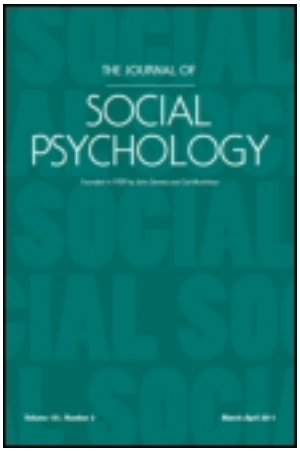

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Self-Stereotyping: The Central Role of an Ingroup Threatening Identity

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Self-Stereotyping: The Central Role of an Ingroup Threatening Identity

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ABSTRACT. Self-stereotyping is a process by which people belonging to a stigmatized social group tend to describe themselves more with stereotypical traits as compared with traits irrelevant to the ingroup stereotype. The present work analyzes why especially members of low-status groups are more inclined to self-stereotype compared to members of high-status groups. We tested the hypothesis that belonging to a low-, rather than a high-status group, makes low-status members feel more threatened and motivates them to protect their self-perception by increasing their similarity with the ingroup. Specifically, we investigated the effects of an experimental manipulation that was conceived to either threaten or protect the natural group membership of participants from either a low- or a high-status group on the level of self-stereotyping. The findings supported the idea that only low-status group members protected themselves when their group identity was threatened through increased self-stereotyping.

Keywords: group status differences, ingroup threat, self-stereotyping, social identity

EXPERIENCING AND PERCEIVING DISCRIMINATION against one's own group necessarily puts individuals in a condition in which they perceive a threat against some aspects of their self-worth (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). One of the more evident effects of self-threat due to ingroup stigmatization is the phenomena called "stereotype threat" that was first introduced by Steele and Aronson (1995). These authors have demonstrated that the awareness of negative ingroup stereotypes can lead individuals both to increase the fear to be judged just on the basis of these stereotypes, and also to perform in a way to confirm them. Another important aspect of the self-concept that is affected by a threatened social identity is self-esteem. Having a devalued social identity may lead to low levels of both

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personal and collective self-esteem (Cooley, 1956); however, this can also lead stigmatized group members to compensate for their threatened identities through the engagement in coping strategies (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999).

The present experiment aims at investigating the role of a threatened ingroup identity on the tendency to stereotype the self for low- and high-status groups. The general assumption is that when individuals perceive their social identity to be threatened they have two possible ways to react. One possibility would be to strengthen the similarity of the self with the stereotypical ingroup's characteristics. In contrast, the alternative strategy would consist in reducing the similarity between the self and the ingroup by distancing oneself from one's social category. We propose that one important variable that is likely to determine whether one or the other strategy will be used when one's group identity is threatened is the high- or low-status of the group. Whereas the former reaction (i.e., self-stereotyping) will be preferred by low-status group members, the latter strategy (i.e., self-maintenance) will be chosen by high-status group members.

Self-Stereotyping Versus Self-Maintenance

The general idea supported in the current work is that the link between the representation of the self and the ingroup may be different for members of low- and high-status groups as a function of a threatened versus favorable group identity. In this way, we propose that group membership serves different needs for low- and high-status groups when their group identity is threatened.

Recent theorizing on the psychology of stigmatized groups has shown that the awareness that one belongs to a devalued ingroup likely brings its members to increase the need to identify with it (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). These studies demonstrated that ingroup identification helps stigmatized group members to defend their subjective well-being from the direct negative consequences of perceiving prejudice towards one's group. In contrast, members of a dominant group did not show any compensating reactions, suggesting that they did not feel threatened at the social level. Importantly, in a previous study Latrofa, Vaes, Pastore, and Cadinu (2009) demonstrated the central role of self-stereotyping, over the ingroup identification process, in compensating for the direct negative effect of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being. Specifically, these authors showed that for low-status group members who were aware that they were likely targets of discrimination, self-stereotyping was a good strategy to restore well-being. In other words, it is possible to conceptualize self-stereotyping as a way of reacting against the threat of a stigma. Latrofa et al. (2009) already claimed that this effect occurred because self-stereotyping allows to re-affirm one's social identity that has been put under pressure by chronic low-status group membership or a specific situational threat. Much like other work has shown that self-affirmation has positive psychological outcomes

(Taylor & Sherman, 2008), re-affirming the self in terms of the ingroup representation, is a good strategy to restore psychological wellbeing that is threatened by stigmatization.

Importantly, previous research has shown that low-status group members are more likely, than high-status group members, to ascribe stereotypic characteristics of the ingroup to the self (e.g., Latrofa, Vaes, Cadinu, & Carnaghi, 2010; Simon & Hamilton, 1994; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). Following the above reasoning, one could hypothesize that because high-status group members do not perceive their social identity as threatening they do not feel the need to re-affirm their selves in terms of the ingroup representation.

On the other hand, Self Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), proposed that people are motivated to maintain a positive social self-image and in doing so they will likely define themselves in terms of their social group membership especially when the ingroup is put in a positive light. Several studies have shown such a tendency that has been called basking in reflected glory. This image maintenance process has been demonstrated especially through increments in one's associations with successful others. As such, it has been shown that university students are more willing to wear school-identifying t-shirts after their school's football team had been victorious rather than non-victorious (Cialdini et al., 1976). In a similar vein, people who displayed election posters in front of their houses were more willing to keep them visible after the elections when their party won the elections (Boen et al., 2002). Importantly for the purpose of the present research, this phenomenon has shown to be exacerbated when one's ingroup is threatened and involves two complementary processes: a tendency to strengthen one's association with a successful group (i.e., basking-in-reflected-glory) and a tendency to lower one's association with a negative group (i.e., cutting-off-reflected-failure) (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986).

