fair in general ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.39$), in comparison with women ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.30$).² No main effect of stereotype content was observed for the combined sample.

The analysis yielded a marginal Gender \times Stereotype Condition interaction, $F(4, 205) = 2.30, p = .06$ ($\eta_p^2 = .04$). As in the preceding study, the system justification scores of women were affected by their exposure to different stereotype contents, $F(4, 111) = 2.69, p < .04$ ($\eta_p^2 = .09$), whereas the scores of men were not, $F(4, 94) = 0.52, p = .72$ ($\eta_p^2 = .02$). Means are illustrated in Figure 2. Tukey's tests revealed that for women who were exposed to benevolent stereotypes, diffuse system justification ($M = 5.14, SD = 1.10$) was significantly higher ($p < .05$) than it was for women who were exposed to favorable but nonstereotypical traits ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.60$). No other comparisons among conditions attained significance. For men, there were no differences among any of the experimental conditions.

Discussion

Study 2 provided further evidence that the activation of benevolent and complementary forms of sexism increases support for the system among women. The fact that such support extends to American society in general (and not just to gender relations) supports the hypothesis from system justification theory that gen-

der stereotypes rationalize the status quo in general (Jost & Banaji, 2003) in addition to specific features of the intergroup relations context (e.g., Tajfel, 1981). Importantly, Study 2 also demonstrated that stereotype activation through incidental exposure was just as effective in increasing diffuse system justification among women as it was when stereotype activation occurred through the opportunity for personal endorsement. Furthermore, the results of Study 2 cast doubt on the possibility that exposure to *any* favorable statements about women serves to increase their level of system support. System justification scores among women assigned to a favorable but nonstereotypical control condition did not differ from those of women assigned to the "nothing" control condition used in the first study.

We found in Studies 1 and 2 that the activation of communal and benevolent stereotypes was sufficient to increase system justification, whereas the activation of agentic and hostile stereotypes was not. These findings are consistent with Jackman's (1994) contention that, when it comes to maintaining inequality, honey is typically more effective than vinegar. To the extent that people already assume that men are advantaged relative to women, our analysis suggests that only those stereotypes conferring unique benefits to women would lead to increased system justification. In other words, we propose that complementary stereotypes justify

² To determine whether male and female participants reacted to the stereotype items differently, we conducted t tests to compare the endorsement-ambiguity ratings of men and women within each of the experimental conditions. Only one of the comparisons yielded a reliable difference: Female participants tended to agree more with the favorable but nonstereotypical statements about women ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.08$) than did male participants ($M = 1.94, SD = 1.25$), $t(22) = 2.68, p < .02$. None of the other comparisons attained significance ($p > .22$ in all cases).

the social system through their potential to counteract or offset the hegemonic advantage of some groups over others.

In Study 3, we sought to investigate this line of reasoning more directly. If the system-justifying benefits of “women are communal” stereotypes accrued in the first two studies because they provided a counterweight to the presumption of male advantage, then highlighting the context of female advantage should activate the system-justifying potential of “men are agentic” stereotypes. To this end, we added a context manipulation designed to temporarily alter the perceived status advantages of male agency and female communality in Study 3. Within each of these two comparative contexts, we exposed participants to either agentic male or communal female stereotypes and subsequently measured diffuse system justification.

Study 3

Method

Research participants. Participants were 64 adults (34 men, 30 women) ranging in age from 19 to 80 years old ($M = 34.70$, $SD = 16.15$) who were approached in public settings in Boulder, Colorado ($n = 44$) and Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada ($n = 20$). In terms of racial/ethnic background, 55 participants (85.9%) identified themselves as White/European American, 2 (3.1%) as Asian or Asian American, 2 (3.1%) as Latino/Hispanic, and 3 (4.7%) as “other.” Two other participants (3.1%) declined to provide this information.

