Categorization in everyday life: The effects of positive and negative categorizations on emotions and self-views[†]

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Abstract

This study investigates how everyday categorization experiences affect people's emotional responses and self-views. A representative Dutch population sample (N = 463) was asked to recount a situation in which they were categorized by others. This resulted in a range of categories that were spontaneously evoked by research participants. Participants were asked to think of a situation either where the categorization resulted in negative *or in* positive *expectations about the self. Positive categorization elicited more positive emotions and agreement than negative categorization. However, when positive expectations about the self were formed, people found it less easy to detect that these were based on external categorizations, and were less likely to protest. Mediational analyses showed that because detection was impaired, exposure to positive categorization resulted in* lower self-confidence *than exposure to negative categorization. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Theory and research on the effects of social categorization (Tajfel, 1978) has mainly examined the problems people encounter when they are categorized as members of *socially devalued* groups, such as ethnic minorities (Ethier & Deaux, 1994), homosexuals (Simon et al., 1998), overweight women (Crocker, Cornwall, & Major, 1993), or disabled people (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). The present research takes a broader view, as it systematically compares how people's emotions and self-views are affected by *positive* versus *negative* expectations that can be derived from the social categories people belong to. Unlike previous researchers we will not limit ourselves to a single category membership, but examine the broad range of categorizations that people can experience in everyday life.

CATEGORIZATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Because social categorizations do not only apply to members of stigmatized groups, but the experience of being categorized is common to all of us, the *first* goal of the present study is not to focus on a single (devalued) group membership, but to investigate a *variety* of different social categorizations that people experience *in everyday life*. Because social categorization is used to simplify information about different people we encounter (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994), by definition the resulting category-based expectations are not always descriptive of the particular individual under consideration. This can be the case because even though the individual belongs to the group, this does not necessarily imply that all group characteristics apply to *each group member*. For instance, while men generally tend to be more competitive than women, the select group of women who have been successful in a typically masculine work setting describe themselves as more competitive than their male colleagues (Ellemers, Van den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maass, & Bonvini, 2004). Additionally, people may prefer to be categorized in a *different* group, because the way they are categorized by others does not reflect self-chosen group memberships (Barreto & Ellemers, 2002, 2003). For instance, immigrants may think of themselves as members of the host community where they live, while others continue to perceive them in terms of their country of origin (Barreto, Spears, Ellemers, & Shahinper, 2003). Finally, people tend to resist being treated in terms of a category membership they do not find *relevant* to the situation at hand, even when they would not contest the fact that they belong to this particular social category in other situations (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). This is the case for instance when a female professional resents being treated in terms of her gender in a work situation, while she is perfectly happy to be regarded as such when going out with friends (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004).

Thus, independently of the identity threat that results from the inclusion of an individual in a socially disadvantaged or otherwise unattractive group (value threat), theorists have proposed that people can feel threatened when they are viewed by others as interchangeable category members, in situations where they think they should be treated as unique individuals, or as members of another category (categorization threat; Barreto & Ellemers, 2003; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Because research so far has not systematically addressed the consequences of social categorization in this more general sense, we aim to assess how people react when others consider them in terms of a broader variety of categorizations, including seemingly 'innocent' group memberships that can elicit *positive as well as negative* expectations about individual group members.

In doing this, we will build on the work of Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, and Ethier, 1995, who developed a broad taxonomy of different kinds of social categorizations. On the basis of a previous investigation where respondents had generated different identities (Deaux, 1991), Deaux et al. (1995) asked a student sample to rate a total of 64 different social identities in terms of their similarity, and in terms of characteristic trait properties. On the basis of these ratings, Deaux et al. (1995). distinguished between five different clusters of social categorizations: (1) relationships (e.g., husband, daughter), (2) vocation or avocation (e.g., salesperson, intellectual), (3) stigma (e.g., deaf, alcoholic), (4) ethnicity/religion (e.g., Jewish, Hispanic), and (5) political affiliation (e.g., feminist, republican). Deaux et al. (1995) conclude that the clarity with which these clusters emerge, attest to the heterogeneous nature of social categorizations as well as the social identities that are derived from them, and emphasize that this should be taken into account in future research. In the present study, where we explicitly address the question whether similar psychological processes may operate across a broad range of social categorizations, we use this taxonomy to organize the variety of social categorizations that is spontaneously mentioned by our research participants into a limited number of classes.

POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE GROUP-BASED EXPECTATIONS

Research shows that group members have mental images of the stereotypes and expectations that others associate with their group (e.g., Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). These meta-stereotypes may be positive, neutral, or negative in valence, and just like ingroup and outgroup stereotypes they are typically sensitive to contextual variations (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connel, 1998). Departing from this knowledge, the *second* goal of our investigation is to systematically compare the effects of positive versus negative category-based (meta-) expectations for the self. As we indicated above, in most research to date, social categorization was expected to have harmful effects for individual group members because the groups that were examined were characterized by socially devalued features (as in research on social stigmatization, Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), or because of immoral behavior of the group in the past (as in research on collective guilt; e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). In the present investigation we aim to examine the broader effects of social categorization, by systematically comparing the effects of positive and negative category-based expectations.

Recent research on different forms of prejudice against women has revealed that views emphasizing positive characteristics of women (e.g., benevolent sexism) are regarded as more acceptable and less offensive than negative expressions of sexism (e.g., hostile sexism, see Barreto & Ellemers, 2005b; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Nevertheless, such category-based expectations can still be harmful for the well being of the individuals who are implicated in these views. Furthermore, recent research on implicit sexism revealed that even when certain acts or statements of others are so subtly sexist that they are not recognized as discriminatory by the women who are exposed to them, they do undermine subjective well-being, and impair individual performance (Barreto & Ellemers, 2004, 2005; Barreto, Ellemers, & Palacios, 2004).

The present investigation builds on this previous research, by systematically comparing how categorizations that evoke negative expectations about the individual (*negative categorizations*) and categorizations that result in positive expectations about the individual (*positive categorizations*) affect the individuals who are exposed to such categorization. Our main prediction is that, while both forms can represent categorization threat, and as a result have the potential to undermine the individual self, each form of categorization can have its own distinct effects. Thus, we predict that the specific effects of categorization are not necessarily determined by the nature of the group one is categorized in, or even by whether or not targets find this categorization contextually appropriate, but depend on whether this is seen to lead to positive or negative expectations about the self.

Our reasoning is based on the assumption articulated in self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987), that the comparative value of any social group is not an inherent feature of that particular group, but can vary over time, across comparative domains, or across social contexts. Thus, similarly valenced expectations can derive from different group memberships. Likewise, the same categorization can be seen as a source of either positive or of negative group-based expectations, depending on the comparison group and the comparative dimension that seems most relevant in that situation (Haslam & Turner, 1992). For instance, psychology students can derive a positive identity from their group membership when they compare to arts students in terms of intelligence, or when they compare to science students in terms of creativity. However, this same categorization as a psychology student can yield a negative identity when comparing to arts students in terms of creativity, or to science students in terms of intelligence (Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). Although these differences can be the mere result of prejudiced beliefs, this is not always the case, as they often correspond to socially valid differences between groups. We predict that each social category membership in principle can yield positive as well as negative expectations about individual category members, and that the way people respond to a particular categorization depends on the positive or negative *valence* of these group-based expectations in a particular context, instead of being determined by the nature of the categorization.

EFFECTS ON EMOTIONS AND SELF-VIEWS

Our *third* goal is to examine more explicitly than before how external categorizations *impact* upon people's emotional responses and self-views. In parallel to our findings with respect to different forms of sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2004, 2005a, 2005b), we hypothesize that a distinction should be made between emotional responses to the categorization on the one hand, and the consequences of categorization for people's self-views on the other. More specifically, we argue that–while positive and negative categorizations *both* can have negative effects for the self–the *nature* and *focus* of these effects differs depending on the extent to which the categorization is *recognized* as a (contextually) inappropriate means of deriving expectations about the self.

When there is a discrepancy between the way people are treated by others and the way they prefer to see themselves, they need to realize that this discrepancy derives from the behaviors of these others (i.e., the act of categorization), to be able to maintain their internal self-views. In other words, to maintain confidence in one's own sense of self, it is essential that people *detect* that categorization is taking place (see also Barreto & Ellemers, 2004). This reasoning is based on previous work showing that people tend to show *confirmation* of views about the self that are held by others when it is *unclear* how these differ from self-views, whereas conditions that *clarify discrepancies* between self-views and views held by others are more likely to result in *self-verification* responses (Kray, Thomson, & Galinsky, 2001; Swann & Ely, 1984).We argue that the *valence of the categorization* (i.e., whether it results in positive or negative expectations about the self) is an important factor that either facilitates or impedes the recognition that categorization is taking place.