Confronting self-stereotyping and self-maintenance strategies of coping with a threatened ingroup identity, the present set of studies proposes that ingroup status is an important variable in determining which strategy people will use. For low-status group members it is the threatened condition of the ingroup that leads them to stereotype the self, supporting the contention that the process of self-stereotyping is a coping strategy by which low-status group members re-affirm their own identity, especially when this is threatened. In contrast, we propose that the same ingroup threat will more likely lead high-status group members to use a strategy like cutting-off-reflected-failure reporting less similarity between the self and the ingroup, because high-status group members are mainly interested in maintaining their positive image.

Ingroup Threat Appraisal and Gender Stereotypes

The model of Stigma-Induced Identity Threat proposed by Major and O'Brien (2005) theorizes that the appraisal of a threatened identity derives from

three components: collective representations, situational cues, and personal characteristics. The concept of *collective representations* refers to the awareness, possessed both by stigmatized and non-stigmatized group members, of the existence of a cultural stereotype that is related to a specific stigmatized social group. In other words, all members of a culture share the same stereotypical representation of the stigmatized group, and even the stigmatized members endorse this representation. These collective stereotypes should be perceived by stigmatized group members as a threat to their social identity, but should be irrelevant to non-stigmatized group members' identity. Consequently, the same *situational* (threatening) *cues* in everyday life should affect or should be perceived differently by stigmatized and non-stigmatized individuals; for instance, a sexist interviewer will create different expectancies for female or male candidates regarding the job they could be hired for. Finally, the appraisal of an identity threat may be influenced by some *personal characteristics,* such as stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999), the relevance for the self of the domain in which the threat is present (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), and ingroup identification (Spears et al., 1997).

The present research will focus on the first two components that are proposed by Major and O'Brien (2005) and that may trigger appraisals of one's ingroup identity as threatening. As for the role of collective representations, we will focus on the consensus about gender stereotypes. Western culture is marked by the existence of strong gender stereotypes that historically treat women as the low-status group and give men the position of the high-status group (e.g., Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Moreover, men are aware of their high social status, whereas women are conscious of their low social status relative to men (Swan & Wyer, 1997). The status difference between women and men has shown to influence a large variety of phenomena such as political attitudes and social roles (Eagly & Diekman, 2006), the outgroup homogeneity effect and perceived group variability (Lorenzi-Cioldi, Eagly, & Stewart, 1995) and, relevant to our experiment, the tendency to engage in self-stereotyping (Latrofa et al., 2010). In line with this reasoning, we investigated collective gender representations assuming that, due to the cultural consensus about gender status differences, the gender identity of women is always potentially threatened as opposed to the male identity. In other words, participant's gender in our experiment will account for a natural threatening ingroup identity for female participants, and a favorable ingroup identity for male participants.

The situational threatening cue in the present research will consist in a bogus scientific article whose content will be experimentally manipulated. This article will state to half of the participants that certain personality characteristics that are related to their gender ingroup are more likely to lead to failure in life; in contrast the other half of participants will be informed that the same characteristics bring forth success. The former manipulation should be perceived as a threat to participants' gender identity; in contrast the latter cue should increase the favorableness with which participants perceive their gender identity.

In conclusion, we predicted a higher level of self-stereotyping when female's gender ingroup is threatened both by the collective representation (i.e., the female low-status) and by a threatening situational cue (i.e., the bogus content of the article). The interaction between the natural and the experimental threat at the ingroup level should pose for women the need to cope with this threatening experience, using more ingroup stereotypical traits in their self-representation. In contrast, we predict that a threatening situational cue will exacerbate males' natural tendency to report low levels of similarity between the self and the ingroup. Following the reasoning of a strategy to cut-off-reflected-failure, males should decrease the similarity with the male ingroup when their group identity gets threatened.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

Two hundred twenty-five participants took part in this study, 112 females and 113 males. They were recruited individually in the vicinity of the Faculty. Their average age was 23 ranging from 18 to 35 years.

Procedure

All participants were asked to fill in the same questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire included the manipulation's content. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: half of both females and males participated in the "Threatened Group Identity" (TGI) condition, the other halves took part in the "Favourable Group Identity" (FGI) condition.

> Recently Psychologists distinguished the "Masculine Personality" from the "Feminine Personality." These kinds of personalities can be held both by women and by men, featuring them with specific traits, attitudes, and behaviors. Recent studies (Graham, T., Hanusa, B.H. e Tidwell, M., 2004) have investigated these two personalities focusing on the role they have in creating better and healthier psychophysical conditions for individuals. Concretely, these studies have shown that individuals with a Feminine Personality show higher levels of psychological balance and a greater ability in social adaption increasing the possibility to obtain success in their lives when compared with individuals with a Masculine Personality.

