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**Should We Have Done with Gender Stereotypes? A Critical Review of  
Psychosocial Studies on the Relations Between the Sexes**

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*Abstract*

We examine a tendency, dominant in the social psychology of relations between the sexes, to focus on gender stereotypes that affect individuals, and to privilege a reading in terms of masculine domination in order to account for them. Through a critical analysis of well-known works in this field, we seek to show that this orientation is usually associated with an overestimation of the impact of gender stereotypes and leads to a partial, and even partisan, vision of the dynamics between the sexes. In reviewing this question, we hope to contribute to a debate on the way in which social psychology often envisages relations between the sexes, and which we believe to be problematic.

**Introduction**

The objective of this article is to assess the significance of a predominant tendency in social psychology, in the context of strategies for the reduction of inequalities between men and women, to focus on the impact of gender stereotypes<sup>1</sup> that affect individuals, and to privilege an interpretation in terms of masculine domination<sup>2</sup> in order to account for them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By *gender stereotype*, we understand traits and behaviors expected of and valorized for the members of a group of the given sex. If stereotypes are the result of social construction (and in this sense, observing the terminological conventions of the discipline, refer to gender, with sex being instead associated with the biological dimension), then from the point of view of individuals, these stereotypes target and affect them above all because they are perceived as belonging to either the masculine or the feminine biological sex. (For a discussion of the problems posed by this distinction between sex and gender, see Helena Hirata, Françoise Laborie, Hélène Le Doaré, and Danièle Senotier, *Dictionnaire critique du féminisme* [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000]; Irène Théry, *La distinction de sexe: une nouvelle approche de l'égalité* [Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007]). As is conventional, we will speak of the feminine group to designate girls and women, and of the masculine group to designate boys and men. We place feminine and masculine in scare-quotes when we are not dealing directly with the sex of individuals but with socially constructed dimensions associated, stereotypically, with one or the other sex group: so-called “feminine” or “masculine” traits, for example.

<sup>2</sup> By *masculine domination* we understand the principle according to which men tend to consider themselves superior to women and, in the framework of their will to dominate over women, have at their disposal a material and symbolic power which limits the behavior and thoughts of women, who, for the most part, through alienation by the man's point of view, do not challenge this power. Theories of masculine domination consider that this principle is present in all societies, whether traditional or modern (Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice [Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002]).

<sup>3</sup> For example Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, “The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, no. 3 (1996): 491–512; John T. Jost and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “The role of stereotyping in system justification and the

Our argument here is that gender stereotypes, together with a reading in terms of masculine domination, pose four types of problems. Firstly, such an analysis brings with it biases which encourage an overestimation of the weight and the effects of gender stereotypes. Secondly, this analysis situates itself within what seems to us too deterministic and mechanistic a vision of the relation between individual and society, one which in particular is neglectful of the dynamics of individuals qua autonomous actors capable of making decisions about their own lives. Thirdly, this analysis fuels a partial, or even partisan, view of the reality of relations between women and men scarcely capable of taking account of contemporary social developments and, in particular, of the social and psychological heterogeneity of feminine and masculine groups. Finally, such an analysis may turn out to be paradoxically counterproductive in the struggle against inequality between women and men. Discourses couched in terms of masculine domination, which are widespread in certain policies in favor of equality, can arouse feelings of incomprehension in individuals insofar as they regard them as failing to recognize the way in which, in everyday life, as far as they are able, they promote equality between women and men. Thus, since they do not recognize themselves in this discourse or in the negative images of themselves that it presents, there is a risk that they may end up distancing themselves from policies of equality, or may not feel they are the ones being addressed and therefore become less engaged with these issues. In the course of this article we look successively at the presence of

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production of false-consciousness," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 33 (1994): 1-27; Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, *Les représentations des groupes dominants et dominés: collections et agrégats* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2009); Marie Sarlet and Benoit Dardenne, "Le sexisme bienveillant comme processus de maintien des inégalités sociales entre les genres," *L'Année psychologique* 112 (2012): 435-63; Jim Sidanius, Felicia Pratto, Colette van Laar, and Shana Levin, "Social dominance theory: Its agenda and method," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2004): 845-80.

evaluative biases linked to sex, the threat of gender stereotyping the validity of the procedures that measure adherence to gender stereotypes, and sexism and the supposed links between gender stereotypes and discriminatory behavior. Finally, we end with a critical discussion of the basic postulates that very often accompany studies of gender stereotypes. But before beginning, let us state that for us this is not a matter of denying that gender stereotypes, whether through explicit or unconscious mechanisms, can have negative effects and that in this sense it is quite valid to study them.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, as we aim to demonstrate, what is questionable is the general presence of these gender stereotypes and the magnitude of their negative effects.

### ***Contributions of Social Psychology to the Struggle Against Gender Stereotypes and Everyday Sexism***

Social psychology, drawing on a long tradition of research on stereotypes (implicit personality theory, beliefs about certain categories of people or groups) and prejudices (attitudes, whether positive or negative, in regard to these categories), has resolutely taken up the question of stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes, and their effects.<sup>5</sup> The aim is a legitimate one, and the underlying agenda calls for

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<sup>4</sup> Allen R. McConnell and Jill M. Leibold, "Relations among the implicit association test, discriminatory behavior, and explicit measures of racial attitudes," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 37 (2001): 435–42.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1954); Richard Y. Bourhis and Jacques-Philippe Leyens, *Stéréotypes, discrimination et relations intergroupes* (Brussels: Mardaga, 1998); Susan T. Fiske, "Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske, and G. Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 357–411; Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1922).

advances on theoretical, methodological, and practical planes. At the level of the struggle against gender discrimination, then, social psychology and its works are leading the way.<sup>6</sup> But what is being put forward, in fact? What are the underlying postulates? Is there any correspondence between the results of experimental research pursued within the framework of theories of domination, and phenomena observed in the “natural” social milieu?

### **Three Examples of Typical Research Studies on the Effects of Gender Stereotypes**

We will begin by presenting three social psychology research studies that are typical of a certain way of thinking about differences between the sexes. Of course, this is an arbitrary choice given the dozens of studies that have been published on the question. Our choice of these three owes to the fact that each of them is heavily referenced in manuals of social psychology, in research, and in campaigns for awareness of discrimination based on gender stereotypes. In this sense, they can claim to be part of a certain common culture both within and beyond social psychology.<sup>7</sup> The message conveyed by these studies aims to alert us to the alterations and deformations of the perception of reality inflicted upon us by our gender preconceptions and stereotypes and, in particular, to highlight the insidious effects of a certain masculine domination.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, one could consult Pascal Tisserant’s and Richard Bourhis’s “Discriminations and the management of equality and diversity” on the website Canal U, or the French Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Women’s Rights site [femmes.gouv.fr](http://femmes.gouv.fr).

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Gergen, “Social Psychology as History,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 26 (1973): 309–20.

Interestingly, owing to their popularity, these studies have been replicated by further studies; these replications are not so often referenced, but their results give us an image of the relations between the sexes quite different from the initial message conveyed by the original studies.

