

Stereotypes as Ideologies. The case of Gender Categories

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Abstract

The paper reviews some of the theoretical models of gender stereotypes. Different approaches, such as the sociocognitive, the intergroup, in particular the role model, the expectations model and the social function of stereotypes are discussed. Gender stereotypes are seen as social representations or collective ideologies defining models of behavior.

Key words: Gender; Stereotypes; Ideologies; Social Representations.

Los estereotipos como ideologías. El caso de las categorías de género

Resumen

Este texto revisa algunos de los modelos teóricos de los estereotipos de género. Diferentes aproximaciones, como la sociocognitiva, la intergrupar, en particular, el modelo de roles, el modelo de expectativas y el de funciones sociales de los estereotipos son examinados. Los estereotipos de género se conciben como representaciones sociales o ideologías colectivas que definen modelos de conducta.

Pablaras clave: Esterotipos; Género; Ideología; Representaciones Sociales.

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Introduction

Interest in gender-related socio-psychological processes has increased in the last twenty years, as evidenced by the great number of studies included in recent reviews of the literature (Deaux, 1984, 1985; Spence, Deaux and Helmreich, 1985). Indeed gender research may very well represent a privileged field to add scientific rigor to social relevance - to use Brewer's (1985) classification of two polarized research traditions (experimental rigor and policy relevance) in a broader sense. However, research in this field has not yet provided a consistent social psychological explanation for the persistence of discriminatory judgements, evaluations and attributions associated to gender categories, in spite of significant social change in recent years in the number of working women and in their occupational activities and status.

Within the most recent framework in social psychology, the social cognition and information processing perspective (Higgins and Bargh, 1987) much research has been done on the structuring of gender stereotypes (Deaux and Lewis, 1984; Deaux and Kite, 1985), their structural relationship to other sub-categories (Deaux, Winton, Crowley and Lewis, 1985) and inference of stereotypical traits or categories (Ashmore and DelBoca, 1979; Ashmore, 1981). However, the social cognition perspective tends to ignore evaluation, which has led on to recuperate attitude theory (Eagly, 1989), and content, which was particularly relevant in classical studies of sex-role stereotypes (Rosenkrantz, *et al.*, 1968; Broverman, *et al.*, 1972). The neglect of evaluation and content also involves a further neglect of the consensuality about the dimensions that differentiate gender groups, the direction of this differentiation and the identification of group members with these dimensions. These aspects are particularly important within an intergroup analysis (Tajfel, 1978) of gender relations (Huici, 1984) but this perspective has paid very little attention to gender categories.

In this paper we do not pretend to review the whole production of gender research within the social cognition perspective, neither do we pretend to present a completely new model of gender intergroup relations. However, we intend to enhance the evidence that gender beliefs are largely shared by groups of different ages and different nationalities, and to present evidence from our own research, that gender stereotypes can be seen as collective ideologies that give sense to the self and the group membership and orient expectations of behaviour. Furthermore, our analysis of this evidence will enhance the structural difference between gender stereotypes that neither the social cognition nor the intergroup relations perspectives have considered so far.

Gender stereotypes as largely shared asymmetrical beliefs

The classical studies of Rosenkrantz, *et al.* (1968) and Broverman, *et al.* (1972) have evidenced that groups of different ages, religions and levels of instruction associate the positive poles of the traits of independence, rationality and assertiveness, which the authors designate by the cluster of competence, with the masculine category, and the positive poles of the traits of expressivity and affectiveness with the feminine category. According to these results, the masculine category includes a greater number of positive traits than the feminine category, which is related with a more positive self-image for male subjects than for female subjects. Analysis of data collected in 25 countries shows the cross-

national generality of these findings concerning both the content and the evaluative direction of gender stereotypes (Williams and Best, 1986).

However, critics of Rosenkrantz's and Broverman's studies have pointed out that their list of traits contained more masculine than feminine traits (Widiger and Settle, 1987), but in trying to eliminate the masculine-favorable bias the authors replaced it with a feminine-favorable bias. Instead of considering this an inevitable methodological weakness of studies of stereotypical traits that must necessarily lead to the search for new and more rigorous measures (Eagly and Mladinic, 1989), we could also hypothesize that the impossibility of finding a quantitative and evaluative equivalence of male and female traits lies in the absence of symmetry between gender categories. Masculine competences seem more diverse than feminine competences according to the results of several studies that were not specifically designed to evidence this asymmetry.

Sub-categories of woman only elicit typical feminine traits in the case of the traditional role of housewife (Clifton, McGrath and Dewick, 1976) while other sub-categories share a great number of traits that are not typically feminine. Studies designed to assess the relative salience of different components of the stereotypes for the inference of other characteristics have shown the importance of the role dimension (Deaux and Lewis, 1984; Deaux and Kite, 1985) but they also show the strong association between the category of women and the feminine traditional role, designated by the sub-categories of mothers and parents (Deaux, Winton, Crowley and Lewis, 1985). On the other hand, the content of the masculine stereotype overlaps with the more universal category of nationality, as shown in a study on the stereotypes of gender categories of different nationalities (Eagly and Kite, 1987).