In the example above participants were informed that a successful life is related to a Feminine Personality. Hence, depending on participants' gender the same manipulation represents either a FGI condition (female judges) or a TGI condition (male judges). Table 1 summarizes all the possible messages that were

TABLE 1. Overview of the Experimental Conditions as a Function of Participants' Gender

	Experimental conditions	
	Threatened group identity (TGI)	Favourable group identity (FGI)
Female participants	Feminine personality & failure in life	Feminine personality & successful life
	Masculine personality & successful life	Masculine personality & failure in life
Male participants	Feminine personality & successful life	Masculine personality & successful life
	Masculine personality & failure in life	Feminine personality & failure in life

given to participants as a function of whether the feminine versus masculine personality was linked to a successful life versus failure in life, and as a function of participants' gender.

Immediately after reading the manipulation, participants had to rate a number of traits indicating the extent to which they described the self and the ingroup, allowing us to calculate the self-stereotyping index. At the end of the questionnaire we asked participants to report some general information (age, sex, sexual orientation). Before dismissing participants they were informed about the bogus content of the initial manipulation and the true aim of the study.

Materials

A pre-test was conducted in order to select traits that were feminine, masculine, and irrelevant to gender stereotypes using a sample of university students ($N = 20$ female and $N = 20$ male). Participants were asked to rate both males and females as a group in general along 103 traits. For each trait, participants were asked to rate the female group and the male group separately on a scale ranging from 0 to 6 with 0 = *very atypical of females/males*, 3 = *neither typical nor atypical,* and 6 = *very typical of females/males*. Unlike participants in the experiment in which they had to give their personal opinion, participants in the pre-test were asked to report what they thought society thinks of females and males as groups in general. Relevant traits were selected so that they were stereotypical for one group and at the same time counter-stereotypical for the other gender group. Specifically, selected traits had to meet the following criteria: a) feminine traits had to be rated

significantly higher than three on female typicality and lower than three on male typicality; b) masculine traits had to be rated significantly higher than three on male typicality and lower than three on female typicality; c) gender irrelevant traits had to be rated not differently from the midpoint three of the scale both for male and female typicality. Moreover the selected feminine and masculine traits were balanced so that they had a comparable mean level of stereotypicality. The list of selected adjectives included: 16 stereotype-relevant traits, 8 of which were feminine (orderly, sensitive, sentimental, home-loving; acid, impressionable, fragile, fearful), 8 masculine (vigorous, risk-taker, self-ironical, sturdy; rough, tactless, reckless, insensitive), and 16 gender-irrelevant traits. Within each type of traits, half of the traits were desirable (e.g., orderly) and the other half were undesirable (e.g., fearful).

Self-Stereotyping Measure

Self-ratings. All participants rated the self, always as the first target. Thinking about themselves, they were asked to assess how typical they considered each of 32 personality traits along a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (*very atypical* to *very typical*).

Ingroup-ratings. In accordance with their gender, participants rated their own ingroup along the same 32 personality traits. They were asked to assess how typical they considered each adjective in describing the Female/Male group as a whole on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (*Very Atypical* to *Very Typical*).

Valence-ratings. Also participants were asked to rate how positive versus negative each of the 32 personality traits was on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*).

As in previous research (Latrofa et al., 2010), four self-stereotyping indexes were obtained by calculating within-participant correlations between self and ingroup ratings separately for stereotype-relevant[1] and stereotype-irrelevant traits, and for positive and negative traits. All four indexes were included in the analysis to investigate the differences in the level of Self-Stereotyping between the experimental conditions. As suggested by Michela (1990), in order to increase the normality of the distribution of correlations, the indexes were transformed in *Z*-Fisher values before they were entered in the analysis.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Since none of the interactions that resulted from analysis (all $p's > .12$) was qualified by the positivity of the message (i.e., whether it talked about success or

failure in life) we collapsed these two conditions in all analyses. Even though one could argue that psychologically it is different to feel threatened by the failure that is associated to one's own group compared to the success that is linked to the outgroup, they both constitute a potential threat to one's in-group.

Stereotype Consensus

First of all, we controlled whether the experimental manipulation affected the stereotypicality of the male and female group along the presented traits. Participants' group ratings were analyzed using a 2 (gender: female or male) × 2 (condition: TGI or FGI) × 3 (trait stereotypicality: feminine, masculine, irrelevant) mixed ANOVA. Importantly, the experimental condition did not interact significantly with any of the variables in this analysis. Instead, we found main effects of trait stereotypicality, $F(2, 442) = 13.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and participants' gender $F(1, 221) = 5.62$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, that were qualified by their expected interaction, $F(2, 442) = 388.05$ $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .64$, showing that, independently from the experimental manipulation, women ascribed more feminine traits to their ingroup ($M = 5.21$, $SE = .08$) than both masculine ($M = 3.03$, $SE = .07$, $t(111) = 18.58$, $p < .001$) and irrelevant traits ($M = 4.20$, $SE = .04$, $t(111) = -14.87$, $p < .001$). Consistently, men described the male group as a whole more with masculine traits ($M = 4.79$, $SE = .07$) than with both feminine ($M = 3.29$, $SE = .07$, $t(112) = -12.54$, $p < .001$) and irrelevant traits ($M = 3.97$, $SE = .04$, $t(112) = -10.21$, $p < .001$). Hence, these data confirmed the presence of the consensus about group stereotypes which did not vary as a function of the favorable or threatening information participants received concerning their gender ingroup.

