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“IS THAT DISCRIMINATION? I’D BETTER REPORT IT!” SELF-PRESENTATION CONCERNS MODERATE THE PROTOTYPE EFFECT

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ABSTRACT

Prototypical kinds of sexism (a man derogating a woman) are more often detected than non-prototypical kinds (a woman derogating another woman) because the former ones match the mental representation of discrimination. We proposed a motivational process may also account for this prototype effect, and that the prototype effect is moderated by the observer’s self-presentation concerns. In two studies, we showed that under positive self-presentation instructions and under unspecified instructions, comparable levels of prototype effect are obtained, and are larger than under negative self-presentation instructions. These results suggest that the prototype effect which is typically obtained might partially be a consequence of a motivation to appear as egalitarian by reporting blatant forms of prejudice and discrimination rather than subtle ones.

INTRODUCTION

A man derogating a woman (i.e., prototypical prejudice) is more easily attributed to discrimination than a woman derogating another woman (i.e., non-prototypical prejudice). Could this be because reporting some forms of sexism generates more social approval than reporting other forms? We suggest that prototypical discriminations are more likely to be consensually disapproved of than non-prototypical ones, and thus more easy to report when one wants to give a good impression of him/herself. Indeed, reporting blatant cases of prejudice elicits greater approval than reporting subtler ones (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001).

We consider that prototypical situations are blatant instances of prejudice, whereas non-prototypical ones are subtle instances of prejudice. While recognizing the robustness of the

prototype effect regarding discrimination perception, we propose that motivational issues can contribute to reports of prototypical forms of discrimination compared to non-prototypical ones.

PREJUDICE AND PROTOTYPE EFFECT

Prejudice is more likely to be detected and reported when it is committed by an expected perpetrator and directed toward an expected victim (Krumm & Corning, 2008). Indeed, sexist treatments toward women are more detected when expressed by a man than by a woman (e.g., Baron, Burgess & Kao, 1991). Processes underlying this “prototype effect” (Baron et al., 1991; Inman & Baron, 1996 ; Inman, Huerta, & Oh, 1998) are explained by cognitive matching: A situation is perceived as discriminatory to the extent that it fits prototypes regarding discrimination in memory (Baron et al, 1991; Inman & Baron, 1996). Consequently, prototypical forms of prejudice are more detected because they are more accessible in memory. Recognition of non-prototypical forms requires deliberative thinking and is impeded under cognitive load, whereas recognition of prototypical ones is not (Marti, Bobier & Baron, 2000). However, in this body of research, discrimination detection was measured via discrimination reports (e.g., explicit questions about discrimination occurrences or traits attribution to the perpetrator). Given the normative pressure on discrimination reports (Kaiser & Major, 2006), we argue that motivational processes can also account for the prototype effect. That is the motivation to appear as egalitarian would lead people to over report prototypical forms of prejudice, but not non prototypical.

EGALITARIAN STANDARDS AND DISCRIMINATION REPORT

People are motivated to be and to appear egalitarian (e.g., Monteith & Walters, 1998). Failing to act according to egalitarian standards induces negative self-directed feelings and strategies to restore a positive self-image. For instance, appearing as having expressed prejudice elicits negative self-directed affects (Czopp & Monteith, 2003), and efforts to appear unprejudiced in subsequent interactions (Mallett & Wagner, 2011). Another way to foster one’s egalitarian image is being alert in situations where someone is the target of derogatory treatment and to report it. Indeed, the egalitarian norm strongly regulates individuals’ reactions facing potentially discriminatory situations (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002). It also regulates discrimination reports. Indeed, some types of discriminations, the blatant one, are easier to report than others, the subtle ones (Dodd et al., 2001; Zou & Dickter, 2013). This is due to the fact that blatant (or old fashioned) forms of prejudice are perceived as more likely to violate the egalitarian standards than subtler (or more modern) forms of prejudice (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

The tendency to report forms of discrimination differently because of their obviousness can be extended to the prototype effect. We argue that prototypical forms of discrimination are more consensual than non-prototypical forms (e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996), thus, the former can be considered as blatant and the later as subtle. Consequently, reporting prototypical forms of prejudice may be less hazardous for an individual’s self-image than reporting non-prototypical forms. Therefore, we propose that the prototype effect observed in the literature is partially due to participants’ motivation to maintain a positive self-image in an antidiscrimination social context.

OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDIES

We addressed this research question in the case of sexism by using a self-presentation paradigm (e.g., Jellison & Green, 1981). This procedure is commonly used to distinguish normative behavior from counter-normative behavior. Usually, participants are asked to present themselves to give a good impression in one experimental condition (this leads them to display pro-normative responses) or to give a bad impression on another (this leads them to adopt counter-normative responses; e.g., Darnon, Dompnier, Delmas, Pulfrey, & Butera, 2009). By comparing the behavior displayed in a standard condition where no self-presentation instruction is given to the behavior adopted in the pro-normative and counter-normative ones, it is possible to determine whether the latent norm influences the behavior in standard conditions.

We applied this rationale in the present studies: Participants were asked to assign traits to the main actor of a discriminatory scenario in order to give a positive or negative image of themselves (“positive self-presentation” and “negative self-presentation” instructions) or without any specific instructions (“standard” instruction). We predict that because reporting prototypical forms of discrimination – compared to non-prototypical ones – is socially valued as it conforms to the non-discrimination norm, participants in the standard condition and participants in the “positive self-presentation” condition will more frequently report sexism directed towards a woman when exhibited by a man (i.e., prototypical discrimination) than when exhibited by a woman (i.e., non-prototypical discrimination), and that this prototype effect will be reduced for participants in the “negative self-presentation” condition. We tested this prediction in two studies.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and design

Ninety-nine psychology undergraduate volunteers participated in this study (72 women). Their mean age was 22.27 ($SD = 9.83$). The experiment employed a 3 (Instructions: positive self-presentation, negative self-presentation, standard) X 2 (Perpetrator Gender: male, female) between-subjects design.

Material and Procedure

Each participant received a booklet containing three critical and two filler vignettes. Critical vignettes described interactions between two characters. The target of sexist prejudice was always a female who received a derogatory comment involving her group membership (e.g., “Women do not know how to drive!”). The perpetrator was male or female. Filler vignettes were written in a similar way except that the actor addressed a derogatory comment to the female target without expressing any sexist stereotype. To avoid an effect of a specific critical vignette on sexism perception among the others, they were presented in two different orders. Because this

variable did not account for any variance, nor interact with our variables, it has been retrieved from the analyses presented below.

Participants were contacted during a lecture. Self-presentation was manipulated through instructions written on the first page of the booklet. In the positive self-presentation condition, we asked participants to respond in order to give a positive image of themselves to the student who will be reading the responses. In the negative self-presentation condition, we asked participants to respond in order to give a negative image of themselves. To make the egalitarian norm stand out in these two conditions, we introduced the vignettes as a material used in a lecture on moral judgment. In the standard condition, neither self-presentation instructions nor indications regarding the norm were given; participants were told to answer sincerely. After reading each vignette, participants had to generate three characteristics to describe the person whose name was spelled in capital letters (i.e., the perpetrator). Finally, participants provided some demographic information, and they were debriefed and thanked.

Responses coding

Two raters blind to the experimental conditions coded the traits provided by the participants, “1” if the judge considered the participant to perceive the main actor as sexist, “0” if not. The rating procedure was similar to the one used by Baron and colleagues (1991). The independent coders were instructed to evaluate if the perpetrator was perceived as sexist. Accordingly, they were instructed to read all the traits provided by the participants (one, two or three traits), and to code the whole response, not each individual traits (e.g., if a participant reported the traits “macho”, “stupid” and “conservative”, the response is coded “1”; if the reported traits were “selfish”, “lonely” and “unfriendly”, the response is coded “0”). Discrepancies between judges were resolved after a discussion. Because all participants saw three critical vignettes, we used the number of perpetrators qualified as sexist by each participant as a dependent measure. Thus, the values of the dependent measure were ranked from 0 (no perpetrators qualified as sexist) to 3 (all perpetrators qualified as sexist). The two raters reached a 99% agreement.

