

## **Disinhibition of stereotyping: context, prejudice, and target characteristics**

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### *Abstract*

*The present research examined the moderating influences of individual differences in sexism on the application of gender stereotypes to stereotypic versus nonstereotypic targets as a function of contexts that induced sex stereotypic or counterstereotypic responses. Specifically, participants first received an attribution task in which they were induced to explain a variety of gender relevant situations in gender stereotypic or nonstereotypic ways. Participants were then presented with an ostensibly unrelated person judgment task in which they were asked to judge two women who acted either ambiguously stereotypically or nonstereotypically. The initial opportunity to express stereotypes without censure accentuated stereotype application, but only for highly prejudiced participants rating a woman who acted in an ambiguously stereotypical (i.e. unassertive) manner. We consider the implications of these findings for processes of stereotype disinhibition, and the moderating influences of individual differences in prejudice, target characteristics, and local norms. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

In examining the relationship between categorization and stereotyping, current theorists emphasize the importance of distinguishing between stereotype activation and application (Bargh, 1996; Devine, 1989; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Stereotype activation is determined in part by the accessibility of information stored in memory and its fit to the target object. Stereotype application refers to the use of stereotypes in perceptual or evaluative operations. Well-learned cultural stereotypes are commonly activated automatically, without intention (see Blair, 2001, for a review). Nevertheless, people may be able to avoid the application of these stereotypes when they are motivated to be nonprejudiced (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998), experience heightened awareness of egalitarian norms and standards (Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1998), or have goals that require acquiring unique information about a group member (Fiske &

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Neuberg, 1990). The present research further examined how individual differences and the social context can moderate stereotype use (i.e. application).

With respect to individual differences, there is consistent evidence that people higher in prejudice are more likely to apply stereotypes in their judgments of others. For example, Devine (1989) found that although both high and low prejudiced people were equally knowledgeable of cultural stereotypes of Blacks, people higher in prejudice personally endorsed these stereotypes more strongly (see also Kawakami, Dion, & Dovidio, 1998). In their meta-analytic review of the literature, Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, and Gaertner (1996) found a significant (but modest,  $r = .25$ ) relationship overall between racial prejudice and the application of racial stereotypes to Blacks.

Individual differences in the application of stereotypes can be further moderated by social context. The study of normative influences on prejudice and expressions of bias has a longstanding tradition within social psychology (see Duckitt, 1992). This research frequently makes a distinction between personal norms and standards on the one hand, and social norms and standards on the other (Allport, 1954; Devine, 1989). Similarly, motivations to control prejudice are hypothesized to arise from external sources (e.g. others' expectations) as well as from internal sources (e.g. personal values; see Plant & Devine, 1998). People who have prejudiced attitudes may thus perceive a discrepancy between their personal standards and norms in societies generally characterized by egalitarian values. As a consequence, such individuals may be wary of explicitly expressing their prejudice publicly and overtly (Monteith, Spicer, & Tooman, 1998).

Although both high and low prejudiced people often show equivalent levels of stereotype activation (Devine, 1989; Monteith *et al.*, 1998, Experiment 2; cf. Kawakami *et al.*, 1998; Lepore & Brown, 1997), personal standards have been found to influence the application of stereotypes depending on the social context. For example, in the study by Monteith *et al.* (1998) people high or low in prejudice toward gay people were instructed to suppress their stereotypes or given no specific instructions to control their stereotypes. When the explicit application of stereotypes in a written passage was measured, low prejudiced people showed no significant evidence of stereotyping regardless of instructions. High prejudiced people, in contrast, were more likely to show stereotyped responses, and particularly so when they were not instructed to suppress their stereotypes. These findings suggest that, because highly prejudiced people have personal standards that are discrepant with dominant social norms, their expression of stereotyping may be more sensitive to social contexts than those of low prejudiced people.

Because the norms and groups that make up society are not uniform, the expression and application of stereotypes may vary according to local contexts and salient group memberships. Thus, whereas it may be possible to distinguish different societal reactions to different groups (e.g. skinheads versus gays) for which the norms against bias vary (Devine, 1998; Monteith *et al.*, 1998), it is also possible to distinguish different contexts in which reactions to the *same* group vary as a function of group and normative context. (See also Postmes & Spears, 1998, for a similar discussion of societal versus local group norms with regard to the deindividuation literature.) For example, with respect to race, Wittenbrink and Henly (1996) manipulated social comparison information by varying the information implied by the choice of response alternatives to questionnaire items. Based on the work of Schwarz and his colleagues (Schwarz & Hippler, 1991), Wittenbrink and Henly presented participants with positive or negative response scale information. For instance, the five choices to the question 'Out of 100 Blacks between the ages of 20–40, how many do you think have a high school degree?' ranged in the positive information condition from 'less than 80' to '95 or more' and in the negative information condition from 'less than 30' to '60 or more'. As expected, this manipulation influenced perceptions of others' racial attitudes. In addition, across two studies, participants in the negative information condition, compared to those in the positive information condition, showed higher levels of self-reported prejudice and, in a simulated juror task, evaluated a Black defendant more negatively, were