Self-Stereotyping

To test whether participants' tendency to self-stereotype was affect by participants' gender and by the manipulation that either promoted or threatened one's gender ingroup, we conducted a 2 (gender: female or male) × 2 (condition: TGI or FGI) × 2 (trait relevance: relevant, irrelevant) × 2 (trait valence: positive, negative) mixed ANOVA on the Fischer-*Z* transformed correlations. The first two factors in the ANOVA were manipulated between participants while the latter two were entered as within participant variables. Evidence for self-stereotyping would be present if self-ingroup similarity was stronger on stereotype-relevant than irrelevant traits.[2]

A significant main effect of trait relevance was found, $F(1, 205) = 20.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, indicating that correlations were stronger for stereotype-relevant ($M = .35$, $SE = .03$) than for stereotype-irrelevant traits ($M = .20$, $SE = .03$). In addition, we found a main effect of gender, $F(1, 205) = 18.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, showing that female participants ($M = .38$, $SE = .04$) showed

stronger correlations between self and ingroup than males ($M = .16$, $SE = .04$). Importantly, the previous effects were qualified by a significant two-way interaction between trait relevance and gender, $F(1, 205) = 28.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Consistent with previous studies (Latrofa et al., 2010) this interaction showed that female participants described themselves similar to their ingroup especially along stereotype relevant traits ($M = .55$, $SE = .05$) as compared to irrelevant traits ($M = .22$, $SE = .04$, $F(1, 205) = 47.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$); whereas males showed lower similarity between the self and the ingroup both on relevant ($M = .15$, $SE = .04$) and irrelevant traits ($M = .17$, $SE = .04$, $F(1, 205) = 0.32$, *n.s.*). This interaction clearly replicated previous findings showing that self-stereotyping is a process occurring especially for women ($M = .55$, $SE = .05$), as a low-status group, but not for men ($M = .15$, $SE = .04$, $F(1, 205) = 37.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$), as the high-status group. Less important for our predictions another two-way interaction emerged between gender and trait valence, $F(1, 205) = 13.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. This interaction showed that, independently of the relevance of the traits, female judges rated the self and the female group especially similar on negative traits ($M = .46$, $SE = .05$). Finally, and as expected, a three-way interaction emerged between participants' gender, condition and trait relevance, $F(1, 205) = 5.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

As illustrated in Figure 1, female and male participants showed two clearly different correlational patterns. Hence, we analyzed participants' self-stereotyping indices in function of trait relevance and condition for female and male participants separately. For female participants a main effect of trait relevance emerged, $F(1, 100) = 46.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .32$ showing that independently of a threat that was linked to their ingroup women always tended to feel more similar to their gender group on stereotype relevant compared to stereotype irrelevant traits. Moreover the experimental condition marginally interacted with trait relevance, $F(1, 100) = 3.33$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, showing that in the TGI condition, women reported a strong pattern of self-stereotyping, with higher self-ingroup similarity on the stereotype-relevant traits ($M = .58$, $SE = .07$) than on irrelevant traits ($M = .17$, $SE = .06$, $F(1, 100) = 38.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .28$); instead, in the FGI condition, their level of self-stereotyping decreased, as shown by a somewhat smaller, but still significant difference between the self-ingroup similarity on the relevant traits ($M = .52$, $SE = .07$) in comparison to the irrelevant traits ($M = .28$, $SE = .06$, $F(1, 100) = 12.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$). Thus, this pattern of results seems to suggest that women tended to self-stereotype especially when their group identity was threatened. It is important to note that no main effect for condition emerged, $F(1, 100) = 0.20$, $p = .67$, *n.s.*, indicating that female participants do not show an overall self-ingroup assimilation effect under TGI condition. Instead and as expected, only an increased self-stereotyping effect was observed, showing a higher self-ingroup similarity along stereotypical dimensions under ingroup threat.

In contrast, condition did not interact with trait relevance for male participants, ($F(1, 105) = 2.02$, $p = .16$, *n.s.*). Pairwise comparisons, however, showed

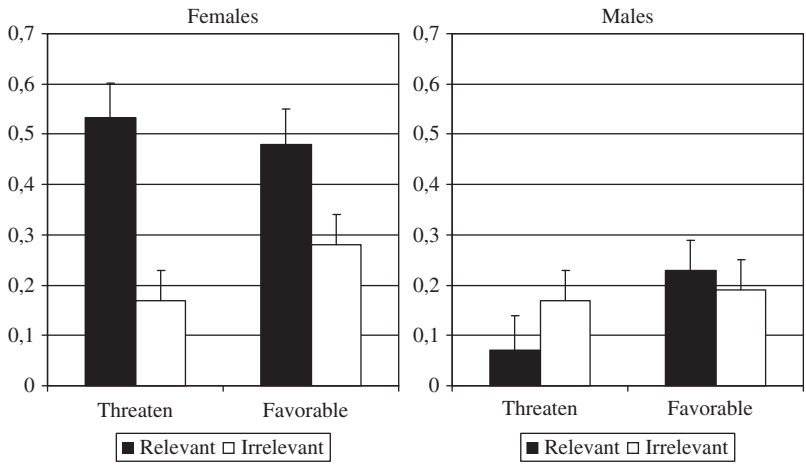

FIGURE 1. Within-participant correlations between ratings of the self and ratings of the ingroup both on stereotype-relevant and stereotype-irrelevant traits as a function of participants' gender and condition (Study 1). Fisher *Z*-correlation, were reconverted into *r* for presentation in this figure.