### ***The John and Sandra Condry Study (1976)***

In this study, a group of students, male and female, were shown a video of a nine-month-old baby's emotional reactions when shown different toys.<sup>8</sup> In the experiment, different groups of subjects were told that the same baby was a girl ("Dana") or a boy ("David"). Subsequently, the subjects had to describe the child's reactions using an emotion attribution scale and Osgood's semantic differential scale.<sup>9</sup> The results showed that when the baby was believed to be a boy, it was perceived as more active, more "potent," and was seen to express more anger and less fear, than when it was believed to be a girl. From this study it is concluded that individuals are influenced by very traditional gender stereotypes (forcefulness and activeness for the boy versus relative passivity and timid emotions for the girl), a simple arbitrary labeling of the sex of the child being enough to bring them into play and to modify the subjects' perception of reality. Let us remark straight away that these effects of labeling linked to sex are far from systematic. In 1989, Stern and Karraker, having analyzed 23 studies on the subject, noted that only 18% of the effects of labeling measured in

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<sup>8</sup> John Condry and Sandra Condry, "Sex differences: A study of the eye of the beholder," *Child Development* 47 (1976): 812-19.

<sup>9</sup> Charles E. Osgood, George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum, *The Measure of Meaning* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1957).

these studies were significant. Consequently, since the Condry and Condry study dates from 1976, one might well ask whether this type of phenomenon is still in effect today, given social developments since that time and the contemporary tendency toward a greater equality between the sexes. A recent study conducted by Steuer, Bode, Rada and Hittner suggests that in fact this is not the case.<sup>10</sup> They replicated the Condry study with almost exactly the same procedure as in the original. Now, they did not observe any effect of this gender labeling on the perceptions of the subjects: whether the baby was labeled boy or girl, both women and men perceived it similarly. There is nevertheless an interesting effect noted in the Steuer et al Study: the women insist more on the child's fear, the men on his/her anger—denoting a somewhat different sensitivity on the part of the two sexes.<sup>11</sup>

#### ***The Kay Deaux and Tim Emswiller Study (1974)***

In this study, male and female students were presented with recordings of men and women attempting to accurately identify objects with a “masculine” connotation (for example, a car jack) or a “feminine” one (for example, a mop [sic]).<sup>12</sup> Given the role of evaluators, the students had to indicate the extent to which the performances of the men and women were a matter of chance or ability. For male and female students

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<sup>10</sup> Faye B. Steuer, Blair C. Bode, Kelley E. Rada, and James B. Hittner, “Gender labeling and perceived infant emotionality: A partial replication of a ‘classic’ study,” *Psychological Reports* 107, no. 1 (2010): 139–44.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Kay Deaux and Tim Emswiller, “Explanation of successful performance on sex-linked tasks: What is skill for the male is luck for the female,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 29, no. 1 (1974), 80–85.

alike, the results showed that the success of the task with a “masculine” connotation was more likely to be attributed to ability when it was carried out by a man than when it was carried out by a woman, whereas the success of the task with a “feminine” connotation was just as likely to be attributed to ability whether it was carried out by a man or a woman. In other words, there was no symmetry in the evaluations: men were evaluated higher than women in the “masculine” domain, but seen as equivalent to woman in the “feminine” domain. Moreover—an important fact—in so far as there was no effect of sex in the evaluators themselves (both male and female students responded in the same way), this asymmetry in favor of men seemed to be internalized by women themselves, who, therefore, would be adversely affected by it. These results are interpreted as owing to the higher status and dominance of men in society. But as if this were not enough, when the experiment is reported this phenomenon is further accentuated: specifically, it is said that the study shows that the success of a performance of a man is explained by ability, that of a woman by chance,<sup>13</sup> which is an over-interpretation of what is actually observed in the experiment. Thus preconceptions sometimes influence researchers too.<sup>14</sup> This having

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Jean-Baptiste Légal and Sylvain Delouée, *Stéréotypes, préjugés et discriminations* (Paris: Dunod, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> In defense of the commentators on this experiment, it must be said that this exaggeration is already found in the title of Deaux and Emswiller’s article itself. More generally, as far as bias linked to researchers’ preconceptions is concerned, we know that, even in a rigorous experimental framework, these preconceptions can affect the results (Martin T. Ome, “On the social psychology of the psychological experiment: With particular reference to demand characteristics and their implications,” *American Psychologist* 17, no. 11 [1962]: 776–82; Henry W. Riecken, “A program for research on experiments in social psychology,” in *Decisions, Values and Groups*, ed. N.F. Washburne [Oxford: Pergamon, 1962], 25–41; Robert Rosenthal, “The effect of the experimenter on the results of the

been said, it should be mentioned that, from the beginning of the 1980s, various studies on this question of the attribution of ability have failed to reproduce these results, and have sometimes even obtained the inverse results: more ability attributed to women than to men.<sup>15</sup> In 1981, Post showed that this negative asymmetrical effect on the part of women depends particularly on political orientation: for example, “liberal” women (in the American sense of “open-minded on moral matters”), unlike conservative women, do not manifest this bias.<sup>16</sup> Finally, a meta-analysis by Swim and Sanna in 1996 concluded that these effects of attribution linked to the sex of the subjects are generally weak.<sup>17</sup>

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psychological research,” in *Progress in Experimental Personality Research*, ed. B.A. Maher [New York: Academic Press, 1964], 79–114). Certain studies have even shown that the accomplices of researchers, who by definition are not supposed to be taken in by the experiment, are also influenced by the things they are supposed to lead their naïve subjects to believe (Daniel Alaphilippe, “L’imposteur auto-mystifié,” *Bulletin de psychologie* 39:3-6, no. 374 [1986]: 191–96; Stéphane Laurens and Serge Moscovici, “The confederate’s and others’ self-conversion: A neglected phenomenon,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 145, no. 2 [2005], 191–207).

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy M. Haccoun and Stanley Stacy, “Perceptions of male and female success or failure in relation to spouse encouragement and sex-association of occupation,” *Sex Roles* 6 (1980): 819–32; Hilary M. Lips and Anita M. Myers, “Subject reactions to a stimulus person as a function of sex of subject and sex-role appropriateness of stimulus person’s career goal,” *Sex Roles* 6 (1980): 675–82; Stephanie H. Smith, George I. Whitehead, and Nan M. Sussman, “Perception of female and male success in United States and third world nations,” *Sex Roles* 10, no. 11–12 (1984): 903–11.

<sup>16</sup> Robin D. Post, “Causal explanations of male and female academic performance as a function of sex-role biases,” *Sex Roles* 7, no. 7 (1981): 691–98.

<sup>17</sup> Janet Swim, Eugene Borgida, Geoffrey Maruyama, and David G. Myers, “Joan McKay versus John McKay: Do gender stereotypes bias evaluation?” *Psychological Bulletin* 105 (1989): 409–29.