confident of the defendant's guilt, and advocated longer prison sentences. These effects were stronger among people initially high in prejudice than those low in prejudice.

Other research on prejudice also indicates that social context can moderate the expression of racial attitudes. For example, Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, and Vaughn (1994; see also Blanchard, Lilly, & Vaughn, 1991) found that participants who heard someone condone racism expressed more negative racial attitudes, both publicly and privately, than participants who were not exposed to these comments. Racially biased models may particularly disinhibit the expression of prejudice in social contexts in which negative responses can be rationalized and among people already so inclined. Two studies illustrate these effects independently. With respect to context, in a study by Greenberg and Pyszczynski (1985), participants who overheard another person refer to a Black debater with a derogatory ethnic label subsequently evaluated the Black debater more negatively than a White debater when the debate was lost. This effect did not occur when the debater won the debate. Simon and Greenberg (1996; see also Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985) interpreted these results in terms of the moderating effect of social context: 'The DEL [derogatory ethnic label] could be viewed as setting up a hostile environment in which expressing racial attitudes would not be censured, and therefore subjects felt it was acceptable to denigrate the Black debater' (p. 1196). With regard to individual differences in prejudice, Simon and Greenberg (1996) found that exposure to a derogatory ethnic label applied to a Black person, compared to a control condition without this racial epithet, produced more racially biased evaluations of a Black target person but only among people who possessed relatively strong anti-Black attitudes. Participants who had relatively strong pro-Black attitudes did not alter their evaluations as a function of exposure to the derogatory ethnic label.

This work on the effect of social context on the expression of racial bias is compatible with more general theorizing on disinhibition processes. Gorenstein and Newman (1980) define disinhibition as 'human behavior that has been interpreted as arising from lessened controls on response inclinations' (p. 302). One of the most widely recognized and powerful theoretical frameworks on this process is Gray's (1981, 1982, 1987; Gray & McNaughton, 1996) neuropsychological model. To explain disinhibition, Gray has proposed two independent motivational systems: the behavioral activation system and the behavioral inhibition system (Avila, 2001). The behavioral activation system is an appetitive system that is activated by signals of reward and nonpunishment, and it promotes approach and active avoidance behaviors. The behavioral inhibition system is activated by conditioned signals of punishment and nonreward, and it promotes suppression of inappropriate behaviors.

Within the context of social attitudes, high and low prejudiced people may be distinguished by systematic differences in their behavioral activation and behavioral inhibition systems (Monteith, 1993). To the extent that attitudes are generally conceptualized as having a behavioral component as well as affective and cognitive components (e.g. Breckler, 1984; Zanna & Rempel, 1988), high prejudiced people would be expected to have a stronger behavioral predisposition for negative expressions of bias toward the target of the attitude than would low prejudiced people. In addition, with respect to the behavioral inhibition system, although both low and high prejudiced people may have similar levels of external motivation to respond without prejudice (i.e., motivations based on the anticipated displeasure of others), low prejudiced people have stronger internal motivations (based on self-censure or meeting personal standards) to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998). According to Gray's (1981, 1987) model, the behavior of people high in comparison to low in prejudice, therefore, would be expected to be influenced to a greater extent by situational factors that demonstrate the expression of prejudice without punishment. That is, to the extent that high prejudiced people have salient behavioral predispositions to biased responses and are inhibiting these responses because of external factors, signals of nonpunishment for biased behavior would strengthen the activity of the behavioral activation system and weaken the activity of the behavioral inhibition system, producing a substantial disinhibition effect. In contrast, because people low in prejudice are

unlikely to be behaviorally predisposed toward bias and can be affected by internal as well as external motivations to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), variations in situational factors that signal nonpunishment by others would be expected to have less impact on their expressions of bias.