When categorization results in negative group-based expectations about the self, self-enhancement motives are challenged (Sedikides, 1993). Thus, the desire to maintain a positive view of the self facilitates the recognition that categorization is taking place, as should be evident from responses indicating disagreement and detection. In addition, we expect that negative categorizations tend to elicit negative emotional responses and lead the individual in question to engage in active coping strategies that focus on the other, not the self (e.g, hostility and protest). However, when the external categorization elicits positively evaluated group-based expectations about the self, the same self-enhancement tendencies will cause people to find these expectations more acceptable as a description of the self (Kunda, 1990). Accordingly, they are less likely to recognize that they are being categorized. Furthermore, because the positive nature of the expectations induces agreement and elicit positive emotions, other-directed coping responses associated with hostility and protest are less likely to be triggered (Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003). Thus, when focusing on emotional responses, positive categorization can be seen to have favorable consequences as it tends to elicit positive emotions and induce a sense of agreement, whereas negative categorization results in hostility and protest. However, the adverse effects of positive categorization emerge when addressing people's self-views. That is, due to the greater difficulty to detect that categorization is taking place we propose that when people who are subjected to positive category-based expectations, this affects the confidence they have in their self-views, instead of calling into question the appropriateness of the categorization to derive expectations about the self.

In sum, we predict that emotional responses and judgmental responses occur relatively independently of each other (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a). That is, whereas *negative* group-based expectations on the one hand lead people to experience negative emotions, on the other hand the negative valence of these expectations makes it easier to detect the fact that they are (inappropriately) categorized, and helps them to maintain confidence in their own internal self-views. On the one hand exposure to *positive* group-based expectations elicits positive emotional responses, on the other hand people are less likely to detect that these favorable expectations about the self are category-based, and as a result they will have less confidence in their internal self-views.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study was obtained through an internet community that is maintained by a national advertising agency with the aim of obtaining representative opinions of the Dutch population on various consumer products. From the complete database, consisting of 40,000 individuals, we drew a stratified sample ($N = 463$) for this study. This sample is representative for the Dutch population in terms of gender (49% male, 51% female), level of education completed (14% primary education, 60% secondary education, 20% higher professional education, 7% university education), and age category (23% younger than 23, 24% between 23 and 33 years, 26% between 33 and 42 years, and 27% over 42 years).

Procedure

Members of the internet community from which we drew our sample, enter the website of the internet community once a week, to complete that week's questionnaire on line. When participants in the present study went on line, through their internet connection they received information explaining that the purpose of the present investigation was to assess their responses to social categorization. Social categorization was defined as a situation where one is labeled by others in a certain way, causing these others to hold specific behavioral expectations about the self. It is however important to note that the Dutch expression used to refer to external categorization ('in hokjes plaatsen') implicitly conveys disagreement with that categorization. Participants were then invited to recount a situation in which they were subjected to categorization by others ('*in een hokje geplaatst*'). Half the participants were asked to think of a situation they had experienced where (unwanted) categorization resulted in *positive* expectations about the self (positive categorization), and half the participants were instructed to evoke an experience where categorization resulted in *negative* expectations about the self. This constituted our experimental manipulation of positive versus negative categorization. Participants were then asked to type-up a brief description of the situation they had in mind. Subsequently, the description they had provided of their own positive or negative categorization experience was projected at the top of their computer screen, and they were asked to keep this situation in mind when answering the questions that followed. All questions were phrased in such a way that they asked participants to indicate how they felt and how they responded in the situation that they had described.

Measures

All measures were taken by asking participants to indicate their agreement with specific statements on rating scales, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Agreement with Categorization

We constructed six items to assess the extent to which research participants considered the categorization appropriate (e.g., I belong in this category, *alpha* = 0.89).

Detection

Three items intended to assess the extent to which participants were able to detect the fact that they had been categorized (e.g., I immediately realized that I had been categorized; others had to point out to me that I had been categorized (reverse-coded), *alpha* = 0.62).