Along the same lines, let us mention that the results of Goldberg's oft-cited 1968 study, showing that when women subjects believe an article to have been written by a woman, they evaluate it less favorably than when they believe it to have been written by a man, were quickly called into question.<sup>18</sup> In 1975, Levenson, Burford, Bonno and Davis, who replicated this study on both a female and a male population, did not observe this bias: the sex of the author did not affect its evaluation, or, when it did, the articles believed to have been written by women were evaluated more favorably.<sup>19</sup> Swim et al's 1989 synthesis confirmed this absence of bias.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in 1991 a synthesis by Eagly, Mladinic, and Otto revealed that women, in terms of personality traits and the social desirability of these traits, are generally better evaluated than men, by women as well as men—which they call the “Wonderful Women Effect.”<sup>21</sup> The “Wonderful Women Effect” can be explained by the fact that positive characteristics (such as care for others and sensitivity) are seen as more frequent in women than in men and that, inversely, negative characteristics (such as aggression or egotism) are perceived as more frequent in the latter than in the former.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Philip Goldberg, “Are women prejudiced against women?” *Trans-Action* 5, no. 5 (1968): 28–30.

<sup>19</sup> Hanna Levenson, Brent Burford, Bobbie Bonno, and Loren Davis, “Are women still prejudiced against women? A replication and extension of Goldberg's study,” *The Journal of Psychology* 89, no. 1 (1975): 67–71.

<sup>20</sup> Swim et al, “Joan McKay versus John McKay.”

<sup>21</sup> Alice H. Eagly and Antonio Mladinic, “Are people prejudiced against women? Some answers from research on attitudes, gender stereotypes, and judgments of competence,” in *European Review of Social Psychology* 5, ed. W. Stroebe and M. Hewstone (London: Wiley, 1994): 1–35.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Gilligan, *Une si grande différence* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986). Let us point out that this bias in favor of women was verified using procedures in which the evaluation of feminine and masculine

To end these studies on stereotypes, we will present one last piece of French research, used widely in promoting awareness of gender stereotypes, and which poses the question of the extent to which the phenomena observed under laboratory conditions pertain to social reality.

### ***(Gender) Stereotype Threat***

We have long known that being a part of a group that is the target of negative stereotypes can have deleterious effects on performance.<sup>23</sup> This is what Steele and Aronson designate with the notion of “stereotype threat,” where fear of confirming a stereotype, even when it is known to be unfounded, by causing tension and additional mental stress, ultimately leads the subject who is the victim of the stereotype to confirm it.<sup>24</sup> Let us specify that this threat is particularly manifested in situations of

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targets was realized separately and by different subjects (between-subject design), in order to avoid biases of social desirability. Indeed, we know that, when targets of both sexes are evaluated by the same subjects (within-subject design), the subjects, in trying not to give the impression of stigmatizing the feminine target, whose group may suffer inequalities, may be led to evaluate her better than the masculine target.

<sup>23</sup> Irvin Katz, Edgar G. Epps, and Leland J. Axelson, “Effect upon Negro digit symbol performance of comparison with Whites and with other Negroes,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 69 (1964): 963–70.

<sup>24</sup> Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, “Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797–811. Let us specify that one can also provoke the contrary effect (better performances) when one activates a positive stereotype attached to the group to which the individual who must realize the task belongs (the phenomenon of ‘stereotype boost’ (Margaret Shih, Todd L. Pittinsky, Geoffrey C. Ho, “Stereotype boost: Positive outcomes from the activation of positive stereotypes,” in *Stereotype Threat: Theory,*

confrontation between groups, where stereotypes become more prominent. Let us also signal a certain misunderstanding that is to be avoided. The studies on stereotype threat do not show that negative stereotypes in themselves explain the inferior results of the individuals who belong to the stereotyped groups.<sup>25</sup> What these studies bring to light is that negative stereotypes add extra difficulties for the disadvantaged group; but the root causes are principally a matter of the social conditions of the individuals belonging to these groups. When social conditions between social groups initially of a different status are equalized, when the environment or the context are more egalitarian, the differences of performance between these groups tend to disappear, with stereotype threat thus playing less of a role.<sup>26</sup>

At the level of gender stereotypes, Pascal Huguet and Isabelle Régner<sup>27</sup> revealed a phenomenon similar to that studied by Steele and Aronson.<sup>28</sup> In their studies, they

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*Process, and Application*, ed. M. Inzlicht and T. Schmader (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 141–56.

<sup>25</sup> Paul R. Sackett, Chaitra M. Hardison, and Michael J. Cullen, “On interpreting stereotype threat as accounting for African American – white differences on cognitive tests,” *American Psychologist* 59, no. 1 (2004): 7–13.

<sup>26</sup> Virginie Bonnot and Jean-Claude Croizet, “Stereotype threat and stereotype endorsement: Their joint influence on mathematic performance,” *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale* 24, no. 2 (2011): 105–20; Jean-Claude Croizet and Theresa Claire, “Extending the concept of stereotype threat to social class: The intellectual underperformance of students from low socioeconomic background,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24, no. 6 (1998): 588–94; Jean-Claude Croizet and Marion Dutrévis, “Socioeconomic status and intelligence: Why test scores do not equal merit,” *Journal of Poverty* 8 (2004): 91–107.

<sup>27</sup> Pascal Huguet and Isabelle Régner, “Stereotype threat among schoolgirls in quasi-ordinary classroom circumstances,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99, no. 3 (2007): 545–60; “Counter-

aimed to study the effects of the negative stereotype according to which girls are inferior to boys at mathematics, the threat of this stereotype explaining in part why young girls obtain worse results than boys in the subject, and why they are less likely to pursue scientific careers.<sup>29</sup> In this context, they had French schoolboys and girls in mixed groups take a test that was supposed either to measure their ability in geometry (which would implicitly bring into play the negative stereotype for girls), or to gauge their memory or their capacity for drawing (aspects supposed not to be the subject of gender stereotyping). In confirmation of the hypothesis, girls scored lower than boys when the test was associated with the negative stereotype (geometry). On the contrary, they scored higher than boys when the test was not associated with this stereotype (memory test or drawing), a finding that is not wholly explained. Thus, if we take just the results in geometry, this study showed, in a mixed situation, the negative effects of a gender stereotype on the performances of girls. As far as the stereotype threat linked to mathematics is concerned, it must however be noted that a recent meta-analysis bearing on thirty-one published studies and completed by three experiments on 931 American pupils aged from 9 to 17, concluded that there was no

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stereotypic beliefs in math do not protect school girls from stereotype threat,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45 (2009): 1024–27.

<sup>28</sup> “Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans.”