The goal of the present study was to further examine the role of context for disinhibiting stereotype application. In contrast to recent research on intergroup biases which focuses on perceptions of others' beliefs on expressions of prejudice (Blanchard *et al.*, 1994; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Wittenbrink & Henly, 1996), and on the effects of instructions to suppress one's own stereotypes (Monteith *et al.*, 1998), we consider an additional factor. Specifically, we examined the impact of the participants' *own* behavior on reduced stereotype inhibition.

This research is based on studies on aggression that have demonstrated that one's *own* actions can facilitate later aggression by those inclined to aggress. For example, Donnerstein and Hallam (1978) found that an opportunity to aggress against a partner initially and without censure significantly disinhibited subsequent aggression. In particular, they found that the effects of films on aggression were stronger after participants had an initial opportunity to aggress against the partner. This research shows that not only can aggressive models and violent cues (e.g. weapons) disinhibit aggressive thoughts (Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1996) and actions among people, but so can their own behavior.

Consistent with Gray's (1981, 1987) general model of disinhibition, disinhibition of aggression occurs primarily for those who are either temporarily induced to aggress (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) or who have chronic aggressive tendencies (Leyens, Camino, Parke, & Berkowitz, 1975). For example, Donnerstein (1980) found that even though aggression toward women has traditionally been strongly discouraged, when male participants were instigated to aggress (by being angered at receiving electric shocks), exposure to aggressive-erotic films disinhibited aggression toward this group.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of filmed models in inducing aggression can be moderated by the characteristics of the potential target of aggression. Donnerstein and Hallam (1978) found that, among participants who were instigated to aggress by being angered, erotic films significantly increased aggressiveness toward women but not toward men; in contrast, aggressive-adventure films increased aggression toward men and not toward women.

The present study builds upon the research on disinhibition processes, the effects of social context on aggression, and the expression of bias, and integrates these processes with recent work on prejudice and stereotyping. In particular, our aim was to examine how the application of gender stereotypes to a target woman may be disinhibited *jointly* by inducing prejudicial responses, the fit of the target person to the stereotype, and individual differences in prejudice.

This work extends previous research on social context and the expression of bias in three ways. First, whereas the previous studies by Wittenbrink and Henly (1996) and by Blanchard and Greenberg and their colleagues (Blanchard *et al.*, 1991, 1994; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Simon & Greenberg, 1996) investigated the role of normative context on *attitudes and evaluations*, the present research specifically examined the effect of social context on *stereotyping*. Second, in contrast to studies that varied social comparison information based on the attitudes or behavior of others (e.g. confederates), in the present research participants' own expression of bias was manipulated. Although the role of inducing bias in decreasing perceived censorship and in releasing stereotyping in certain social contexts is clearly an important aspect of intergroup behavior, this topic has yet to be examined. Third, we studied not only the characteristics of participants, but also the characteristics of targets. In accordance with earlier work on the disinhibition of aggression by expressing aggression (Donnerstein & Hallam, 1978), we hypothesized that being induced to express gender bias without censure would increase stereotype application, but primarily by highly prejudiced participants and mainly toward a woman who possessed stereotypic characteristics.

In the present study, participants high and low in sexism were induced to express gender bias or endorse gender equality by choosing among three stereotypic or nonstereotypic attributions to a series of gender relevant situations. The purpose of this stereotypic/nonstereotypic attribution task was to lead some participants to express stereotypic attributions without censure and to lead other participants to express prevailing nonbiased views. After this exercise, all participants were presented with an ostensibly unrelated person judgment task. In this task, participants were asked to judge two women who acted in either ambiguously stereotypical or nonstereotypical ways. Specifically, one woman exhibited unassertive behavior that was consistent with the female stereotype. The other woman exhibited assertive, aggressive behavior, which was inconsistent with the female stereotype. Following these descriptions, participants were asked to rate each woman on traits related to the stereotypic dimension of unassertiveness.

We proposed that individual differences in prejudice would interact with the nature of the social context to determine stereotype application. Specifically, we hypothesized that when the local context permits the expression of prejudice (compared to a context that reinforces a more general norm of nonprejudice), it may serve to disinhibit stereotypic responses from people who are predisposed to stereotype—that is, from high prejudiced people. In particular, we hypothesized that opportunities to express one's prejudice openly and without censure may undermine general prevailing egalitarian norms. Although Monteith *et al.* (1998) identify the latter norms as 'a powerful force for curbing expressions of prejudice' (p. 374), permitting the expression of prejudice without censure may operate to disinhibit the application of stereotypes. Moreover, as both the work on stereotypes and on aggression suggests, the effect of disinhibiting factors may be moderated by individual predispositions toward stereotyping (i.e. level of prejudice) and the relevance of the target to the stereotype.