Results and discussion

We conducted a 3 (Instructions: positive self-presentation, negative self-presentation, standard) X 2 (Perpetrator gender: male vs. female) between-subjects ANOVA. There was a main effect of Perpetrator gender, $F(1, 97) = 10.15, p < .05, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .09$, replicating the prototype effect, and a main effect of the instruction $F(2, 96) = 5.26, p < .05, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .05$. To decompose this main effect, we used two orthogonal contrasts. The first one is the contrast of interest and compares discrimination reports under standard and positive self-instruction (coded both “1”) to discrimination reports under negative self-presentation instruction (coded “-2”). The second one compares discrimination report under standard self-presentation instruction (coded “-1”) and under positive self-presentation instruction (coded “1”); the negative self-presentation instruction is coded “0”). The first contrast was significant, $F(1, 97) = 9.56, p < .05, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .09$, participants report more discrimination under standard ($M = 1.64, SD = 1.02$) and positive self-presentation instruction ($M = 1.36, SD = 1.17$) than under negative self-presentation instructions ($M = 0.85, SD = 1.0$). The second contrast testing the difference in discrimination report between

standard and positive self-presentation instruction was not significant $F < 1$. The interaction is also significant $F(2, 96) = 4.56, p < .05, \text{Partial Eta } 2 = .04$. To decompose this interaction, we used the two same contrasts. The first one compares the prototype effect (i.e., number of prototypical discrimination reports minus number of non-prototypical discrimination reports) under standard and positive self-presentation instructions to the prototype effect under negative self-presentation instruction. As expected, this effect was significant, $F(1, 97) = 8.57, p < .05, \text{Partial Eta } 2 = .08$, participants qualified more male perpetrators as sexist under standard and positive self-presentation instructions ($M = 2.06, SD = 0.90; M = 2, SD = 1.09$, respectively) than female perpetrators ($M = 1.19, SD = 0.98; M = 0.76, SD = 0.9$, respectively). This difference is reduced under negative self-presentation instructions ($M = 0.75, SD = 1.12; M = 0.94, SD = 0.97$, for male and female perpetrators, respectively). The second contrast testing differences between prototype effect under standard and positive self-presentation instructions was not significant $F < 1$.

Consistent with previous research, we found that for the same sexist comment, male perpetrators are more often qualified as sexist than female perpetrators (Baron et al., 1991; Inman & Baron, 1996). More importantly, this prototype effect was moderated by the self-presentation concerns: under standard instructions and under positive self-presentation instructions, the prototype effect is larger than under negative self-presentation instructions. The results are consistent with the proposition that wishing to be normatively appropriate according to the egalitarian norm contributes to the prototype effect. Motivational processes are thus involved in the prototype effect.

However, our results could have been influenced by the fact that participants read the three critical vignettes. Indeed, reading three instances of discrimination, even embedded among filler vignettes, might have primed the concept of discrimination. In the same vein, as the self-presentation instructions were given before reading the vignettes, they might have impacted their interpretation and not just on the report of discrimination. Indeed, the introduction of the study as preparation for a lecture on moral judgment as well as providing self-presentation instructions could have lead participants to be particularly sensitive to the amoral behavior depicted in the vignettes. In order to rule out these methodological issues, we conducted a second study. We asked participants to read only one vignette, and the self-presentation instructions were provided after reading the vignettes and before the traits production. In addition, in Study 1, the sample was mainly female. Even if the prototype effect is consistently not moderated by the participants' gender or ethnicity (e.g., Inman & Baron, 1996), one may argue that female participants are reluctant to report discrimination expressed by an ingroup member. That is why we balanced male and female participants in Study 2. We expected the interaction effect between the instruction given and the perpetrator's gender on discrimination report to emerge over and beyond the participant's gender.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and design

One hundred and twenty eight undergraduates (74 males; 53 females; one did not report his/her gender) were recruited during a lecture and asked to take part in the study (mean age = 19.98, $SD = 1.94$). The experiment employed a 3 (Instructions: positive self-presentation, negative self-presentation, standard) X 2 (Perpetrator's gender: male, female) X 2 (Participant's Gender: male, female) between-subjects design.

Material and Procedure

The procedure was identical to Study 1, except that the participants read only one of the two critical vignettes used in Study 1, and that we gave self-presentation instructions after the vignette. Like in Study 1, the two raters reached a 99% agreement.