Indeed, in his definition of the gender roles, Parsons (1956a) acknowledged that the feminine role is strictly defined within the family context while the masculine role is more complex and diffuse because it is both related to family life and to life outside the family. However, he was only concerned with the implications of this difference in the socialization of boys and girls in their adequate sex-roles (Parsons, 1956b). As opposed to this idea and also to the classical studies of stereotypes which showed that the greater favorability of the masculine stereotype resulted in a lower self-esteem for female subjects (Broverman, *et al.*, 1972), the model of androgyny (Bem, 1974) aimed at showing that androgynous individuals had a higher self-esteem and were more capable of engaging successfully in a greater variety of situations than individuals with an adequate sex-role identity.

But the validation of this hypothesis was questioned by authors who criticized the scoring system used to classify the subjects (Spence, Helmreich and Stapp, 1975), the similarity of the adaptability results of masculine-oriented and androgynous male subjects (Jones, Chernovetz and Hansson, 1978) and the impossibility of operationalizing behaviours or situations without a specific role connotation (Locksley and Colten, 1979). The hypothesis of the asymmetry between gender identities, underlying those theoretical criticisms, was recently confirmed by Lorenzi-Cioldi (1988) in a series of experiments which showed that the masculine role orientation and model of behaviour overlaps the dominant conception of individuality and distinctive behaviour.

Our own research on gender stereotypes with Portuguese university students (Amâncio, 1989a) aimed at analyzing the relationship between stereotypes, the self-images of male and female subjects and the conception of the adult. 188

students of both sexes, working and not working, spontaneously associated traits to the stimuli "a person of the same sex", "a person of the other sex" and "myself", which were presented in all possible orders. A Factor Correspondence Analysis was run for the twelve dictionaries established for the three stimuli as viewed by each of the four groups of subjects (working males, working females, non-working males and non-working females) followed by other analysis considering only the sex of the subjects, their working situation and the type of stimulus. Results showed that male subjects consistently differentiate between gender categories, while female subjects differentiate between the self and the ingroup. As for the content, both sexes attribute traits of instrumentality and dominance to the masculine category and traits of affection and expressivity to the female group. Male subjects, however, have a varied vocabulary related to heterosexual attraction and eroticism, whereas female subjects do not use this vocabulary, neither do they use physical traits in their self-images, as opposed to male subjects. All traits common to both sexes in all analyses were included in a list that was presented to 182 subjects with the same characteristics as those having participated in the first study. Half of these subjects classified the traits as typical masculine or feminine and the other half classified them as positive or negative for the adult person. These results showed that the masculine stereotype includes more traits than the feminine stereotype, and that the proportion of positive and negative traits is also more favorable to the masculine stereotype. Furthermore, the masculine stereotype includes a variety of competences of the adult person, whereas adult competences of the feminine stereotype are strictly related to the feminine traditional role, as wife and mother.

According to Tajfel's social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) defavorable comparisons on the shared categorial dimensions of comparison result in a negative identity and group members will define either individual strategies, such as assimilation of outgroup characteristics and refusal of the ingroup's, or collective strategies, such as changing the evaluative connotation of ingroup characteristics or creating new dimensions of comparison. Although the confrontation of the results of our two studies indicate that the female group members have a negative identity, as other studies of gender stereotypes had already shown, women do not show any of the predicted strategies to change. On the contrary, they include in their self-images the most positive traits of the feminine stereotype, which are those related to the traditional role, thus differentiating themselves from the ingroup, as more feminine. Furthermore, in the case of working women, this strategy coexists with the assimilation of masculine traits, and this coexistence of universal and particular competences reflects itself in their insecure self-image.

Gender stereotypes as largely shared ideologies

Beliefs about sex differences influence other processes of social perception, such as behavioural explanations and expectations. As mentioned before, studies of androgyny were faced with the difficulty of finding tasks and situations without a specific role connotation. Thus, it is important to show the way gender stereotypes interrelate with other processes of social thinking to shape a social construction of gender.

The concept of personality implicit theory has been proposed to analyze the interrelation between traits, feelings and expectations of behaviour (Ash-

more and DelBoca, 1979, Ashmore; 1981) by authors who consider that the concept of stereotype is too much associated to traits and therefore too narrow to encompass other inferences than personality characteristics. Inferences of behaviour, such as influence style, have been studied as a function of the status and the sex of actors engaged in interactions of persuasion (Steffen and Eagly, 1985) but the similar effects of high status and male actors are ultimately explained through the distribution of women and men into social roles (Eagly, 1988). Differences in attributions for successful performances, which are explained by internal causes in the case of male subjects and external causes in the case of female subjects, are also seen as a consequence of expectations concerning the adequate sex-role behaviour (Deaux, 1984).