Specifically, we predicted that when participants are induced to choose among stereotypic in comparison to nonstereotypic responses on an attribution task, subsequent stereotype application would be facilitated for highly prejudiced participants. It is these people who are hypothesized to be inhibiting their stereotypic responses because of external social norms. By contrast, low prejudiced participants' responses are hypothesized to be governed more by their personal standards and internal motivations (Plant & Devine, 1998) that are consistent with general social norms. Thus, inducing low prejudiced people to choose stereotypic responses on the attribution task, which violates their own nonprejudiced attitudes, was not expected to increase their level of stereotyping.

These differences in expression of stereotyping between high and low prejudiced people were predicted to occur primarily when stereotype application is appropriate to the target. Specifically we predicted that only when the stereotype fits the target—that is, when she behaves in a way congenial with the stereotype—will the stereotype be applied (Bodenhausen, Macrae, & Sherman, 1999; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). When the target behaves inconsistently with the stereotype and the fit is perceived to be poor, the stereotype will not be applied.

These moderating effects were predicted to produce an overall pattern of results reflecting a Sexism (High versus Low)  $\times$  Attribution Task (Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic)  $\times$  Target Person (High versus Low in Stereotypicality) interaction. When the target person behaves stereotypically, Sexism and Attribution Task were predicted to interact to produce differences in the application of stereotypes. For these targets, we anticipated that high prejudiced participants who were induced to express stereotypic responses on the attribution task would show higher levels of stereotype application than high prejudiced participants who were induced to express nonstereotypic responses or low prejudiced participants in both the stereotypic and nonstereotypic attribution task conditions. In contrast, when the target person behaves nonstereotypically, no such effects were expected.

## METHOD

### Participants and Design

Sixty-six (17 female, 47 male, and 2 who did not indicate their sex) undergraduate students at the University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, participated in the experiment receiving course credits.<sup>1</sup> Three main independent variables were included in a 2(Sexism: High versus Low) × 2(Attribution Task: Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic) × 2(Target Person: Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic) mixed model design. The Target Person factor was within-subjects and the Attribution Task and Sexism factors were between subjects.

### Procedure

Upon arrival, participants were informed that they would be taking part in a number of separate studies that were unrelated to each other and were simply combined to save the researcher time and money. In actual fact, the experimental procedure consisted of four interrelated phases. The primary aim of the first phase was to assess the participant's level of prejudice toward women utilizing a modern sexism scale. In the second phase, while half of the participants were presented with an attribution task in which they were induced to respond in stereotypical ways, the other half of the participants were presented with an attribution task in which they were induced to respond in nonstereotypical ways. In the third phase, participants were presented with a filler activity to disguise the true purpose of the study. In the last phase, all participants were presented with a person judgment task in which they were asked to judge two women who acted either ambiguously stereotypical or nonstereotypical.

### Phase One: Modern Sexism Scale

The first phase involved the assessment of self-reported sexist attitudes. Specifically, all participants were asked to complete the Swim, Aikens, Hall, and Hunter (1995) modern sexism scale which consists of eight statements over the current position of men and women in society. Participants were instructed to respond on a scale ranging from '0 = totally disagree' to '100 = totally agree'. Items affirming the presence of sexism were recoded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of modern sexism. The internal consistency of these items, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.83. Participants were categorized as low or high ( $N_s = 33$ ) in sexism based on a median split.<sup>2</sup>

### Phase Two: Attribution Task

Upon entering the laboratory, participants were randomly assigned either to a stereotypic or nonstereotypic attribution task condition and were told that the aim of this second study was to examine how women are perceived in different social contexts. They were further informed that their

<sup>1</sup>Although sixty-eight students participated in the present study, the data from two participants was excluded from the analyses because of missing data.

<sup>2</sup>Preliminary analyses revealed that women and men did not differ in sexism,  $M S = 52$  versus  $54$ ,  $p < 0.63$ . Based on the fact that an analysis of variance including sex as an independent variable, showed that participant sex had no systematic effects and did not moderate the effects associated with sexism, this factor was not included in the results subsequently reported.

task was to examine which of three attributions they personally considered to be the most appropriate. This task was modeled after the procedure of Moskowitz, Wasel, Gollwitzer, and Schaal (1999).