Results and discussion

Judges coded the participants' responses as in Study 1. We conducted a 3 (Instructions: positive self-presentation, negative self-presentation, standard) X 2 (Perpetrator's gender: male vs. female) between-subjects logistic regression, with the vignette read as covariate [1]. This analysis did not reveal any effect of Instructions (the two orthogonal contrasts testing this main effect were non-significant, both $p > .24$), but a main effect of Perpetrator gender, *Chi-square* ($df = 1, N = 128$) = 29.75, $p < .05$, that is, a prototype effect. We tested the predicted interaction via the same orthogonal contrasts than in Study 1. The first contrast compares the prototype effect under standard and positive self-presentation instructions to the prototype effect under negative self-presentation instruction and was significant *Chi-square* ($df = 1, N = 128$) = 4.30, $p < .05$, whereas the second contrast testing differences between the prototype effect under standard and positive self-presentation instructions was not, *Chi-square* ($df = 1, N = 128$) = 0.24, $p = .62$. Results showed that the prototype effect was larger under standard and positive self-presentation instructions than under negative self-presentation instruction. That is, under standard instructions, 85% of participants qualified the male perpetrator as sexist against 19.05% for the female one. Similarly, under positive self-presentation instructions, 68.18% of the participants qualified the male perpetrator as sexist against 13.04% for the female one. Under negative self-presentation instructions, this difference is reduced, 57.14% of participants qualified the male perpetrator as sexist against 28.57% for the female one. Neither participants' gender, nor their first and second order interactions terms, impacted sexism attribution (all $p > .19$), that is, our results are consistent with previous research: the prototype effect on sexist discrimination is not moderated by participants' gender (Inman & Baron, 1996). The main effect of the vignette read is not significant ($p = .11$).

As expected, we replicated the results of Study 1. More participants qualified male perpetrators as sexist than female perpetrators and this prototype effect was again moderated by self-presentation concerns: under the standard instructions, as well as under the positive self-presentation instructions, the prototype effect was larger than under the negative self-presentation instructions. Moreover, the prototype effect emerges over and beyond participants' gender; similarly, the participants' gender does not impact moderation of the prototype effect by self-presentation instruction.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Prototypical forms of prejudice are more recognized as such than non-prototypical ones because they match the representation of discrimination in memory (Inman & Baron, 1996). We proposed a complementary explanation by arguing that the tendency to report more prototypical discriminations than non-prototypical ones is at least partially due to self-presentation motivation. Because prototypical forms of discrimination are more consensual and blatant than non-prototypical ones (e.g., Baron et al., 1991), reporting the former ones is more likely to warrant a positive self-image than reporting the latter ones. In two studies, we supported this hypothesis by showing that the prototype effect is moderated by self-presentation instructions. As predicted, participants in standard and positive self-presentation condition reported more prototypical discrimination than those in negative self-presentation condition. Participants responded in order to give a good impression of themselves, even without being instructed to do so. To our knowledge, the present studies are the first attempt to show the contribution of motivational concerns to the prototype effect.

However, our results may call for an alternative interpretation. We proposed that people are basically motivated to report obvious instances of discrimination in order to foster their positive image. However, one could argue that our results can be produced by one's motivation to avoid unfairly blaming someone of having prejudicial intentions. Claiming discrimination implies accusing someone of having adopted an illegitimate criterion to make a decision, and involves the guilt of a third party (i.e., the perpetrator). Because making such attributions has heavy social consequences, the observer may adopt discrimination judgments with caution (Crosby, 1984), especially in cases of subtle instance of discrimination.

Beyond the contribution concerning the processes underlying the prototype effect, our results have implications for the interpretation of the measurement outcome usually employed in the prototype effect literature. As previously specified, the prototype effect is assessed by the production of traits following the reading of a situation depicting, for example, a perpetrator acting in a sexist way toward a female. This method is used in studies to avoid the demand characteristic if participants were directly asked to rate the actor on a list of traits (e.g., Baron et al., 1991). Our results suggest that this method does not allow ruling out motivational processes under the production of the prototype effect.

In addition, our research has implications for discrimination literature. Past research largely illustrated that the prejudiced targets are reluctant to report that they were victims of discrimination (e.g., Sechrist, Swim & Stangor, 2004; Swim & Hyers, 1999) because it's socially costly to complain about it. (Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003). Indeed, making an attribution to discrimination to explain a personal failure is inconsistent with the meritocratic norm (Kaiser & Major, 2006). However, discrimination claims are better accepted when expressed by observers rather than by victims (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Given that people struggle with competitive norms to value accountability for results on one hand, and to reach an egalitarian standard on the other hand (Katz & Hass, 1988), different norms may regulate target and observer's reactions when facing discrimination. Thus, pervasive norms are powerful regulators of outcomes issuing

from discriminatory situations. On the victim's side, it can prevent from challenging the discrimination they are facing, and on the observer's side, it can inflate reports of blatant forms of discrimination, while diminishing reports of subtler ones.