an interesting effect. Even though male participants generally did not engage in self-stereotyping, as was shown by the absence of the main effect of trait relevance, they tended to increase similarity between the self and the ingroup on stereotype-relevant traits in the FGI ($M = .23$, $SE = .06$) condition compared to the TGI ($M = .07$, $SE = .06$, $F(1, 105) = 2.88$, $p = .09$). No difference emerged on the irrelevant traits between the FGI condition ($M = .17$, $SE = .06$) and the TGI condition ($M = .19$, $SE = .06$, $F(1,105) = .06$, *n.s.*). In other words, when thinking that they belonged to a successful group, or that failure was especially part of the life of women, male participants tended to act in an opportunistic way increasing their similarity with their ingroup.

Discussion

The results from Study 1 provide initial support for the general idea that belonging to a successful or unsuccessful group may affect the self-representation of its members. Importantly, however, the way in which participants' self-representations were influenced depended greatly on their group membership in a permanent low- or high-status group. When individuals belonged to a low-status group, such as the women in the present experiment, threatening their ingroup did

affect their self-descriptions in that they showed a clearer self-stereotyping pattern of results than when their group identity was favorably depicted. Independently of the valence of the traits, low-status group members always showed a higher correlation between self and ingroup ratings on stereotype relevant compared to stereotype irrelevant traits and threatening their ingroup seemed to have an additional effect on their natural tendency to self-stereotype. In other words, threatening their group identity lead low-status group members to increase the similarity between the self and the group especially on stereotype relevant dimensions. In contrast, high-status group members showed exactly the reverse tendency. Only when they believed to belong to a favorable group, male participants somewhat opportunistically introduced stereotype relevant characteristics in their self-description.

One limitation of the present study is the lack of a manipulation check that could test the actual efficacy of the experimental manipulation. It is conceivable that male and female participants react differently to feedback of failure or success because they interpret it very differently. Maybe, male participants were more sceptical towards the failure feedback given that present-day reality often shows a different picture emphasizing males' success. In light of these considerations, we decided to conduct a second experiment that introduced a more convincing manipulation and included a manipulation check.

STUDY 2

Method

The present study originated as a replication of Study 1; thus the experimental design and the dependent variables remained unchanged. Still, we slightly changed the content of the manipulation to make it more convincing and introduced a manipulation check.

Participants

Two hundred forty-seven subjects participated in this study, 124 females and 123 males. They were recruited individually in the vicinity of the Faculty. The mean age was 22 ranging from 18 to 32.

Procedure

As in Study 1, the first page of the questionnaire included the experimental manipulation, but in this second study the form was changed making the abstract look like that of a real psychological journal to increase its reliability. In addition, the content of the manipulation was modified as follows:

> Recently Psychologists distinguished people in two groups: "The group with a Masculine Personality" and "The group with a Feminine Personality." These two groups of personality are independent from people's gender. In other words, both women and men can belong to one of the two groups, and their membership will make that they can be described with specific traits, attitudes, and behaviors. Recent studies (Graham, T., Hanusa, B.H. e Tidwell, M., 2004) have investigated these two groups of personalities focusing on the role they have in creating better and healthier psychophysical conditions for individuals. Concretely, these studies have shown that individuals who are part of the group with a Feminine Personality show higher levels of psychological balance and a greater ability in social adaption increasing the possibility to obtain success in their lives when compared with individuals who belong to the group with a Masculine Personality.

Hence, this manipulation aimed to influence participants' gender identity more clearly referring to "*the group with a feminine personality*," instead of "*individuals with a feminine personality*." As in Study 1, according to their gender, participants were randomly assigned to either the TGI condition or to the FGI condition.

Afterwards participants had to fill in the manipulation-check and the self-stereotyping scales. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were informed about the bogus content of the abstract and fully debriefed.

Measure

Self-stereotyping. As in Study 1, the main dependent variable was the level of Self-Stereotyping defined as a stronger similarity between the self and the ingroup along stereotype-relevant traits than stereotype-irrelevant traits. Thus, all participants completed the self-ratings as the first target, then they judged the ingroup and finally they rated the traits' valence. The list of adjectives included: the same 16 stereotype-relevant traits of Study 1, and only 8 gender-irrelevant traits. We reduced the number of irrelevant adjectives to balance it with the number of both feminine and masculine traits and to make the rating task lighter.

As in Study 1, self-stereotyping indexes were obtained by calculating within-participant correlations between self and ingroup ratings separately on stereotype-relevant and stereotype-irrelevant, both for positive and negative traits, that were transformed in *Z*-Fisher values before they were entered in the analysis.

Manipulation check. Immediately after reading the bogus article, on the second page of the questionnaire, participants were asked to report their personal opinion clarifying the reasons why the group with a feminine/masculine personality is likely to have more success/failure in life. This procedure allowed us to reinforce the salience of the manipulation's content and check the extent to which participants could imagine that the information they just received was true.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

As in Study 1, none of the reported effects was qualified by the positivity of the message (all p's $> .15$) allowing us to collapse findings across both these conditions.