Specifically, each participant was presented with five different situations about women followed by three possible explanations for each situation—all of which were either stereotypic or nonstereotypic of women (Williams & Best, 1994). Pilot testing supported the perceived difference in stereotype endorsement reflected in each set of responses. An example of one of the situations is: 'After a number of interviews, a professor chooses a male assistant.' In the stereotypic attribution task condition, participants were presented with the following three options: (a) women show less effort in trying to achieve a career; (b) women have less experience in working with computers and using specific programs; (c) women are more interested in applied situations and less interested in science. Because all explanations were related to gender stereotypes, this context induced the use of cultural stereotypes of women. Alternatively, participants in the nonstereotypic attribution task condition were presented with the following three options: (a) the professor is obviously prejudiced against women; (b) the professor has failed to take affirmative action policies into account; (c) women are often more modest than men in interviews and so unjustly disadvantaged. Because all explanations in this condition were related to politically correct, nonstereotypical attributions, this context does not involve the application or endorsement of cultural stereotypes of women.

### **Phase Three: Filler Activity**

To support the cover story that the session involved a series of separate studies and to separate the attribution task from the main dependent variable (i.e. the person judgment task), participants were presented with another 'study', a word search puzzle, and were instructed to circle as many words as possible within seven minutes.

### **Phase Four: Person Judgment Task**

Following the filler task, all participants were presented with a person judgment task, adapted from earlier research by Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977) and Banaji, Hardin, and Rothman (1993). This task included two paragraphs describing a number of activities involving two separate target women (see the Appendix). Participants were asked to develop an impression of these women while reading the paragraphs and to subsequently rate each target. In one paragraph, a woman named Rose was described exhibiting behavior consistent with the female stereotype of women. Specifically, Rose behaved unassertively, acting shy and unsure of herself. In the other paragraph, a woman named Eva was described exhibiting behavior inconsistent with the female stereotype. Specifically, Eva behaved very assertively, acting pushy, at times aggressively. Pilot testing again supported the difference in perceived stereotypicality of these targets. The order of the target paragraphs, whether participants received the description of the stereotypical or the nonstereotypical target person first, was counter-balanced across participants.

After reading each paragraph, participants were asked to rate the person on 24 traits utilizing a 9-point scale ranging from '1 = totally not applicable' to '9 = totally applicable'. Twelve traits were related to cross-cultural stereotypes of women (Williams & Best, 1994). Specifically, six traits were positively related to unassertiveness (i.e. passive, submissive, yielding, shy, unsure, and timid) and six traits were negatively related to assertiveness (i.e. dominant, assertive, direct, arrogant, self-assured, and conspicuous). Before analyzing the data, the latter items were re-scored so that higher scores reflected a more stereotypic unassertive response. Twelve other traits were selected as unrelated to the

gender stereotype (i.e. interesting, reliable, fun, intelligent, optimistic, happy, willful, selfish, passive, annoying, bitter, and narrow-minded). The ratings on the 12 gender stereotypes were averaged to yield a stereotypic trait score for Rose, the stereotypical target person and for Eva, the nonstereotypical target person.

## RESULTS

To examine the effects of the attribution task on stereotypic trait ratings, a 2(High versus Low Sexism)  $\times$  2(Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic Attribution Task)  $\times$  2(Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic Target Person) mixed-model analysis of variance was performed. The Target Person factor was repeated measures. A main effect for Target Person was found,  $F(1, 62) = 491.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Participants evaluated the stereotypic target person, Rose, higher on stereotypic characteristics ( $M = 6.49$ ) than they did the nonstereotypic target person, Eva ( $M = 3.43$ ). This effect, however, was qualified by the predicted Sexism  $\times$  Attribution Task  $\times$  Target Person interaction,  $F(1, 62) = 4.46$ ,  $p < 0.039$  (see Table 1). Subsequent analyses further tested the predictions by considering responses to the stereotypical and nonstereotypical target persons separately.

For the stereotypical target person, Rose, we expected and obtained a two-way interaction between Sexism and Attribution Task on the application of stereotypic traits,  $F(1, 62) = 3.95$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . We further anticipated that high sexist participants would demonstrate a uniquely high level of stereotype application for Rose after they participated in the stereotypic attribution task, compared to the conditions in which high sexist participants performed the nonstereotypic attribution task, and low sexist participants performed the stereotypic and the nonstereotypic attribution tasks. Supportive of this prediction, contrast analysis (+3, -1, -1, -1) demonstrated more stereotypic responses by high sexist participants in the stereotypic attribution condition ( $M = 6.69$ ) than by participants in the combination of the other three conditions ( $M = 6.39$ ),  $t(62) = 1.75$ ,  $p < 0.041$ , one-tailed. There was no significant difference among the conditions in which high sexist participants performed the nonstereotypic attribution task, and low sexist participants performed the stereotypic and nonstereotypic attribution tasks,  $F(2, 43) = 0.59$ ,  $p = 0.56$ .