Materials and procedure. In the first part of the procedure, we sought to vary the managerial context so that subsequently activated stereotypes of men as more agentic (as well as stereotypes of women as more communal) would be seen as complementary. More specifically, we hypothesized that if participants were first exposed to a context in which women’s interpersonal skills were seen as leading to *higher* managerial status, then reminding people of men’s complementary endowments in terms of agency would increase system justification, just as reminding people of women’s communal characteristics would increase system justification in the more typical context in which men’s attributes are associated with higher status. Thus, there were two experimental conditions in which a comparative managerial context was established. In the women are better managers condition, which was based loosely on scientific and journalistic accounts of female leadership qualities in business (e.g., Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Sharpe, 2000), participants read that

Research has demonstrated convincingly that the best *managers* in business settings tend to have excellent *interpersonal* skills and are able to *communicate* well and work closely with *others*. Consequently, the most effective managers in recent years have tended to be *women* rather than men.

In the men are better managers condition, participants read that

Research has demonstrated convincingly that the best *managers* in business settings tend to have excellent *individual leadership* skills and are able to *solve problems independently*. Consequently, the most effective managers in recent years have tended to be *men* rather than women.

To provide a rationale for including these passages and to be sure that participants read the information carefully, we asked them, “Are you aware of this research?” In response, they were asked simply to circle “Yes” or “No.” There were no reliable differences between the two conditions in the degree to which people reported being familiar with the alleged research conclusions, $\chi^2(1, N = 63) = 0.88, p = .35$.

To manipulate stereotypic exposure, all participants received the proof-reading instructions from Study 2 that asked them to indicate the degree to which they thought that the sentences were “ambiguously worded.” Specifically, they were asked to rate each item on a scale ranging from 0 (*The wording is not clear at all*) to 5 (*The wording is perfectly clear*). Approximately half of the participants were exposed to four stereotypic statements indicating that men are more agentic than women: (a) “In general, men are more assertive than women,” (b) “In general, men are more rational than women,” (c) “In general, men are more decisive than women,” and (d) “In general, men are more self-reliant than women.” These four traits (“assertive,” “rational,” “decisive,” and “self-reliant”) were selected from Prentice and Carranza’s (2002, p. 274) list of highly prescriptive gender stereotypes associated with men. In the other condition, participants were exposed to four stereotypic statements indicating that women are more communal than men. The four traits (“cooperative,” “friendly,” “sensitive,” and “warm”) were selected from Prentice and Carranza’s (2002, p. 273) list of highly prescriptive stereotypes associated with women.

The experimental design was a 2 (context: women are better managers vs. men are better managers) \times 2 (stereotype exposure: women are communal vs. men are agentic) between-participants factorial design. The effects of participant gender were also investigated. All participants completed the same diffuse system justification scale ($\alpha = .73$) used in Study 2, but references to the “United States” and “American society” were changed to “Canada” and “Canadian society” for Canadian participants only.

Results

To investigate the effects of managerial context, stereotype exposure, and participant gender, we conducted a 2 (context: women are better managers vs. men are better managers) \times 2 (stereotype exposure: women are communal vs. men are agentic) \times 2 (participant gender: male vs. female) ANOVA on the dependent variable of general system justification scores. The model included a control variable for age, which exerted a main effect indicating that older participants tended to score higher on system justification, $F(1, 50) = 7.47, p < .01$ ($\eta_p^2 = .13$). We also included control variables for race/ethnicity and country of sample (United States vs. Canada), but neither of these variables exerted reliable effects on system justification. No other main effects were obtained, and no effects involving gender attained significance in this study.

