

Proof that men and women activate stereotypes of competence and sociability respectively

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Are stereotypes and prejudices automatically activated when we notice someone? How do women react when they are faced with the traditional gender roles?

A group of scientists from the University of Granada has studied for the first time from a scientific point of view gender driven prejudices, proving that both stereotypes and prejudices can be modified in spite of the automaticity of stereotyping and even though they are implicit (that is to say, people do not realize them).

The study was carried out by Doctor Soledad de Lemus Martín and directed by Miguel Moya Morales and Juan Lupiáñez Castillo, professors of the Department of Social Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Methodology and Department of Experimental Psychology and Behavioural Physiology.

The researchers from the University of Granada have proven that a man's image associated with masculinity activates a mental structure of competence, whereas when we see a woman we activate the social one. This is because these are the conventional domains in which we usually categorize them.

The results of this study prove that when we see someone in a concrete social context, the qualities associated with competence (efficacy, motivation, intelligence and their antonyms) are more activated when we judge men or women in their traditional roles (the man in an office as a leader and the woman as a housewife). However, the qualities related to sociability (kindness, understanding, sensibility and their antonyms) are notably more activated in counter-stereotype contexts (a man doing the housework and a woman as a leader).

Furthermore, women react at an emotional level, judging men more negatively when they are in their traditional roles, whereas it changes significantly when they play counter-stereotype roles.

The study has significant practical applications for preventing stereotypes and prejudices towards disadvantaged groups. The researchers have pointed out that even though gender stereotypes represent a better distribution of society, prejudices can also be used strategically by lower-status groups in order to thwart the social disadvantage.

These findings are of great significance since there was no scientific evidence suggesting that a member of a disadvantaged group could react in such a spontaneous way before a threat to the identity of his group.

According to the researchers "it would be interesting to develop the possible uses of prejudice as a strategy for social change and a way to observe if women do not only react negatively to maintain gender equality but also develop positive behavioural strategies to promote social equality".

The results of this research have been accepted for their publication in Spanish in the 'Psicológica' journal (included in the database of "Science Citation Index"), as well as in other international specialized magazines.

Source: Universidad de Granada

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