No differences in the application of stereotypes were expected as a function of attribution task or level of sexism for ratings of Eva, the nonstereotypical target person. As expected the Sexism and Attribution Task analysis for this target person (see Table 1) revealed no significant effects (all  $ps > 0.12$ ). Thus, the overall pattern of results conformed to the predictions.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1. Evaluations of Rose and Eva on stereotypic traits as a function of sexism and attribution task

	Rose, the stereotypic target person		Eva, the nonstereotypic target person	
	Stereotypic task	Nonstereotypic task	Stereotypic task	Nonstereotypic task
Low sexism	6.30	6.54	3.79	3.25
High sexism	6.69	6.30	3.41	3.39

<sup>3</sup>An analysis of the effects Sexism and Attribution Task and Target Person performed on the 12 nonstereotypic traits included in the rating scales of Rose and Eva demonstrated no significant main effects or interactions. When ratings of stereotypic and nonstereotypic ratings were included as a repeated measures independent variable with the other factors, the overall ANOVA revealed a significant Attribution Task  $\times$  Sexism  $\times$  Target Person  $\times$  Trait Association (Stereotypic versus Nonstereotypic Trait) interaction,  $F(1, 62) = 6.71$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .



## DISCUSSION

Stereotypes, particularly those about race and sex, are pervasive cross-culturally (e.g. Williams & Best, 1994) and may be automatically activated by the direct or symbolic presence of representatives of the group (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Devine, 1989; Kawakami & Dovidio, 2001; Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000). However, automatic stereotype activation does not necessarily imply stereotype application (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). The present results demonstrate that allowing people to express stereotypes openly and without negative consequences from others produces greater subsequent stereotype application by high but not by low sexist people. Whereas low sexist participants did not differ in their level of stereotyping across the stereotypic and nonstereotypic attribution tasks, high sexist participants showed more stereotyping after making stereotypic attributions, a local context that permitted the application of stereotypes without censure.

Moreover, our findings demonstrated that not only the characteristics of the participant but also the characteristics of the target (in terms of her fit with traditional stereotypes) moderate the impact of social context on stereotyping. As hypothesized, we found that being induced to express gender bias without censure increased stereotype application, but primarily by highly prejudiced participants and mainly toward a woman who behaved stereotypically. Evaluations of a woman who behaved in a nonstereotypical way were not influenced by the initial use of stereotypic or nonstereotypic attributions. These findings are important in that they suggest the specificity with which some social contexts can affect stereotyping. The use of stereotypes was accentuated for highly prejudiced people only when the woman's behavior was unassertive and there was therefore a reasonable fit between the target person and the cultural stereotype (Bodenhausen *et al.*, 1999; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Oakes *et al.*, 1994). When the woman's behavior was assertive and therefore did not fit the cultural stereotype, the induced expression of gender bias in the social context did not influence the participants' evaluation of her. Overall, these findings attest to the complexity and specificity with which certain social contexts can influence the application of stereotypes.

Despite the increasing convergence of evidence demonstrating that social context is an important moderator of expressions of bias, prejudice, and stereotyping (e.g. Blanchard *et al.*, 1994; Wittenbrink & Henly, 1996), future research might explore the mechanisms that potentially mediate this effect. Methodologically, for instance, future research might consider whether our results were due to social norms communicated through the research materials, the participant's own behavior, or a combination of both. Including control groups that are presented with the same materials as were our participants but not requiring these control participants to actually perform the task would help to disentangle these alternative possibilities.

Theoretically, future research might also productively explore the distinction between controlled and automatic processes related to stereotyping. We proposed that the fundamental mechanism related to the present findings was the reduction of the inhibition to stereotypes by high prejudiced people when they are previously allowed to express stereotypes without negative consequences. In particular, we assumed, on the basis of past research, that when presented with a stereotypical female target person, Rose, high prejudiced people would generally automatically *activate* gender stereotypes (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Banaji *et al.*, 1993), regardless of the preceding context (i.e. attribution task). The completion of a stereotypic or nonstereotypic attribution task, however, was hypothesized primarily to influence whether high prejudiced people would *apply* these activated stereotypes. In general, nonprejudiced social norms or personal standards might inhibit people from applying social stereotypes to women. But because the local context in the stereotypic attribution task permits the expression of stereotypes without punishment, which can strengthen the initial behavioral