<sup>29</sup> For a synthetic work foregrounding the effect of gender stereotype threat, see Isabelle Régner, Jennifer R. Steele, Nalini Ambady, Catherine Thinus-Blanc, and Pascal Huguet, “Our future scientists: a review of stereotype threat in girls from early elementary school to middle school,” *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale* 27, no. 3 (2014): 13–51.

significant effect of stereotype threat.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, are these negative effects necessarily present in real life at the level of school results? In order to conclude that stereotype threat is in effect, one would have to observe *a minima* that in the context of mixed boy/girl schools, girls do indeed achieve lower than boys in mathematics. But in fact this is not the case. In the US, a meta-analysis by Lindberg, Hyde, Petersen and Lim has shown that girls and boys perform similarly in the subject.<sup>31</sup> This is also true in France, where the 2013 Ministry of National Education statistics reveal that overall girls achieve an equivalent level to that of boys in mathematics. Let us add that in the scientific baccalaureate par excellence, the “bac S,” where they represent 45% of candidates, girls even tend to achieve better results than boys. One might therefore wonder about the presence and significance of a stereotype threat whose effects in experimental studies are not borne out when one puts it to the test of real situations of mixed schooling. An observation which suggests that, in information campaigns for gender equality, rather than concentrating on the threat of a stereotype whose reality is arguable, we might be better off challenging certain received ideas by highlighting this result: girls are just as good as boys at mathematics. Indeed, recent studies have revealed some paradoxical effects linked to the omnipresence of the discourse alerting us to the dangers of this kind of stereotype.<sup>32</sup> For example, in his

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<sup>30</sup> Colleen M. Ganley, Leigh A. Mingle, Allison M. Ryan, Katherine Ryan, Marina Vasilyeva, and Michelle Perry, “An examination of stereotype threat effects on girls’ mathematics performance,” *Developmental Psychology* 49, no. 10 (2013): 1886–97.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah M. Lindberg, Janet S. Hyde, Jennifer L. Petersen, and Marcia C. Linn, “New trends in gender and mathematics performance: A meta-analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 6 (2010): 1123–35.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Breda and Son T. Ly, “Professors in core science fields are not always biased against women: Evidence from France,” *Paris School of Economics-CNRS* (2014): 1–40.

study of 3,964 French sixth grade schoolgirls and boys, Terrier observes that mathematics teachers unconsciously mark girls more generously than boys (and this when standardized and anonymous marking—without knowing the sex of the student—reveals equivalent achievement for girls and boys).<sup>33</sup> These teachers therefore practice discrimination in favor of girls, perhaps from fear of being the involuntary agents of the widespread notion that girls are at a disadvantage in relation to boys in scientific disciplines. In other words, the stereotype “girls are not as good at mathematics” here seems to become a self-fulfilling prophecy, but in the opposite direction to which such prophecies are usually understood and expected to operate.

Furthermore, let us recall that, contrary to what certain works on stereotype threat tend to suggest, individuals do not necessarily fall victim to such a threat. When women are explicitly (and not implicitly, as in most studies on stereotype threat) presented with a negative stereotype about their group (for example, by saying that they are worse negotiators than men), their performance does not get worse but, on the contrary, improves.<sup>34</sup> This result can be explained in terms of reactance, or as the reaction to a feeling of injustice: women mobilize their cognitive resources in order to challenge a stereotype that fixes them in a negative identity. What is more, one might

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<sup>33</sup> Camille Terrier, “Giving a little help to girls? Evidence on grade discrimination and its effects on students’ achievement,” *Paris School of Economics-CNRS* 36 (2014): 1–41.

<sup>34</sup> Laura J. Kray, Leigh Thompson, and Adam Galinsky, “Battle of the sexes: Gender stereotype confirmation and reactance in negotiations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, no. 6 (2001): 942–58.

observe that when women are placed in situations of mastery and autonomy, this kind of stereotype threat also fades away.<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, the message of the original studies outlined above, which are found in many current manuals of social psychology, is that we are the victims of gender stereotypes. Certainly, there is no doubt that negative effects of gender stereotypes are common, yet the message in this form is eminently disputable. As will have been noted, the data issuing both from certain replications of the studies and from social practices in the “natural” milieu do not always corroborate this assertion—far from it. In this sense, to explain certain differences in behavior between girls and boys solely by way of gender stereotypes seems to us reductive, as is the case when one cites differences in the choice of subject options between them. Although it is true that girls are less likely to take up scientific subjects, it must be added that boys are also taking them up less, and that there is a general decline in numbers for these subjects. This means that what is in play here is not solely a question of gender stereotypes, but also a decline in the social desirability of the subjects in question. It must be added that this loss of interest on the part of young girls only applies to certain specific scientific subjects (physics, fundamental chemistry) and that they are more numerous than boys in other scientific subjects (biology, medicine)—which sits badly with a reading in terms of gender stereotypes unless we consider that the latter subjects are not scientific, or that there is still a categorization of these subjects into feminine and masculine. But even in the latter hypothesis, we see that the potential for girls to engage in scientific subjects has broadened considerably.

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<sup>35</sup> Katie J. Van Loo and Robert J. Rydell, “On the experience of feeling powerful: Perceived power moderates the effect of stereotype threat on women’s math performance,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 39, no. 3 (2013): 387–400.

At this stage, one might wonder about the external validity of the results of the experimental studies often carried out in laboratory conditions—that is, the extent to which they can be generalized into “real” life. In parallel with the conducting of such experiments, shouldn’t we make sure that the mechanisms studied actually correspond to phenomena observed at the level of social practices?

Having said this, models such as the social judgeability and social determinability approaches can prove fruitful in understanding the conditions under which stereotypes may or may not apply. These models show that social pressures relating to certain stereotypes are only exerted under certain conditions. For instance, when a person in the position of a potential judge not only has information at their disposal that can be used to construct their judgment, but also deem that the parameters of the situation permit them to pass judgment (social judgeability). Or when the characteristics of the social situation exert an influence upon the person who has to make a judgement (social determinability).<sup>36</sup>

## **On the Measurement of Gender Stereotypes and Everyday**

### **Sexism**

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<sup>36</sup> Pascal Morchain, Georges Schadron, Roxane Saint-Bauzel, Géraldine Béchu, “« Le parfum ». Quand l’odeur d’un candidat affecte le recruteur...ou pas: une question de déterminabilité,” *Revue Internationale de psychologie sociale* 26, no. 2 (2013): 73–79; Candy Sabatier, Georges Schadron, Isabelle Milhabet, and Daniel Priolo, “La déterminabilité de « celui qui juge » : impact sur l’orientation d’un jugement et sur la formation d’impression,” *L’Année psychologique* 110, no. 4 (2010): 573–93; Georges Schadron, “Déterminabilité sociale et essentialisme psychologique : quand une conception essentialiste renforce la confirmation des attentes stéréotypiques,” *Les cahiers internationaux de psychologie sociale* 67–68, no. 3 (2005): 77–84.

In this section we will try to show how methods of measurement tend to lead to an overestimation of the weight of gender stereotypes and of everyday sexism.

### ***Explicit Measures of Gender Stereotyping and Everyday Sexism***

By explicit measures we understand methods in which the subject is asked to indicate the extent of his or her agreement with propositions relating to gender stereotypes.

The most well known of these measurements is the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI).<sup>37</sup> This questionnaire consists of 60 items relating to personality traits: 20 so-called “feminine” items, 20 so-called “masculine” items, and 20 “neutral” items (not associated with sex roles). When the BSRI was first created, it was based on a true theoretical innovation, since it no longer envisaged femininity and masculinity as two dimensions situated on opposite sides of the same continuum (i.e., if you are very “feminine” you are de facto not very “masculine”), as was the case in older questionnaires,<sup>38</sup> but as two independent dimensions. It thus permitted more freedom in the evaluation of the femininity/masculinity of individuals. We must however note the now obsolete, rather traditional aspect of some of the items on the questionnaire: as “feminine” items we have: “gullible,” “flatterable,” and “shy”; and as “masculine” items: “forceful,” “acts as a leader,” “dominant.”<sup>39</sup> There is one point that raises a

**Commented [MM1]:**

Il n'y a pas un problème avec “well known”. Mais j'ai éliminé le tiret. “Best known” est aussi possible: “The best known of these...”