Manipulation check task. First of all, two independent judges coded the participants' opinions relative to the abstract's content as either consistent or inconsistent with the manipulation. Eleven percent of the sample did not answer, 12% of them had an inconsistent opinion or described reasons that could discount the bogus research that was named in the abstract, while 77% participants reported arguments in line with the content of the manipulation. We decided to include only this final part of participants that recognized the content of the manipulation, in the analysis. As such, the final sample consisted of 189 participants of which 106 females (54 in TGI and 52 in FGI) and 83 males (40 in TGI and 43 in FGI).

Stereotype consensus. As in Study 1, we investigated whether the experimental manipulation influenced participants' perception of the gender stereotypes. A 2 (gender: female or male) $\times$ 2 (condition: TGI or FGI) $\times$ 3 (trait stereotypicality: feminine, masculine, irrelevant) mixed ANOVA was run on participants' group ratings. Again, the experimental condition did not significantly affect any of the variables in this analysis. Moreover, also in this study, we found a main effect of trait stereotypicality, $F(2, 370) = 11.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .06$, that was qualified by the interaction with participants' gender, $F(2, 370) = 297.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = .62$, showing a pattern consistent with the expected stereotype consensus. Women ascribed more feminine traits to their ingroup ($M = 5.38$, $SE = .08$) compared to both masculine ($M = 3.21$, $SE = .07$, $t(105) = 18.99$, $p < .001$) and irrelevant traits ($M = 4.18$, $SE = .05$, $t(105) = -16.61$, $p < .001$). In contrast, men described the male group as a whole with masculine traits ($M = 4.85$, $SE = .08$) more than with both feminine ($M = 3.40$, $SE = .09$, $t(82) = -9.61$, $p < .001$) and irrelevant traits ($M = 4.23$, $SE = .06$, $t(82) = -6.91$, $p < .001$).[3]

Self-stereotyping. With the aim to replicate the findings of Study 1 showing the effect of the TGI versus the FGI condition on the level of self-stereotyping, we conducted a 2 (gender: female or male) $\times$ 2 (condition: TGI or FGI) $\times$ 2 (trait relevance: relevant, irrelevant) $\times$ 2 (trait valence: positive, negative) mixed ANOVA on the Fischer-Z transformed correlations. The first two factors were manipulated between participants while the latter two were entered as within participant variables.[4]

The analysis produced two main effects, one relative to participants' gender, $F(1, 149) = 14.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, indicating higher self-ingroup similarity for females ($M = .44$, $SE = .05$) than for males ($M = .18$, $SE = .05$), the other regarding trait valence, $F(1, 149) = 20.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, showing higher correlations on negative ($M = .43$, $SE = .04$) than on positive traits ($M = .19$, $SE = .04$). Consistent with Study 1 and with previous studies (Latrofa et al., 2010), a significant two way interaction was found between trait relevance and gender, $F(1, 149) = 11.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, showing again that women described themselves as similar to the ingroup especially on relevant ($M = .53$, $SE = .05$) rather than irrelevant traits ($M = .35$, $SE = .07$, $F(1, 149) = 4.79$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.); whereas males showed lower similarity between the self and the ingroup on relevant ($M = .07$, $SE = .06$) than on irrelevant traits ($M = .29$, $SE = .07$, $F(1, 149) = 6.26$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$). Hence, we replicated that self-stereotyping is a process occurring solely for women ($M = .53$, $SE = .05$), as a low-status group, but not for men ($M = .07$, $SE = .06$, $F(1, 149) = 33.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$), as a high-status group. Moreover, trait relevance interacted with trait valence, $F(1, 149) = 4.94$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, showing that negative traits always showed the highest correlations but this difference was highest on irrelevant traits, $F(1, 149) = 14.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$ ($M = .14$, $SE = .07$, and $M = .50$, $SE = .07$ for positive and negative irrelevant traits respectively). In addition, trait relevance interacted with the experimental condition, $F(1, 149) = 4.78$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, showing that while relevant traits had slightly higher correlations than irrelevant traits in the TGI condition, $F(1, 149) = 1.77$, *n.s.* ($M = .31$, $SE = .05$, and $M = .20$, $SE = .07$, for relevant and irrelevant traits respectively), the reverse happened significantly in the FGI condition, $F(1, 149) = 3.07$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ($M = .29$, $SE = .06$, and $M = .44$, $SE = .07$, for relevant and irrelevant traits respectively).

Contrary to expectations, the supposed three-way interaction between participants' gender, condition and trait relevance did not emerge, $F(1, 149) = 0.40$, *n.s.* Still, considering our hypothesis and the results of Study 1, we decided to analyze participants' self-stereotyping indices as a function of trait relevance and condition for female and male participants separately. As illustrated in Figure 2, for female participants we replicated the same pattern as in Study 1. A main effect of trait relevance emerged, $F(1, 81) = 4.85$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, confirming that women described themselves always more similar to their gender group on stereotype relevant compared to stereotype irrelevant traits. Again, the experimental condition marginally interacted with trait relevance $F(1, 81) = 3.14$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, corroborating the result that in the TGI condition women reported a stronger pattern of self-stereotyping, with higher self-ingroup similarity on the stereotype-relevant traits ($M = .58$, $SE = .07$) than on irrelevant traits ($M = .26$, $SE = .08$, $F(1, 81) = 8.85$, $p < .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$); in contrast, in the FGI condition the self-stereotyping process disappeared, as shown by the similar strength