Emotions

With 16 emotion terms (adapted from PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) respondents were asked to indicate how they felt in the situation they had reported. Principal components analysis revealed that these represented three orthogonal factors, accounting for 67% of the variance in the individual items. Accordingly, three emotion scales were constructed: one containing eight positive emotions (happy, proud, confident, strong, satisfied, secure, cheerful, elated; *alpha* = 0.92), four negative emotions representing feelings of hostility (angry, indignant, frustrated, irritated; *alpha* = 0.89), and four negative emotions associated with anxiety (ashamed, insecure, weak, tense; *alpha* = 0.82; see also Russell, 1980).

Coping Responses

Nine items intended to tap respondents' coping responses. A principal components analysis indicated that these represented two orthogonal factors, which accounted for 58% of the variance in the individual items. Five items captured the use of active coping strategies (e.g., protesting against the categorization, *alpha* = 0.84), whereas the remaining four items indicated the inclination to engage in more passive coping (e.g., avoiding the situation, *alpha* = 0.70).

Self-Views

Eight items intended to assess respondents' self-views. A principal components analysis indicated that these represented two underlying factors, accounting for 49% of the variance in the individual items. Accordingly, we constructed a four-item scale indicating participants' self-confidence (e.g., I can achieve just as much as anyone else, *alpha* = 0.62), and a four-item scale assessing participants' self-doubt (e.g., I feel I cannot live up to other people's expectations, *alpha* = 0.62).

RESULTS

Types of Categorization

Based on the classification provided by Deaux et al. (1995), we coded the categorization experiences that participants generated into five classes (see Table 1). This revealed that the majority of the examples (about 65%) that were provided referred to relatively innocuous categorizations, based on participants' vocations or avocations (e.g., truck driver, teacher, student), or on their personal relationships (e.g., father, daughter), whereas a minority of the experiences (about 25%) were associated with categories that tend to be seen as problematic, as stigmatized categories (e.g.,

Table 1. Category frequencies, according to the classification developed by Deaux et al. (1995)

	Positive	Negative	Total
Relationships	10 (7.1%)	24 (14.7%)	34 (11.2%)
(A)Vocation	97 (68.8%)	66 (40.5%)	163 (53.6%)
Stigma	18 (12.8%)	45 (27.6%)	63 (20.7%)
Ethnicity	0 (0%)	14 (8.6%)	14 (4.6%)
Political	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.2%)	3 (1.0%)
Other	15 (10.6%)	12 (7.4%)	27 (8.9%)
Total	141	163	304

homosexual, elderly, handicapped), or ethnicity. Although the latter classes of categorizations (stigma and ethnicity) were mentioned relatively more often in the negative categorization condition than in the positive categorization condition ($\chi^2(5) = 40.07$, $p < 0.0001$), still more than half of the participants who recounted a negative experience referred to a categorization based on their (a)vocation or personal relationships. That is, whereas previous research on stigmatization has emphasized the ways people can suffer from their membership in groups they did not choose, because they were born in them (such as ethnic groups), or were included due to factors beyond their control (as in the case of disabled people), the everyday categorization experiences recounted by our participants indicate that even self-selected category memberships, such as professional groups can be experienced as a source of negative expectations about the self, and hence can represent identity threat.

Further inspection of the examples that were generated by participants revealed that the same category membership was mentioned by some to illustrate the occurrence of negative group-based expectations, while others referred to this same group membership to recount an experience where categorization had induced positive expectations about the self. For instance, some indicated that because they were civil servants, people thought they would be reliable (positive expectations), while others indicated that their status as a civil servant made other people think that they would be lazy (negative expectations). Likewise, the same category membership (overweight) was used to recount positive group-based expectations (because I am fat, people think I am fun-loving) by some, whereas it served as an example of negative categorization for others (I am fat, so people think I lack self-discipline).

Thus, the coding of the categorization examples spontaneously provided by our research participants first underline that *categorization is an everyday experience*. That is, even those who do not belong to social groups that are considered as disadvantaged can and do experience that others (unjustly) derive expectations about them, based on their social category membership. Second, these results confirm the notion that in principle any social category can yield positive as well as negative expectations, depending on the comparative dimension that is relevant and the comparative context that is salient (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994).