The model did yield support for the hypothesized interaction effect between managerial context and stereotype exposure, $F(1, 50) = 6.16, p < .02$ ($\eta_p^2 = .11$). Unadjusted cell means are illustrated in Figure 3. In the women are better managers context, participants who were exposed to men are agentic stereotypes scored higher on system justification ($M = 5.05, SD = 1.27$) than did participants who were exposed to women are communal stereotypes ($M = 4.20, SD = 0.90$), $t(29) = 2.16, p = .04$. In the men are better managers context, by contrast, participants who were exposed to women are communal stereotypes scored higher on system justification ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.62$) than did participants who were exposed to men are agentic stereotypes ($M = 4.29, SD = 0.83$), although this comparison did not attain significance, $t(31) = 1.15, p = .26$. Overall, system justification scores tended to be higher following exposure to complementary context-stereotype pairings—that is, women are better managers + men are agentic and men are better managers + women are communal (combined $M = 4.92, SD = 1.44$)—than following exposure to noncomplementary pairings—that is, women are better manag-

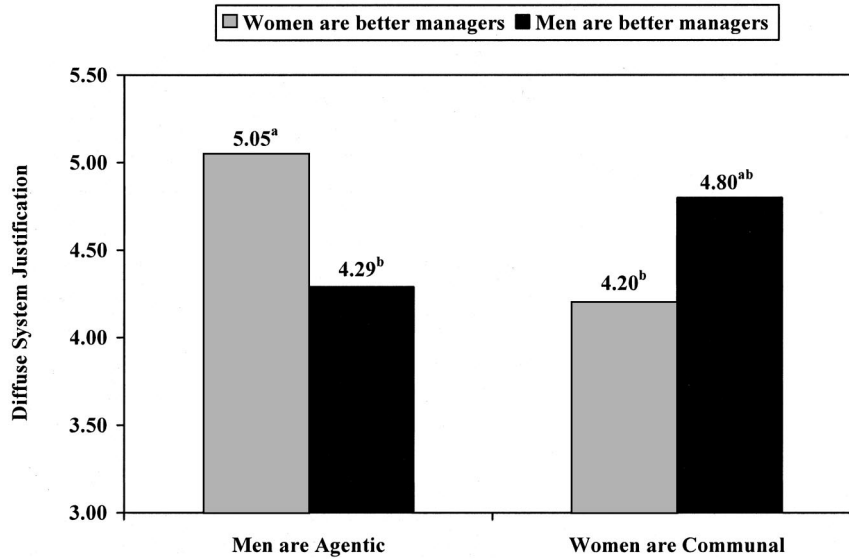


Figure 3. Means with different superscripts differ from one another according to pairwise *t* tests ($p < .05$).

ers + women are communal and men are better managers + men are agentic (combined $M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.85$), $F(1, 62) = 5.25$, $p < .03$ ($\eta_p^2 = .08$).

General Discussion

Several researchers have suggested that culturally prevalent gender stereotypes—especially benevolent and communal stereotypes of women—exist, at least in part, because they facilitate the rationalization of gender inequality in society (Eagly & Mladinic, 1993; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Prior research in support of this contention has been largely correlational, and it has also tended to focus on the degree of personal endorsement of various stereotypes. By adopting a social-cognitive approach, we sought to provide more direct experimental evidence for the hypothesis that exposure to such stereotypes leads to enhanced support for the status quo. Drawing on previous studies demonstrating manifold effects of increasing the cognitive accessibility of stereotypes, we hypothesized that if complementary gender stereotypes do serve system-justifying functions, then reminding participants of such stereotypes (and therefore increasing their cognitive accessibility) should lead to increased support for the status quo. In three experimental studies, this hypothesis was corroborated.

It was demonstrated that exposure to complementary gender stereotypes leads to increased support among women for both the current state of gender relations (Study 1) and the system in general (Studies 2 and 3). We determined in Study 2 that system-justifying effects are not necessarily elicited by exposing women to favorable statements about their group in general. In addition, we provided evidence in Study 3 that such effects are attributable at least in part to the capacity for communal gender stereotypes to compensate for the assumed benefits of male agency and status. Specifically, when we created a context in which women rather than men were assumed to be better managers by virtue of the

former's superior interpersonal skills, reminding people of the male agentic stereotype served to increase system justification scores in much the same way as the female communal stereotype did in Study 1.