predisposition and weaken the inhibition system (Gray, 1981, 1987), high prejudiced people were expected to rate Rose more stereotypically. However, because the nonstereotypic attribution condition does not condone the use of stereotypes, high prejudiced people would be externally motivated to live up to general nonprejudiced norms and rate Rose as less stereotypically female. Thus although they may have a strong predisposition for the negative expression of bias, high prejudiced people were expected to be externally motivated to respond without prejudice to avoid the anticipated displeasure of others (Plant & Devine, 1998). As proposed by this disinhibition framework (Gray, 1981, 1987) and as demonstrated in the results, high prejudiced people would therefore stereotype Rose significantly more in the stereotypic attribution than the nonstereotypic attribution task condition.

The hypotheses for low prejudiced people involve different assumptions about the activation and application of stereotypes. With respect to activation, it is unclear whether presentation of a stereotypical female target person would activate (Banaji & Greenwald, 1995; Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Banaji *et al.*, 1993; Blair, 2001) or would not activate (Lepore & Brown, 1997; Kawakami *et al.*, 1998) gender stereotypes for low prejudiced people. Regardless of whether they do not activate and therefore do not apply these stereotypes or they activate the stereotypes and inhibit their application, stereotype application for low prejudiced individuals would be expected to be uniformly low. Because recent research indicates that low prejudiced people have a strong internal motivation to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), we anticipated that they would show no differences in the application of stereotypes regardless of whether they completed a stereotypic attribution task or a nonstereotypic attribution task. The present findings demonstrated a slight decrease in stereotyping by low prejudiced people in the stereotypic attribution relative to the nonstereotypic attribution task condition. But consistent with our hypotheses, the difference did not approach statistical significance.

Although we recognize that high and low prejudiced participants might differentially activate gender stereotypes when they are presented with stereotypical target group members, an alternative explanation for the present findings is related to differential stereotype activation as a function of *attribution task*. In particular, it is possible that the stereotypic attribution task may affect the ratings of a stereotypic target person because it primes or activates stereotypic representations rather than influencing the norms in the local context. This alternative explanation is unlikely, however, for two main reasons. First, to the extent that this activation translates directly into stereotype application, the stereotypic attribution task would have to prime the activation of stereotypes for high but not for low prejudiced people to correspond to the obtained pattern of results. Because both high and low prejudiced people are equally knowledgeable of cultural stereotypes (Devine, 1989), and because of the very explicit use of stereotypes in the attribution task, it is likely that both groups would be influenced by the stereotypic attribution task to activate cultural stereotypes (Lepore & Brown, 1997). Second, because both types of attribution tasks, stereotypic and nonstereotypic, make gender-related issues salient and deal with the explicit use or nonuse of cultural stereotypes, it is not obvious why one condition would activate stereotypes to a greater degree than the other.

Nevertheless, it is possible that some combination of our disinhibition framework and the activation interpretation may be possible. For instance, it is possible that the stereotypic attribution task activated gender stereotypes equivalently for high and low prejudiced people, but only high prejudiced people chose to express and apply these stereotypes in their description of Rose. Thus, we acknowledge that we cannot rule out a simple priming and activation interpretation definitively with the present design and data. Because both the disinhibition and activation interpretations may account for the pattern of stereotype *application* that we observed, we suggest that future research might directly explore the issue of stereotype *activation* to illuminate further the different possible underlying mechanisms. One way to examine automatic stereotype activation is to utilize short stimulus onset asynchronies (SOAs) between the prime and target stimuli on a response latency task

(Kawakami *et al.*, 1998; Neely, 1977, 1991). An activation explanation would suggest that under short SOAs (e.g. 300 ms) there would be greater automatic stereotype activation in the stereotypic task condition than in the nonstereotypic task condition, at least for high prejudiced people. In contrast, evidence for our proposed disinhibition framework would be obtained if equivalent levels of stereotype activation occurred across both attribution task conditions under automatic processing conditions. Thus, differences in stereotype application across conditions for high prejudiced people would not be due to differences in levels of automatic activation, but rather as a function of a greater reduction in the inhibition to apply stereotypes in the stereotypic in comparison to the nonstereotypic attribution task conditions.