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<sup>37</sup> Sandra L. Bem, “The measurement of psychological androgyny,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 42 (1974): 155–62.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Harrison G. Gough, *Manual for the California Psychological Inventory* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1957).

<sup>39</sup> For more details on this type of questionnaire, see Kamel Gana, “Androgynie psychologique et valeurs socio-cognitives des dimensions du concept de soi,” *Les cahiers internationaux de psychologie*

question: the subject's responses (in describing themselves) are often interpreted as a measure of their adhesion to gender stereotypes.<sup>40</sup> But is this necessarily the case? Imagine a resolutely feminist woman who marks her full agreement with certain "feminine" items such as "sensitive to other's needs" or "loves children." Is she just adhering to these gender stereotypes? Couldn't one see this as a personal response emphasizing the priority she places on her relations with others? Often, because of an absence of any complementary information on the person who has filled out the questionnaire, it is impossible to answer this question. When one reasons in terms of adhesion to gender stereotypes, the risk is that one applies the group level of analysis (gender stereotypes) to the individual level (the task of self-description), as if the former were a mere mechanical summation of the former.<sup>41</sup>

Modern questionnaires on sexism ("neo-sexism," "ambivalent sexism") have also been developed using these methods of explicit measurement, in order to measure potentially discriminatory stereotypes about the other sex group. These questionnaires set out from the idea that sexism, qua expression of masculine domination, is now

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*sociale* 25 (1995): 27–43; Pascaline K'Delant, Kamel Gana, "Analyse multitraits-multiméthodes des scores au questionnaire d'attributs personnels (Personal attributes questionnaire [PAQ]) auprès d'un échantillon féminin," *Psychologie française* 54 (2009): 323–29; Paul Fontayne, Philippe Sarrazin, and Jean-Pierre Famose, "The Bem sex-role Inventory: Validation of short version for French teenagers," *European Review of Applied Psychology*, 50, no. 4 (2000): 405–16. For a critique of BSRI, see Namok Choi, Dale R. Fuqua, Jody L. Newman, "The Bem sex-role inventory: Continuing theoretical problems," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 68, no. 5 (2008): 881–900.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra L. Bem, "The BSRI and gender schema Theory: A reply to Spence and Helmreich," *Psychological Review* 88, no. 4 (1981): 369–71.

<sup>41</sup> Anne Locksley and Mary E. Colten, "Psychological Androgyny: A case of mistaken identity?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no. 6 (1979): 1017–31.

taking subtler forms because it has become socially problematic to overtly challenge the principle of gender equality. Alongside traditional sexism, characterized by negative attitudes and hostility towards women (who are seen as aggressive, manipulative, and incompetent), a “benevolent” sexism develops which, under cover of foregrounding the positive qualities of women (purity, attention to others) and promoting chivalrous or romantic sentiments toward them, keeps them hemmed into a subordinate position (by insisting on their fragility and their need to be protected by men). This second form of sexism, since it is less visible, is seen as more insidious and as having more negative effects upon women than hostile sexism. It is more difficult for women to challenge it, and they may not be so conscious of its perverse effects. One might nonetheless question this idea that modern sexism is more redoubtable than traditional sexism because it is more insidious. Isn't the situation of women in certain traditional societies, because of traditional sexism, more worrying than the situation of women in our western societies, supposedly characterized by a certain benevolent sexism? What is more, it seems to us, speaking for ourselves, that treating women as incompetent or manipulative (traditional sexism) is more problematic than treating them as sensitive but fragile (benevolent sexism). Nonetheless, these questionnaires rest upon the postulate that masculine dominance is just as present in modern societies; that the qualitative changes in this dominance do not mark any quantitative change in it<sup>42</sup>—leading authors who follow this line of thought to write “plus ça change....”<sup>43</sup> In view of the societal developments of the last thirty years towards greater equality, along with the massive influx of women into the

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<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.

<sup>43</sup> Francine Tougas, Rupert Brown, Ann M. Beaton, and Stéphane Joly, “Neosexism: Plus ça change, plus c'est pareil,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, no. 8 (1995): 842–49.

workplace, and even though many of these advances remain fragile, this postulate seems eminently contestable to us. But let us pass to the point that interests us. We remark on the coding of responses in these questionnaires, which gives the singular impression of artificially systematizing the presence of sexism and of exaggerating its frequency in the masculine population. Here again, as for the studies we looked at above, we will voluntarily limit ourselves to looking at just three examples which, while obviously not exhaustive, seem to us revelatory of a certain mode of thought prevalent in these questionnaires. The first example is taken from Tougas et al's (1995) questionnaire on neo-sexism.<sup>44</sup> Here we find the item: "It is difficult for a woman to work as a boss." An affirmative response is taken as a sexist response. Coding it in this way amounts to supposing that the response necessarily expresses the opinion that a woman should not be a boss. Now, responding in this way may be an expression of a different point of view which does not question the possibility of a woman being a boss: namely, that because of certain inequalities against which they have to struggle, it is more difficult for a woman to be in a leadership position than it is for a man, an observation that can be supported by figures easy to come by in France: only 17% of company directors are women.<sup>45</sup> The next two examples are taken from Glick and Fiske's 1996 questionnaire on ambivalent sexism,<sup>46</sup> which was adapted into French by Dardenne, Delacollette, Grégoire and Lecocque.<sup>47</sup> It includes

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Chiffres-clés de l'égalité 2011*, Minister of Women's Rights, the City, Youth and Sports.

<sup>46</sup> Glick and Fiske, "The ambivalent sexism inventory."

<sup>47</sup> Benoit Dardenne, Nathalie Delacollette, Christine Grégoire, and Delphine Lecocq, "Structure latente et validation de la version française de l'Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: l'échelle de sexisme ambivalent," *L'Année psychologique* 196 (2006): 235–64. This questionnaire has found a certain

the following item: “Men are incomplete without women.” A positive response is recorded as sexism. So, for these authors, if the subject considers that men are incomplete without women, it is because they think that they are different and that one needs this difference. And, as always for these authors, to affirm the principle of a differentiation between the sexes, particularly in the context of heterosexuality, is to betray a sexist position of masculine domination. But is this the case? Since the questionnaire invites the subject to respond generally in regard to their own feelings, let’s imagine that the subject responding is heterosexual (a situation that is not uncommon): might he not consider, in view of his sexuated and sexual orientation, that sharing his life with a woman is an important condition of his psychological equilibrium? Could a positive response to this item “Men are incomplete without women” not also be a way of rejecting the contrary (“Men are complete without women”), which would, in this case, be the basis of a sexist vision of relations between women and men? Here is a third example: the item “Women, compared with men, tend to display a greater moral sense.” An affirmative response is once again marked as sexism (“benevolent sexism” in this case). The justification put forward by the authors is that, since it differentiates women from men, this type of response expresses a tendency to essentialize “feminine” qualities, to imprison women in