In the first two studies, enhanced system justification among women occurred only in response to stereotypes that were benevolent, communal, or complementary. Exposure to the stereotype that men are more agentic than women was not sufficient to trigger an increase in system justification in these studies. This would not necessarily have been predicted on the basis of prior theorizing in this area (e.g., Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994), unless one assumes that the male agentic stereotype (and its relation to status attainment) is already part of the presumptive context. Benevolent and complementary stereotypes seem to possess distinct advantages from a system maintenance point of view over other kinds of stereotypes.

Our results therefore lend some credence to previous suspicions that the “women are wonderful” effect documented by Eagly and Mladinic (1989, 1993) is similar, at least in its consequences, to benevolent paternalism (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman, 1994). Activation of the stereotype that women are more communal (and honest and warm) than men produced virtually identical effects on women's system justification scores in Studies 1 and 3 as did activation of benevolent sexist beliefs in Study 2. These findings suggest that communal stereotypes of women may be functionally equivalent to benevolent sexism, at least from the standpoint of system maintenance.

Although women's attitudes toward the system were highly affected by the context of prior stereotype exposure, men's attitudes were relatively unmoved by our experimental machinations in Studies 1 and 2. There are a number of factors that could have contributed to gender differences. For one thing, women (like other subordinated groups) may be more attentive to and more constrained by situational forces compared with men (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Hecht & LaFrance, 1998; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson,

2003; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002; Roberts, 1991). In their review of gender differences, Roberts and Pennebaker (1995) concluded that—in comparison with men—women “make greater use of external situational cues in defining their internal state” (p. 143). Second, women may be more ambivalent than men about the status quo (Jost & Burgess, 2000), insofar as they are faced with the complex task of reconciling diverse and sometimes conflicting personal and ideological commitments. Research has demonstrated that members of disadvantaged groups are sometimes less likely to provide ideological support for prevailing systems and authorities (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and they are sometimes *more* likely to provide such support (e.g., Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003) in comparison with members of advantaged groups. Third, it is reasonable to assume that for women (more than for men) benevolent, paternalistic types of sexism are highly preferable to hostile or violent strains. Given the unfortunate choice between hostility and condescension, most women would choose the latter, even if it entails their collaboration in a sexist society. Jackman (1994), for instance, has referred to benevolent paternalism as “the sweetest persuasion” (p. 9). The positive valence of many female stereotypes may be ingratiating on one level (Eagly & Mladinic, 1993; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998; Langford & MacKinnon, 2000) and contribute to women’s subjugation on another (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). For a variety of reasons, then, women might be particularly susceptible to the allures of complementary stereotypes.

Nevertheless, men’s (as well as women’s) attitudes were affected by the experimental manipulation of managerial context introduced in Study 3. Specifically, both groups scored higher on system justification following exposure to the men are agentic stereotype, but only when they were provided with contextual information suggesting that women are generally better managers because of their interpersonal skills. This created a circumstance in which men were represented as relatively lower in status—a context that differed from the default cultural assumptions that were likely operating in Studies 1 and 2. The findings from Study 3 therefore suggest that different types of complementary stereotypes are capable of exerting system-justifying effects, depending on the context of status relations (see also Kay & Jost, 2003).

Data from all three experiments indicate that stereotype *activation* (rather than the degree of stereotype *endorsement*) accounts for the effects of stereotype exposure on women’s attitudes toward the system. No significant correlations between stereotype endorsement and system justification were obtained in either of the first two studies, although it is possible that such effects would emerge with larger sample sizes and larger pools of items. It may be that complementary stereotypes are overlearned (Bem & Bem, 1970), so that merely reminding people of the stereotype’s existence is sufficient to produce system-justifying results.