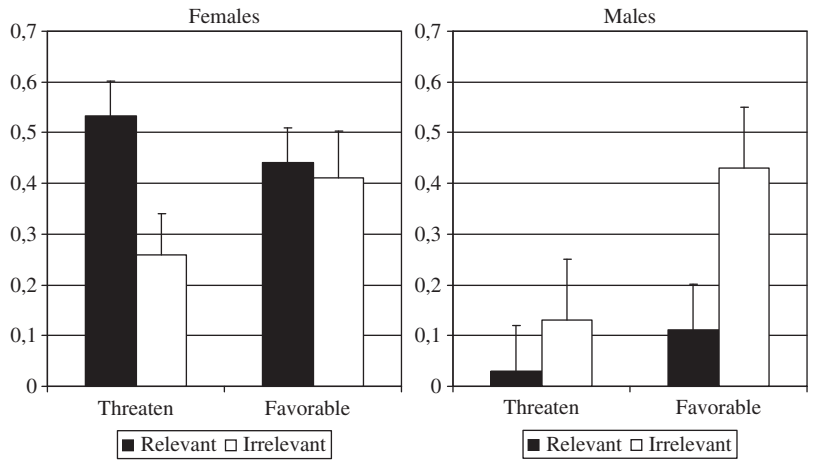

FIGURE 2. Within-participant correlations between ratings of the self and ratings of the ingroup both on stereotype-relevant and stereotype-irrelevant traits as a function of participants' gender and condition (Study 2). Fisher *Z*-correlation, were reconverted into *r* for presentation in this figure.

of the correlations for relevant ($M = .47$, $SE = .07$) compared to irrelevant traits ($M = .43$, $SE = .09$, $F(1, 81) = .08$, *n.s.*). Hence, more clearly than in the previous study, these results indicate the peculiar process of women to self-stereotype especially when their gender identity is threatened.

As for male participants, the analysis showed a main effect of trait relevance, $F(1,68) = 6.17$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, indicating that they felt especially similar to their ingroup on the irrelevant rather than on the stereotype relevant traits. More importantly, a marginally significant condition main effect was found, $F(1,68) = 3.11$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, that showed that independently of the type of trait male participants significantly increased their similarity with the ingroup in FGI ($M = .29$, $SE = .08$) compared to the TGI condition ($M = .08$, $SE = .08$). Even if this main effect was not qualified by the interaction with trait relevance, $F(1,68) = 1.80$, $p = .19$, pairwise comparisons as in Study 1 showed that male participants increased their similarity with the ingroup in the FGI compared to the TGI condition mainly on the irrelevant traits ($M = .45$, $SE = .12$, and $M = .13$, $SE = .12$, $F(1,68) = 3.87$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$; for the FGI and TGI respectively) and not on the stereotype-relevant traits ($M = .12$, $SE = .09$, and $M = .03$, $SE = .09$, $F(1,68) = 0.48$, *n.s.,* for the FGI and TGI respectively). In other words, similarly to male participants in Study 1, only when they think to belong to a

favorable group they seem to increase their similarity with this group. However, unlike Study 1, male participants of Study 2 only showed this opportunistic behaviour on gender irrelevant traits rather than on the relevant ones.

Discussion

Study 2 aimed to replicate Study 1's findings introducing a more rigidly controlled experimental manipulation. Considering only participants for whom we were sure that they recognized the content of the manipulation in the analysis, the data from Study 2 mainly replicated that from Study 1. Specifically, females stereotyped themselves significantly more in the TGI condition than in the FGI condition, a pattern that gives further support to the general prediction that low-status group members use self-stereotyping as a strategy to deal with their threatened ingroup. As for male participants, similarly to Study 1, we found that they decreased their similarity with the ingroup only when they thought to belong to an unfavorable group. Indeed, a marginally significant effect of the experimental condition showed that males in the TGI condition showed the lowest general similarity with the ingroup, consistent with the phenomena of cutting-off-reflected-failure (Snyder et al., 1986) that predicts a lower association with a negative threatening ingroup. As such, male participants showed to be opportunistic increasing their similarity with the ingroup only when their group was put in a positive light.

In order to explain the discrepancy between both studies along the irrelevant traits for male participants, a look at differences in the perception of the pretested traits could be illuminating. For example, it could be that male participants in Study 2 increased their similarity with the ingroup in the FGI condition along irrelevant rather than relevant traits because they actually perceived these traits as more stereotypical rather than irrelevant as they were initially intended. This explanation found some evidence first by an independent sample *t*-test showing that male participants in Study 2 ($M = 4.23$, $SE = .06$) rated men as a whole along the supposed-irrelevant traits differently than males in Study 1 ($M = 3.97$, $SE = .04$, $t(194) = -3.46$, $p < .001$). This difference did not occur either on feminine or masculine traits for males, and never occurred either comparing female participants in Study 1 and Study 2 along the different types of traits. In addition, a one sample *t*-test (test value = 4, the midpoint on the scale) confirmed that males in Study 2 ($M = 4.23$, $SE = .06$) rated the supposed-irrelevant traits as more stereotypical in describing the ingroup ($t(82) = 3.57$, $p < .001$) than males in Study 1 ($M = 3.97$, $SE = .04$, $t(113) = -0.74$, *n.s.*).