Once more these explanations assume sex-roles, internalized through socialization as simply content differentiated. However, if we assume them as asymmetrical, expectations of behaviour should also evidence this asymmetry, both in content and in form. In order to validate this hypothesis we designed an experiment where the status and sex of the actor were manipulated in an episode concerning a disciplinary decision in an organisation (Amâncio, 1990). The decision was either interpersonally oriented (helping behaviour), or based on the organisational interests (punishment). Typical masculine and feminine traits, as well as traits that had no gender connotation were included in a list of dependent variables. Results showed that feminine traits were associated with the interpersonal decision whereas masculine traits were associated with both decisions. Furthermore, the female actor was described with feminine traits when she behaved according to her role and with masculine traits when she did not, whereas judgements of the male actor were not influenced by his behaviour.

In a second experiment with the same episode and a similar design, attributions of behaviour were used as dependent variables. In the first experiment subjects were asked, first of all, to give at least five reasons to explain the decision. These statements were content analyzed and then included in a questionnaire with several causal dimensions scales. The explanations for the second experiment were selected on the basis of the factor analysis (PCA) of this questionnaire. According to our results, attributions for a decision, just like attributions for success (Deaux, 1984), are internal in the case of male actors and external in the case of female actors.

However, studies of achievement attribution confronting the classical two-dimensional method (locus of control and stability) with a free response method have shown (Sousa and Leyens, 1987) that the classical dimensions are insufficient to evidence discriminatory attributions for male and female achievements. In order to investigate the existence of spontaneous dimensions of causality in our second experiment, we performed a factor analysis on the 12 explanations followed by an analysis of variance on the factor's scores. The results of this procedure showed that the dimension of causality which included internal and positive explanations was attributed to the interpersonal decision and to the female actor, whereas the dimension of causality which associated positive explanations with explanations that were related to organizational ethics, such as duty or the manager's responsibility, was attributed to the decision to punish but also to the female actor.

Within the framework of intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1981, 1982) social stereotypes are analyzed as ideologizations that shape collective action and intergroup relations through the three functions of differentiation, explanation and

justification. However, according to our results the outgroup stereotype is particularly functional for the group occupying the privileged position in the intergroup relation. In our study of stereotypes the differentiation between gender categories was particularly salient for male subjects. Male subjects also attribute feminine traits to female actors more consistently than female subjects, although both groups attribute masculine traits to the female actor who does not behave according to her role. For male subjects, female actors' decisions are more consistently explained either by their traditional role or by organizational norms. Concerning the justificatory function of the feminine stereotype, we observed the same asymmetry. In a study of social implicit theories about women and work in which we analyzed the subjective causal relation of the content of the feminine stereotype and women's discrimination at work (Amâncio and Soczka, 1988) male subject's structure of explanations associated the feminine traditional role with the dimensions of expressiveness and submission, independently of the subject's conservative position, whereas conservative female subjects agreed that the traditional role is women's most important contribution to society but did not associate this role with a specific pattern of competences that are inadequate at work.

Conclusion

Studies apparently so diverse both in the theoretical perspective and in methodological procedures, such as those that were designed to analyze differences between gender categories and those designed to analyze the cognitive processing of gender related information and dual versus overlapping sex-role identity, present several forms of evidence concerning the structural difference of gender categorization and stereotyping.

Gender categories do not encompass a simple binary (Maccoby, 1988) role orientation (Eagly, 1988) nor do they only differ in the evaluation of common dimensions (Tajfel, 1978), but they also differ in social significance. Recent social cognitive models enhancing the conceptual differentiation of categorial, individual and personalized information (Brewer, 1988) should also integrate the qualitative distinction between universal and particular representations of "person". A role orientation in terms of pattern of competences with the consequent norms of behaviour clearly exists within the feminine stereotype, as opposed to the greater diversity and extension of significance of the masculine stereotype. Thus, feminine stereotypical dimensions, particularly role, are more salient, enhancing greater similarity in social perception and orienting more particular expectations in the case of the female actor. On the other hand, the male actor's behaviour seems "naturally" more diverse and therefore more internal and distinctive than the female actor's behaviour, since the identification with the models of "person" defined by categorial stereotypes implies different patterns of male and female behaviour (Amâncio, 1989b). Under these circumstances the feminine stereotype becomes more functional for male subjects, at least within the working context, while female subjects are faced with the difficult enterprise of reducing the salience of gender categories and maintaining femininity as a specific feature of their own group.

The asymmetry of gender stereotypes functions and significance has been almost always evidenced in studies that are related to the working context. The importance of work versus family as a dimension of differentiation between gen-

der categories certainly demands more studies related to the family context in order to further validate the hypothesis of the structural difference between gender stereotypes which, according to recent studies, also underlies parental roles (Scott and Alwin, 1989).

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