In the present research program, Study 2 provided the most direct comparison of activation versus endorsement explanations. We found that activating complementary stereotypes through a proofreading task was sufficient to trigger increased support for the system (Studies 2 and 3). Although conscious (or self-conscious) endorsement of stereotypes may contribute to system justification, endorsement per se does not seem to be required, possibly because these stereotypes are already culturally available. This line of reasoning is consistent with prior research on various effects of stereotype activation even in the absence of personal

endorsement (e.g., Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Kray et al., 2001; Steele, 1997; Wheeler & Petty, 2001).

It seems that once stereotypic associations are sufficiently dispersed in the population of ideas, it is necessary only to temporarily activate them in order to evoke their social and psychological consequences. Steele and Aronson (1995), for instance, have found that merely increasing the salience of one’s low status or minority group identification is sufficient to impair subsequent test performance, presumably because of culturally assumed (rather than personally endorsed) associations between race, ethnicity, and gender, on one hand, and intellectual abilities, on the other. To take another case, Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, and Strack (1995) demonstrated that an automatic association exists between power and sex, at least for some cultural agents. For these people, priming the concept of power is sufficient to increase sexual arousal, as measured by their subsequent attractiveness ratings of a female confederate. Our findings suggest that prevalent gender stereotypes are linked (at the level of culture and society) to perceptions of the legitimacy of the social system as a whole and, consequently, that activating certain gender stereotypes will exert predictable effects on attitudes toward the social system. Including direct measures of stereotype accessibility would be worthwhile in future studies.

We have proposed that the system-justifying effects observed in the present set of studies are related to the capacity of complementary stereotypes to sustain an image of society in which everyone benefits through a balanced dispersion of benefits (as well as burdens; see Glick et al., 2004). This is suggested by the results of Study 3, and it is also consistent with work investigating complementary stereotypes of the rich and poor (Kay et al., 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003; Lane, 1959/2004). It is likely that more basic cognitive processes pertaining to automatic, nonconscious goal pursuit also underlie the effects of incidental exposure to complementary stereotypes (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998; Glaser & Banaji, 1999; Higgins et al., 1977). For example, Bargh et al.’s (2001) automotive model suggests that once a given situation leads an individual to consciously adopt a specific goal often enough (so that the situation–behavior link becomes adequately “tight”), the situation will eventually begin to automatically activate the goal. Although our dependent measures differed from the types of motivated behaviors that models of this type are generally used to explain, their emphasis on the replacement of a consciously motivated process with an implicitly activated one is intuitively appealing. From this perspective, one could account for the relation between complementary stereotype activation and societal-level rationalization in terms of motive-fulfilling processes. That is, the repetition of explicit justifications for inequality in society (through the use of commonly held complementary stereotypes) may occur so often and become so “well-rehearsed” that increasing the cognitive accessibility of such stereotypes would automatically trigger the same rationalization process, without any deep consideration of the merits of the specific triggers (i.e., the stereotypes). An obvious limitation of the present set of studies is that they do not directly address the automatic or motivated qualities of stereotypical rationalizations, but this was not a central goal of the planned research. Future research is needed to investigate these issues more directly and to evaluate the suitability of the automotive model in accounting for system justification effects of this type.

The present set of studies contributes to an understanding of the impact of social stereotypes in at least two important ways. Past research addressing the system-justifying potential of stereotypes has been largely correlational in nature, and it has often focused on explicit endorsement of various stereotypes that are assumed to rationalize inequality. By manipulating the cognitive accessibility of gender stereotypes and by measuring system justification as an outcome variable, we have provided new and direct evidence in support of several converging theoretical perspectives that stress system maintenance as a functional property of social stereotypes (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Temporary activation of culturally available gender stereotypes does lead women—and in some circumstances men—to embrace the system (with its attendant degree of inequality) more enthusiastically than they otherwise would. Although our data do not suggest that the contents of stereotypes arise solely or even primarily because of their capacity to bring about allegiance to the system, it is at least clearer now that some very familiar stereotypes do indeed have this capacity once they are activated.

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