FOOTNOTE

[1] A third vignette initially included in the design failed to produce the prototype effect under standard instruction condition, and was thus withdrawn from the analysis.

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APPENDIX A

Correlation matrix of Study 1 variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Perpetrator's gender (0.5 = Men , -0.5 = Women)	1	-	-	-
2. Instructions (Contrast of interest)	-0.014 <i>ns</i>	1	-	-
3. Instructions (Residual contrast)	0.025	0.000	1	-
4. Number of perpetrators labelled as sexist	.294**	.277**	.100 <i>ns</i>	1

APPENDIX B

Material

Vignette 1 (*experimental item; in studies 1 and 2*)

Anne and ALAIN/BARBARA have contacted each other by advert in order to carpool. Their families live in a small town 400 miles away from the university. Anne meets ALAIN/BARBARA at the gathering place and they hit the road. Their trip will last 5 hours. They decide to take a break and eat a sandwich on the way. At lunch, Anne leaves the highway and heads for the nearest town. On arrival, she shouts out: "it's market day, it will be difficult to find a parking space!" ALAIN/BARBARA replies: "There are a lot of parking slots everywhere". "Yes, but they seem too narrow" says Anne. ALAIN/BARBARA alleges: "It's well-known that women do not know how to drive!"

Vignette 2 (*filler item*)

SEBASTIEN/LUCIE, Emma and Julien leave their offices at lunch and meet in the cafeteria's hallway. They have to wait for Victor, working in another office with whom they agreed to have lunch. All of a sudden they see Justine down the hallway. SEBASTIEN/LUCIE says: « Oh no, not her! I cannot stand her! Please, don't ask her to have lunch with us ». Emma and Julien are embarrassed when Justine joins them. "Hello everybody! So, Victor told me that you will have lunch together, can I come with you?". "Not at all" replies SEBASTIEN/LUCIE, "he probably made a mistake, not today". "OK", says Justine, disappointed, "I will eat alone with my computer". "Good for you!" replies SEBASTIEN/LUCIE, heading off.

Vignette 3 (*experimental item ; in study 2*)

JEAN/JEANNE is invited for lunch by Ludovic and his girlfriend Clara. JEAN/JEANNE has spent a few months overseas. During this time, Ludovic and Clara began a more serious relationship and just decided to live together. JEAN/JEANNE is looking forward to this dinner and to meet Clara. They don't know each other very well. JEAN/JEANNE rings the doorbell at noon, with a bottle of wine for the lunch. They're having a cocktail and going out for dinner.. During the dinner, Ludovic is planning their future. "Well you see, JEAN/JEANNE, since Clara and I have good jobs now, I think we're only missing a child in this house". "Wait!" claims Clara: "We just started living together, I don't feel ready, our relationship should develop before thinking about that". JEAN replies: "That's exactly the point! A woman cannot flourish without children; women are first and foremost mothers."

Vignette 4 (*filler*)

LAURENT/CELINE and Antoine are sitting at the kitchen table talking together when Amélie, their roommate, joins them. Recent disagreements came up between Amélie and LAURENT/CELINE, because of their sharing of the apartment. Amélie talks with them for a while and then leaves to meet a friend. As she is leaving, she asks LAURENT/CELINE if he/she can give her a cigarette, looking at the pack on the table. LAURENT/CELINE refuses, saying the pack belongs to a friend. When Amélie is gone, LAURENT/CELINE says to Antoine "In fact it's mine, but if she thinks that I'm going to give her anything, she's dreaming". Then they keep on talking.

Vignette 5 (*experimental item; in study 1 only*)

Patrice wants to meet his friend RICHARD/SABRINA in order to introduce his girlfriend, Valérie to him/her. They gather for lunch on the campus. Patrice and RICHARD/ SABRINA haven't seen each other for a very long time, they speak about friends they all know. "Have you heard this" Patrice says: "Mathieu's girlfriend is pregnant and they have to get married. He's looking for a job right now. Valérie and I had dinner with him last week". "That girl is such a nuisance!" says RICHARD/ SABRINA, "She's really ruined his chance to go to university now. How could she have let this happen?". Valérie replies: "It takes two to make a child, doesn't it?". RICHARD/ SABRINA says: "Yes, but contraception is women's business".

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