Agreement with Categorization

To examine our predictions about the effects of positive versus negative categorization, we conducted one-way ANOVA's on our dependent measures. For the indicator of agreement with the categorization, this resulted in a significant effect of categorization condition ($F(1,436) = 123.78$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.221$). The relevant means (see Table 2) show that participants generally agreed more with the positive categorization than with the negative categorization, as predicted. It is however important to

Table 2.   Mean differences for positive versus negative categorization

	Positive categorization	Negative categorization
Agreement	2.82 (0.82)	1.98 (0.76)
Detection	3.41 (0.85)	3.67 (0.83)
Emotions:		
Positive	3.22 (0.75)	2.42 (0.78)
Hostility cluster	2.41 (0.96)	3.39 (0.97)
Anxiety cluster	2.38 (0.81)	2.69 (0.98)
Active coping	2.59 (0.85)	3.09 (0.94)
Self-confidence	3.65 (0.63)	3.78 (0.63)

Standard deviations are given in brackets.

note that the relatively low mean scores indicate that people generally considered the categorization *inappropriate* rather than appropriate, irrespective of valence. This is consistent with what we requested participants to recount, and indicates that the reactions described here must be seen as reactions to category-based perceptions of self that deviate from situationally preferred self-views and hence represent an identity threat, regardless of whether they elicit positive or negative expectations from others.

Detection

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of categorization ($F(1,435) = 10.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.023$), showing that detection was impaired in the positive categorization condition compared to the negative categorization condition, as we predicted (see Table 2).

Emotions

The three composite emotion scores were subjected to a one-way (condition: positive/negative) MANOVA, revealing significant effects of condition for all three emotions. These confirm that participants who had been asked to recount an instance of positive categorization reported more positive emotions than participants in the negative categorization condition ($F(1,441) = 119.12$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.213$). Additionally, less hostility-related emotions were reported in the positive categorization condition than in the negative categorization condition ($F(1,441) = 112.07$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.203$). A similar effect was obtained for the anxiety-related emotions ($F(1,441) = 13.26$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.029$), although the latter effect was substantially smaller in size than the effects on positive emotions or on hostility-related emotions.

Coping Responses

A MANOVA on the two composite scores indicated that, as predicted, respondents in the negative categorization condition were more inclined to use active coping strategies than those in the positive categorization condition ($F(1,4408) = 34.06$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta^2 = 0.072$), while participants in both categorization conditions were equally likely to display passive coping ($M = 2.55$, $F < 1$, *ns*).

Self-views

A one-way MANOVA on the two composite scores for self-confidence and self-doubt revealed that participants in the negative categorization condition reported *more* self-confidence than those in the positive categorization condition ($F(1,441) = 4.88$, $p < 0.028$, $\eta^2 = 0.011$), as we predicted. Categorization condition did not significantly affect reported levels of self-doubt (overall $M = 2.98$, $F(1,441) = 1.74$, *ns*).

Mediation

Finally, through structural equation modeling (using EQS 6.0) we examined whether the observation that positive categorization resulted in less self-confidence than negative categorization, could be ascribed to the fact that positive categorization was less likely to be detected as such. For this analysis, the categorization manipulation was dummy-coded, with positive categorization coded as 1, and negative categorization as 2. First, we tested a model where detection mediated the relation between categorization and self-confidence but no direct relation was allowed between categorization and self-confidence. This fully mediated model ($\chi^2(19) = 25.25$, $p = 0.15$) indicated that categorization was a significant predictor of detection ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$), and that detection was a significant predictor of self-confidence ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, it showed a good fit to the data (Non-Normative Fit Index NNFI = 0.97; Comparative Fit Index CFI = 0.98; Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation RMSEA = 0.027; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In the alternative model, where in addition to the mediated path a direct relationship between categorization and self-confidence was allowed ($\chi^2(18) = 22.32$, $p = 0.22$), this direct relation was not significant ($\beta = 0.11$, *ns*), and indeed this more elaborate model did not represent a significant improvement over the fully mediated model ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.93$, *ns*). From these analyses, we conclude that the effect of positive versus negative categorization on participants' self-confidence is fully *mediated* by the detection of the categorization. That is, the reason that people respond with lower self-confidence to positive categorization than to negative categorization, is that they find it more difficult to realize that they are being categorized in the case of positive categorization.

DISCUSSION

The present research has increased our understanding of the effects of categorization in everyday life.