Overall, the results in this study give clear support to the original hypothesis that underlines the central role of identity threat for low-status group members to stereotype themselves. Likely this is due to the more reliable manipulation we used in this study in comparison to Study 1.

General Discussion

The present work is a first attempt to understand why only members of low-status groups engage in self-stereotyping but not members of high-status groups. When one's ingroup identity is perceived as threatened, two alternative strategies can be adopted: a stronger depersonalisation process or a higher individualisation process. The former process results in an assimilation of ingroup stereotypical knowledge to the self (e.g., Latrofa et al., 2010), namely self-stereotyping, and reflects the need to re-affirm the self in light of one's threatened ingroup identity. Indeed, self-stereotyping has been demonstrated to be a good way to cope with the stressful awareness of belonging to a stigmatized ingroup, resulting in the decrements of negative psychological consequences (Latrofa et al., 2009). In contrast, the individualisation process leads individuals to perceive themselves more strongly as a unique person rather than members of a social group (e.g., Snyder et al., 1986). This alternative strategy may reflect the need to maintain a positive view of the self that has been put under pressure due to the threat to the ingroup.

Starting from the model of Stigma-Induced Identity Threat (Major & O'Brien, 2005), we explored the interaction between a consensually devalued ingroup identity (female group) and a situationally threatening cue (a bogus article) as factors leading to self-stereotyping. On the basis of this model we expected low-status group members to use an assimilation strategy, while high-status group members should tend to individuate when their group identity is under threat.

Defining self-stereotyping as a heightened similarity between the self and the ingroup on stereotype-relevant rather than on stereotype-irrelevant traits, we found results supporting this prediction. While low-status group members reacted to the ingroup threat by strengthening the similarity between the self and the ingroup especially on ingroup stereotypical characteristics, high-status group members tended to distance themselves from their ingroup category. More specifically, we found a higher level of self-stereotyping when participants' gender ingroup was threatened both by the collective representation (i.e., the female low-status) and by the threatening situational cue (TGI condition). In comparison, self-stereotyping decreased when females were in the FGI condition. Taking together, these results demonstrated that the threatening situational cue (TGI) exacerbates the female's natural tendency to self-stereotype, suggesting that it is the perception of threat associated to their gender ingroup that causes them to self-stereotype. In contrast, we found that males never showed a self-stereotyping process both in TGI and in FGI conditions, consistent with their assumed natural tendency to perceive their gender ingroup as unthreatening.

It is important to note, in line with previous work (Latrofa et al., 2010), that stigmatized members increase their similarity between the self and the ingroup to the same extent on positive and negative stereotypical characteristics. This result extends both the initial conceptualization of the depersonalization process as a process that is driven by the motivation to maintain a positive social self-view

(SCT; Turner et al., 1987; SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and the previous work on selective self-stereotyping that only looked at positive dimensions (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996). Although in real life stereotyping and favoritism often co-occur, we found further evidence that self-stereotyping is a process clearly distinct from self-enhancement and ingroup-bias.

Whereas our work focused on gender status differences, future research should focus on different asymmetrical social status contexts (race, nationality, sexual orientation) and investigate the presence of self-stereotyping as a response strategy to ingroup identity threat. On the basis of the present findings and previous research (Latrofa et al., 2009), we expect that, whenever one's group membership is salient and whenever it is threatened by a social stigma, we expect that self-stereotyping will emerge as a central strategy to reduce the stress of belonging to a discriminated ingroup.

Taken together, we can conclude that it is the appraisal of the threat at the ingroup level that is internalized by low-status group members which in turn triggers their need to become similar to their group along both positive and negative stereotypical traits. Although it may appear counter-intuitive at first glance, this research clearly suggests that self-stereotyping is a strategy that low-status group members adopt to defend themselves from the threat against their ingroup.

NOTES

1. We collapsed feminine and masculine traits as stereotype-relevant traits because they were selected both as stereotypical and at the same time counter-stereotypical for the relative gender group. Moreover since we used a similarity index we expected the same type of correlation between self and ingroup ratings both on stereotypical (the more to the self the more to the ingroup) and on counter-stereotypical (the less to the self the less to the ingroup).

2. Due to the lack of variance in some participants' judgments about the self and/or the ingroup, the within-subject correlation of some participants could not be calculated. Therefore the sample in this analysis contains only 209 participants.

3. Both in Study 1 and 2, we also retested the level of stereotypicality for each trait that was listed in the questionnaire. On the basis of this analysis, in Study 2 we excluded the trait "self-ironical" from the self-stereotyping index because both female ($M = 3.99$, $SE = 1.18$, $t(103) = -.084$, *n.s.*) and male ($M = 4.08$, $SE = 1.69$, $t(109) = .482$, *n.s.*) participants rated this trait not significantly different from the midpoint ($= 4$) of the ingroup rating scale. In other words, participants in Study 2 considered the trait self-ironical as an irrelevant trait with respect to the gender stereotype. However the inclusion of the trait in the analysis led to the same conclusions.

4. As in Study 1, it was impossible to calculate the within-subject correlations for some participants due to a lack of variance. Therefore, the final sample in this analysis was reduced to 153 participants.

AUTHOR NOTES

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