**Commented [MM2]:**  
Cela marche mieux en anglais.

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popularity. The article in which it is presented is one of the most frequently cited according to the website of *L'année psychologique*, the journal in which it appeared. In a similar theoretical framework, one can consult the justification scale of the specific system of gender in Catherine Verniers and Delphine Martinot, “L’EJSAG, une échelle de justification du système spécifique au genre: validation auprès d’une population d’adolescents et d’adultes,” *L’Année psychologique*, 115, no. 1 (2015): 107–140.

stereotyped sexuated traits.<sup>48</sup> Now, it might be suggested that, if a subject responds in this way, it is because he considers that, given that they confront greater injustice than men, women might have been led to develop a greater attentiveness to moral matters.<sup>49</sup> If this coding is oriented toward a particular view of things, this is because the questionnaire, in our view, rests on two questionable identifications. The first is that heterosexuality is implicitly envisaged as heterosexism. To defend this point of view, Glick and Fiske emphasize that, from an anthropological and historical point of view, heterosexuality is systematically associated with patriarchy, paternalism and, hence with masculine domination.<sup>50</sup> One might remark that this is to neglect the idea that heterosexuality can be lived in many different ways depending on the individual: certainly, for some, it may relate to dominating attitudes; but for others, heterosexuality can form part of a relationship that is respectful to and even rewarding for the woman.<sup>51</sup> The second identification consists in linking differences between the

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<sup>48</sup> Let us recall, as an indicative example, that essentialism is not necessarily a stigmatizing stance; certain homosexual and transsexual movements legitimate their sexuated orientation by evoking a disposition of biological origin, an intimate essence (Pierre-Henri Castel, *La métamorphose impensable. Essai sur le transsexualisme et l'identité personnelle* [Paris: Gallimard, 2013]).

<sup>49</sup> So as not to overload the text, we have not enumerated too many examples, but let it be said that almost a third of the items on the scale could give rise to a critical analysis similar to that outlined here.

<sup>50</sup> Glick and Fiske, "The ambivalent sexism inventory."

<sup>51</sup> François de Singly, *Le soi, le couple et la famille* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005); Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Sociologie du couple* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014). Let us mention that this kind of theoretical stance, which tends to identify heterosexuality with heterosexism, is politically problematic. For in the current debate in France on gender theory, it paradoxically supplies arguments to a whole reactionary current that criticises equality measures in schools as the result of an insidious

sexes to domination. For these authors, the highlighting of differences between the sexes is at the origin of inequalities between the sexes. In distinguishing the two sexes, in emphasizing qualities that are potentially distinctive to women (whether innate or socially constructed, and even if positive, such as attention to others), one assigns women to specific domains (the private family sphere, social professions, etc.) which prevent them from entering into the sphere of masculine activities that are often more socially valued (managerial posts, activities in the competitive sector, etc.). Let us mention three points here. On one hand, as Fraisse indicates, difference is not the contrary of equality, but of the identical (or indifference).<sup>52</sup> Difference, or the complementarity between sexes in certain respects, does not logically, necessarily, imply inequality.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, let us recall that the question of whether to valorize differences between men and women or to struggle against them does not constitute a clear battle line between antifeminist and feminist positions.<sup>54</sup> Some feminists, advocating a universalist logic, are in favor of an indifferenciation of the genders;<sup>55</sup> others on the contrary, from a differentialist perspective, advocate and

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will to suppress the differences between the sexes and to contest heterosexuality (See the journal *Esprit*, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, *La différence des sexes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> Irène Théry, *La distinction de sexe: une nouvelle approche de l'égalité* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Marie-Hélène Bourcier, Alice Moliner, *Comprendre le féminisme: essai graphique* (Paris: Max Milo, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011); Elisabeth Badinter, *Dead End Feminism*, trans. Julia Borosso (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

promote alterity between women and men.<sup>56</sup> Finally, let us add that the chivalrous or romantic attitudes denounced as benevolent sexism are open to a very different reading. Claude Habib has shown that, historically, these attitudes, which developed through the (outdated?) figure of French gallantry were, contrary to certain received ideas, a vector for the amelioration of the feminine condition.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it seems to us that if, for example, one valorizes a woman's sensitivity (benevolent sexism), this does not necessarily make it more difficult for her to enter into varied professional domains.

**Commented [MM3]:**  
Nous avons changé un peu votre modification.

If we challenge the generality of the presence of sexism, it is not so as to deny its deleterious effects. Authors such as Dardenne, Dumont and Bollier have revealed the negative effects of benevolent sexism on the performance of women.<sup>58</sup> However, when conducting this type of research, one must distinguish more systematically—which is not always done—between benevolent sexism proper (when the latter is indeed an attitude that consists in rendering women inferior), benevolence toward women which does not, in our view, imply any will to render them inferior and, finally, voluntarist egalitarian “benevolent” practices such as positive discrimination, where one privileges a woman over a man when both are of an equal level of ability. These three attitudes, in so far as they belong to different dynamics, can have

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<sup>56</sup> Antoinette Fouque, *There Are Two Sexes: Essays in Feminology*, trans. David Macey and Catherine Porter (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>57</sup> Claude Habib, *La galanterie française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Benoit Dardenne, Muriel Dumont, and Thierry Bollier, “Insidious dangers of benevolent sexism: Consequences for women’s performance,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93, no. 5 (2007): 764–79.

different effects and must therefore be distinguished in studies. Let us note in concluding that certain advanced effects of sexism are subject to debate. For example, if Brandt concludes, on the basis of a study carried out in 57 countries, that the level of sexism raises the level of inequality between sexes in societies,<sup>59</sup> Ullrich and Schlüter show that this effect ceases to be significant if one excludes a country such as Switzerland from the sample, which singularly limits the import of Brandt's result.<sup>60</sup>

Let us now move to implicit methods, which, because of their more technical procedures, are supposed to allow a finer grained measurement of stereotypes, and to allow us to observe their effects.

### ***Implicit Measures of Gender Stereotyping: The Example of the Gender Implicit Association Test***

To avoid certain biases pertaining to explicit measurement questionnaires—subjects do not necessarily wish to reveal what they really think, and are not always capable of doing so—implicit measures have been developed. These measures are called implicit in so far as they are supposed to be able to reveal the true, hidden attitudes of subjects, which may influence them without their being aware of it. For example, a much-used method is based on reaction times. In this method one is usually presented with words on a computer screen, which one must associate with more general categories.

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<sup>59</sup> Mark J. Brandt, "Sexism and gender inequality across 57 societies," *Psychological Science* 22 (2011): 1413–18.

<sup>60</sup> Johannes Ullrich and Elmar Schlüter, "Detecting nasty data with simple plots of complex models: Comments on Brandt (2011)," *Psychological Science* 23, no. 7 (2012): 824–25.