When considered in combination with other research, the present study suggests that although stereotype application is typically controllable, under many common circumstances it may remain a problem—particularly for people who are predisposed to be biased, when punishment for stereotype expression is not signaled in the social context, and when the target reflects stereotypic qualities to some degree. Nevertheless, sexism that is manifested only occasionally or to a limited degree can still have substantial negative social and economic consequences for women (Martell, Lane & Emrich, 1996). Specifically, a range of conditions can stimulate the expression of this prejudice. For example, both contextual factors that lead to the suppression and the expression of stereotypes may facilitate subsequent stereotyping. Whereas past research on the rebound effect has found that inducing individuals *to avoid stereotypes* can subsequently lead to increased stereotyping (Macrae *et al.*, 1994; Monteith *et al.*, 1998); the present findings suggest that inducing individuals *to utilize stereotypes* can also increase stereotyping. In particular, recent results related to stereotype suppression by Monteith *et al.* (1998) found that high prejudiced participants who initially were induced to control stereotypes subsequently recalled more stereotypic words than high prejudiced participants who did not suppress stereotypes. Comparably, the present results demonstrate that high prejudiced participants who were induced to use stereotypic attributions subsequently utilized stereotypes to a greater extent when evaluating a woman who behaved stereotypically than high prejudiced participants who were induced to use nonstereotypic attributions. In combination, these findings suggest that at least high prejudiced individuals seemed to be ‘damned if they do and damned if they don’t’—both their use and attempts to avoid stereotypes can lead to accentuated stereotyping.

However, it is also important to note that while strategies to induce stereotype suppression or stereotype use may actually increase stereotyping for high prejudiced people, they may not have the same effects for low prejudiced people. Specifically, in the Monteith *et al.* (1998) study and the present research, these types of manipulations appeared to have no effect on the subsequent stereotyping of low prejudiced people. Although this may be of little condolence when attempting to reduce stereotyping by those who really need it, it also underlines the importance of considering motivation and level of prejudice in examining processes related to stereotype activation, application, and reduction (Devine, 1989; Kawakami *et al.*, 1998; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997).

These findings also suggest one reason why prejudicial views might persist in societies that have by and large developed increasingly anti-prejudice societal norms (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Although egalitarian norms may exist for society in general, they are unlikely to hold in many of the local contexts that prejudiced individuals frequent. For example, barroom and canteen cultures operating within organizations and other corners of society may serve a nourishing and validating function, keeping alive prejudiced views. Researchers have increasingly acknowledged that stereotypes are strengthened, and perhaps even created, to the extent that they are socially shared and socially validated (e.g. Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985). The present research makes explicit that these local norms may keep these perceptions alive in the minds of prejudiced individuals and explains why such views may continue to thrive despite generally nonprejudiced cultures.

## APPENDIX

### Rose

Last Friday I was waiting for my friend Rose. She was supposed to drop by because we were going to a party that night. As usual she was late. When she did finally come, she explained that because she was always nervous about going to parties it took her a long time to get ready. Nevertheless, we arrived at the party at about the same time as most of the other guests. After about an hour, an acquaintance of Rose's asked her to dance, but she said no. Rose and I decided to go outside to get a breath of fresh air, but after we had walked around for a while, we realized that we were lost. Although I had to ask directions from a stranger, we quickly arrived back at the party. One of Rose's colleagues began discussing politics with Rose but because Rose speaks so softly I couldn't understand what she was saying. We lost contact with each other for a while and I only saw her again at the end of the evening. When I found her she was trying to decide whether she should introduce herself to a famous writer that had just arrived. Rose asked me what she should say because she wanted to practice her introduction first. In the meantime, however, there were so many people that had gathered around the writer that Rose gave up. Because we both had to work the next day, we decided to go home. Before we separated, we agreed to meet again for lunch next week.

### Eva

Recently I came across an old acquaintance, Eva, on the street. Because we both had the day off, we decided to hang out together. So we agreed to meet within an hour at her house. Shortly after I arrived a salesman came to the door but Eva refused to let him in. She also told me that she had refused to pay her rent until her landlord had repainted her apartment. We talked for a while, had lunch, and decided to go for a drive. Because Eva's car had broken down that morning, we took my car. First, however, we took her car to a garage. When we got there she told the mechanic that she would go to another garage if he couldn't repair it the same day. After the garage, we went to a park and wandered around for a while and then we stopped by a store that sold electrical appliances. I looked around a bit while Eva tried to exchange a small appliance. I heard her demand her money back. I couldn't find what I wanted and so we walked a few blocks down to another store. Outside a stand was set up by the Red Cross and they asked us if we wanted to donate blood. Eva lied by saying that she had diabetes and therefore couldn't give blood. When we arrived at the other store, we discovered that it was no longer open. It was getting late, so we went to pick up Eva's car. Before saying goodbye, we decided to see each other again as soon as possible.

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