First, because we asked research participants to generate their own examples of instances of categorization, we were able to establish that people's everyday experiences are permeated with the effects of categorization, even if we would not suspect this to be the case, because they do not belong to the socially disadvantaged or stigmatized groups that are the focus of most research in this area. Indeed, although some of our research participants clearly belong to stigmatized social groups (e.g., due to their sexual preferences or physical disabilities), what strikes us is the relatively unproblematic and innocent nature of most of the categorizations that were mentioned, which also included self-selected category memberships that are generally seen as harmless, such as professional groups (Deaux et al., 1995; Frable, 1993).

This complements what we know from previous research suggesting that categorizations based on gender and ethnicity dominate the way we perceive others (Fiske, 1998). The argument here is that these category memberships are readily visible, and can even be inferred from people's names or voices when there is no face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, these categories are associated with a clear and

widely shared system of expectations about the traits and behaviors that are characteristic for the members of these groups (Williams & Best, 1990). This is used to explain why gender and ethnic categories tend to determine people's responses even in situations where they are clearly irrelevant (Becker & Eagly, 2004). However, the present data show that a variety of social categories is used to derive expectations about individuals, indicating that social categorization is a much more general phenomenon.

Second, it is important to note that the identity of the group is not the decisive factor that determines how people experience the fact that they are categorized. Instead, the predicted results of positive versus negative categorization emerged across different category classes, and the same social categories were mentioned as examples of negative as well as positive categorization. Indeed, the consistency of the effects we observed is all the more meaningful, given the broad variety of categorizations that was generated by the participants in this study. Furthermore, because research participants indicated how they felt as a result of categorization experiences that had actually occurred we feel confident that we have captured experiences that people considered subjectively meaningful, which is less obvious when participants are required to focus on particular category memberships or on traits or behaviors that researchers consider relevant.

A *third* important conclusion is that–as predicted–positive as well as negative categorization can have negative effects for the self, even if these effects emerge in different ways. This is likely to be the case when the categorizations are unwanted in a given context, irrespective of their valence. Indeed, overall our participants indicated a lack of agreement with the fact that they were categorized, indicating that the categorization in itself can constitute a source of identity threat, which should be separated from the threat that stems from the association of the self with a lower status or morally suspect social group (Branscombe et al., 1999; Ellemers et al., 2002). This complements recent research demonstrating that positive versus negative expressions of sexism each in their own ways have negative effects on the individuals who are exposed to such views (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). The present investigation shows that similar processes can also emerge with respect to other types of categorizations, and are not restricted to perceived gender differences.

The *final* conclusion from this study is that those categorizations that evoke the most negative emotional responses (and generally tend to be seen as most problematic), at the same time are most easy to cope with, as they elicit disagreement and invite protest (Deitch et al., 2003). By contrast, seemingly favorable categorizations that are less easily detected are more likely to affect people's self-views as they result in lower individual self-confidence. These findings clearly illustrate the relevance of studying the range of responses of interest, as we cannot infer how people's self-views are affected by a particular categorization from the emotional responses they show. Indeed, although some of the effects reported here are relatively small, it is important to note that–compared to the way valence of categorization affected people's emotional responses–we observed a *significant reversal* of the effect when addressing their self-confidence. This is consistent with our research on expressions of sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2004, 2005a) which also indicates that when group-based expectations are presented in a 'positive' way, positive emotional responses can co-occur together with negative effects on self-confidence and task performance. Likewise, in a study where Asian American women were subtly reminded that Asian Americans tend to have superior mathematical skills, these women showed impaired performance on a maths test, which the researchers ascribed to the pressure of positive group-based expectations (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Kray et al., 2001).

While research on stereotype threat has by now established that group-based expectations can undermine task performance even for members of groups with no history of stigmatization or social disadvantage (Maass & Cadinu, 2003), this evidence has been restricted to cases where the group stereotype was *negative* with respect to the task domain (e.g., when men were compared to women in terms of affective information processing, Leyens, Désert, Croizet, & Darcis, 2000, or when whites

were compared to blacks in terms of their athletic performance, Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). Thus, we think that the results of the present investigation indicating that *positive* stereotypes can also be harmful for individual group members are novel and thought-provoking, and deserve further attention in future research examining the conditions under which and the processes through which this occurs.

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