Concretely, a word appears on a screen and, for example, you have to press a key on the right of the keyboard as quickly as possible if this word relates to the masculine (the word “brother”), on the left of the keyboard if it relates to the feminine (the word “sister”). Different words are successively presented and each time you must make the correct corresponding association. The basic postulate here is that the more rapidly you make the association, the more it reveals a personal, profound, and truthful tendency. Now, the implementation of such a measure can lead to disputable results.<sup>61</sup> Take for example one of the best known such tests, the IAT or Implicit Associations Test for gender stereotypes.<sup>62</sup> The procedure takes place over four phases. In phase 1, you have to associate words with their corresponding domain (for example, if the word “mathematics” appears on the screen, associate it with the category “sciences” by pressing a key on the keyboard, or if it is the word “literature,” associate it with the category “letters” by pressing another key). Phase 2 involves sexuated associations (for example, if the word “father” appears, associate it with the “masculine” domain, if it is the word “sister,” associate it with the “feminine” domain). In phase 3, you are asked to make associations relating to gender stereotypes (for example, if the word “mathematics” or “brother” appear, to associate them with a domain containing “sciences” and “masculine,” if it is the word “humanities” or “aunt,” associate them with a domain containing “letters” and “feminine”). Finally, in

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<sup>61</sup> For more details on these implicit measurement tests and the problems raised by them, see Christophe Blaison, Delphine Chassard, Jean-Luc Kop, and Kamel Gana, “L’IAT (Implicit association test) ou la mesure des cognitions sociales implicites: revue critique de la validité et des fondements théoriques des scores qu’il produit,” *L’Année psychologique*, 106 (2006): 305–36.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony G. Greenwald, Debbie E. McGhee, and Jordan L. K. Schwartz, “Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 1464–80.

the last phase, you are asked to make associations that go against gender stereotypes: in this case the words must be associated either with a domain that groups together “sciences” and “feminine” (for example if the words “mother” or “astronomy” appear), or with a domain that groups together “letters” and “masculine” (for example if the words “humanities” or “uncle” appear). To measure the degree to which you are influenced by gender stereotypes, the difference in response time between phase 3 (task of association corresponding to gender stereotypes) and phase 4 (task of association contrary to gender stereotypes) is calculated. If your reaction time is on average higher in phase 4 compared to phase 3, the conclusion is that you are influenced by gender stereotypes, with this influence judged to be greater depending on the magnitude of the difference. This kind of conclusion seems quite a delicate affair, though. Since the procedure involves mobilizing gender stereotypes in phase 3, this might well rub off on phase 4, making it more difficult to complete (in terms of reaction times) in so far as, in this new phase, one must make opposite associations to those that were asked for in the preceding phase. Additionally, since gender stereotypes are a part of the social world, it seems quite probable that they are easily accessible and available to memory—in any case, more accessible than contrasexuated examples. Faster reaction times when the association goes in the direction of gender stereotypes (and slower when the association goes against gender stereotypes) may thus not necessarily indicate adhesion to the influence of stereotypes, but their greater frequency in the social memory of individuals. In this sense, Karpinski and Hilton conclude that, unlike the explicit measurement of stereotypes, the IAT, rather than measuring personal attitudes, reveals the cultural environment of individuals.<sup>63</sup> According to them, this is what explains the often weak

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew Karpinski and James L. Hilton, “Attitudes and the implicit association test,” *Journal of*

links between IAT and explicit measures: for gender, if we refer to Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann and Banaji, this link between explicit and implicit measures is of the order of .172.<sup>64</sup> Along the same lines, Lynott, Connell, O'Brien and Kansal, on the basis of their study, propose that the results of the IAT reflect the linguistic frequency of stereotypes rather than the subject's adhesion to these stereotypes.<sup>65</sup> There is therefore an open debate between researchers such as Greenwald et al who think that the IAT reveals the personal attitudes of subjects, and those, such as Tetlock et al. who consider on the contrary that the IAT reflects the cultural knowledge of the subject but not necessarily their own personal attitudes.<sup>66</sup>

This debate also extends to the predictive nature of the results obtained by explicit and implicit tests. Is having a higher score in these tests an indication that the subject presents actual discriminatory behaviors? On one hand, Greenwald, Banaji and Nosek, although their meta-analysis reveals weak links between the results of these tests and discriminatory behaviors (for gender, around .181 for explicit associations

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*Personality and Social Psychology* 81 (2001): 774–88.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony G. Greenwald, T. Andrew Poehlman, Eric L. Uhlmann, and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Understanding and using the Implicit association test. III. Meta-analysis of predictive validity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97, no. 1 (2009): 17–41.

<sup>65</sup> Dermott Lynott, Louise Connell, Kerry S. O'Brien, and Himanshu Kansal, "Modeling the IAT: Implicit association test reflects shallow linguistic environment and not deep personal attitudes," in *Proceedings of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, ed. N. Miyake, D. Peebles, and R.P. Cooper (Austin, TX: Cognitive Science Society, 2012), 1948–53.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Hal R. Arkes and Philip E. Tetlock, "Attributions of implicit prejudice, or 'Would Jesse Jackson "fail" the implicit association test?'," *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 4 (2004), 247–78; Philip E. Tetlock and Gregory Mitchell, "Calibrating prejudice in milliseconds," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2008), 12–16.

and .224 for implicit associations), suggest that these small statistical effects—most often obtained in an experimental context—correspond to important effects in “real” life.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, also following a meta-analysis of these links, Oswald et al consider on the contrary that these effects in “real” life are so weak that, given the current state of research, they are very difficult to estimate, and that one must therefore be careful about generalizing to social reality the effects obtained in the laboratory.<sup>68</sup> According to them, in so far as there are no controlled longitudinal experiments in the milieus where these effects may be felt (schools, companies, administrations, etc.), the effects cannot yet be determined. By recalling these debates we do not mean to deny that adherence to stereotypes<sup>69</sup> and, more specifically, to gender stereotypes<sup>70</sup> can translate into discriminatory behaviors, but to call into question the generality of these effects and to highlight the problems posed by the generalization to real life of results obtained in the laboratory.

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<sup>67</sup> Antony G. Greenwald, Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Brian A. Nosek, “Statistically small effects of the Implicit association test can have societally large effects,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 108 (2015): 553–61.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick L. Oswald, Gregory Mitchell, Hart Blanton, James Jaccard, and Philip E Tetlock, “Predicting Ethnic and racial discrimination: A meta-analysis of IAT criterion studies,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 105, no. 2 (2013): 171–92.

<sup>69</sup> John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner, “Aversive racism and selection decisions: 1989 and 1999,” *Psychological Science* 11, no. 4 (2000): 315–19; John F. Dovidio, Kerry Kawakami, and Samuel L. Gaertner, “Implicit and explicit prejudice and interracial interaction,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 1 (2002): 62–68.

<sup>70</sup> Susan T. Fiske, “Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination,” in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. D.T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, and G. Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998): 357–411.

## Conclusion

Bringing together the various points made above, we can say that the study of gender stereotypes raises numerous questions. Contrary to what is presented to us by campaigns for awareness and by many works of social psychology, stereotypes do not necessarily have the power that is often attributed to them. Firstly, the perception and the judgments of individuals are not necessarily altered by gender stereotypes. And in addition, measures of gender stereotyping are not necessarily neutral, and can direct one towards a vision that artificially accentuates the presence and weight of stereotypes. Finally, the predictive value (in terms of links with discriminatory behaviors) of tests for the evaluation of stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes, remains subject to debate.

More fundamentally, it is our view that studies on stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes, pose four problems. Firstly, they often envisage stereotyping as a thinking that is frequently suffered by individuals.<sup>71</sup> Now, this is to risk misunderstanding the fact that individuals can make reference to stereotypes according to different levels of judgment and different perspectives, and that one must take into account the interaction between the individual and the characteristics of the situation in which they find themselves.<sup>72</sup> Thus, although individuals can certainly use them in the first degree, they can also play with them in subtle ways, for example with

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<sup>71</sup> Lee Jussim, *Social Perception and Social Reality: Why Accuracy Dominates Bias and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, *Les excès du genre. Concept, image, nudité* (Paris: Lignes, 2014); Sabatier et al, "La déterminabilité de « celui qui juge »", Vincent Yzerbyt Charles M. Judd, and Olivier Corneille, *Psychology of Group Perception* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004).

humorous intent, or as provocation in a discussion. Additionally, studies that aim to struggle against discrimination tend implicitly to adopt a univocal causal schema: that it is stereotypes that bring about discrimination. Is this necessarily the case, though? As Sherif showed in his time,<sup>73</sup> stereotypes can also be a consequence of the nature of the objective relations of discrimination between groups—or both at once, causes and consequences. Finally, it is rather problematic to neglect the fact that, outside of experimental situations in which one tries to neutralize certain variables in order to see the specific effects of gender stereotypes activated by the procedure, in everyday situations individuals are constantly faced with heterogeneous dynamics, some of which can be opposed to these stereotypes. Think of the child who can come to absorb very traditional gender stereotypes (for example when he is read bedtime stories drawn from the great classics of children's literature), can observe differences in behavior between women and men that agree with those stereotypes, but can observe, at the same time, that his father is also doing the cooking and the shopping whereas his mother is active outside of the house, that she works and takes decisions concerning the family. We must be attentive to the fact that multiple influences, sometimes in agreement, sometimes opposed, are a source of reflection for the child and can ultimately allow him to distance himself from traditional stereotypes and to form his own judgment.<sup>74</sup>

All things considered, and coming back to the question of the movement towards greater gender equality, it seems to us that rather than focusing systematically on the

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<sup>73</sup> Muzafer Sherif, "A preliminary experimental study of inter-group relations," in *Social Psychology at the Crossroads*, ed. J. H. Rohrer and Muzafer Sherif (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 388–424.

<sup>74</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, *Les excès du genre. Concept, image, nudité* (Paris: Lignes, 2014); Véronique Rouyer, *La construction de l'identité sexuée* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007).

weight of gender stereotypes,<sup>75</sup> which carries the risk of presenting a fixed image of relations between women and men and rendering stereotypes more important than they actually are, we should, on one hand, show that we are not necessarily the victims of stereotypes, and that we can appeal to our autonomy and our reasoning. On the other hand, without claiming that everything can be easily reconciled, we should bring to the fore situations in which gender stereotypes and the threats they represent are precisely set aside in individuals' choices (for example, a woman scientist, a woman CEO, a male midwife, nurse, or kindergarten assistant, etc.). Ultimately, we ought to give more prominence to the resources of individuals who grasp situations and transform them so as to become, as far as they are able, unique in their own way.<sup>76</sup> Certainly we are not the first to put forward such reflections. And yet they do not seem superfluous here, in view of certain directions in the social psychology of the relations between the sexes, which read everything in terms of masculine domination. Let us add that, before and beyond gender stereotypes, individuals and groups live in definite concrete, material situations that subserve the devaluation of the self, false consciousness, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.<sup>77</sup> It is the modification of these concrete conditions of existence, comprising inequalities and injustices, that is the major priority.

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<sup>75</sup> Bernard E. Whitley and Mary E. Kite, *The Psychology of Prejudice and Discrimination* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Véronique Rouyer, Yoan Mieyaa, and Alexis le Blanc, "Socialisation de genre et construction des identités sexuées: contextes sociétal et scientifique, acquis de la recherche et implications pratiques," *Revue française de pédagogie* 187 (2014): 97–137.

<sup>77</sup> Muzaffer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, *Social Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

Having said this, one may wonder about the reasons for this gap between the importance accorded to gender stereotypes by many works in social psychology and their sometimes ambiguous effects when we confront these studies with the social reality that they are supposed to depict. Although the attention to gender stereotypes results from a long and fruitful tradition of studies of stereotypes in social psychology and from the legitimate will to struggle against discrimination, the tendency to overestimate the effects attributed to gender stereotypes owes to the idea that we are their involuntary or even active victims. This idea is now a feature of common sense and government policies alike.<sup>78</sup> There is thus a mismatch between the expectations of the discipline and the social demand that favors attention to and orientation toward the negative aspects of stereotypes. This way of seeing things can be explained, in our view, by the fact that numerous works situate themselves within the framework of theories of (particularly masculine) domination.<sup>79</sup> These theories prioritize the claim that our mental structures are largely determined, altered unconsciously by the different social positions of women and men, and that the ideology that legitimates masculine domination, and which traffics in gender stereotypes, is inscribed at the heart of our modes of apprehending the real.<sup>80</sup> This point of view seems problematic

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<sup>78</sup> Marie-Cécile Naves, Vanessa Wisnia-Weill, *Lutter contre les stéréotypes filles-garçons*, Commissariat général à la stratégie et à la prospective, January 2014.

<sup>79</sup> As to this “dominance” of theories of masculine domination in the field of such studies, one may explain it by reference to its origin: the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, one of whose primary objectives was the necessary struggle against masculine domination (Fraisse, *La différence des sexes*; Camille Froidevaux-Metterie, *La révolution du féminine* [Paris, Gallimard, 2015]).

<sup>80</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*; Jost and Banaji, “The role of stereotyping in system justification; Lorenzi-Cioldi, *Les représentations des groupes dominants et dominés*; Jim Sidanius and Felicia

to us, because it does not take account of social developments toward greater equality between the sexes, or of the autonomous capacities of social actors. In a forthcoming article<sup>81</sup> we interrogate these psychosocial theories of domination. We evoke empirical and experimental data from sociological and psychological works which call into question and go against expectations born of a vision of masculine domination, and we emphasize certain problems associated with the postulates of these theories. Finally, we seek to present other approaches to the relations between the sexes which place the accent on the dynamics of subjective appropriation. In so doing they seem to us at once more respectful of social actors, more likely to take account of current social developments between women and men—in particular of the plurality of situations and of **intrasex** variability—and, finally, more relevant in moving toward greater equality between them.

**Commented [MM4]:**  
Intrasex, pas “intrasexe”.

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Pratto, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>81</sup> Manuel Tostain, “Pour en finir avec la domination masculine? Regard critique sur les approches psychosociales des relations entre sexes,” *Bulletin de psychologie*, forthcoming.

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