

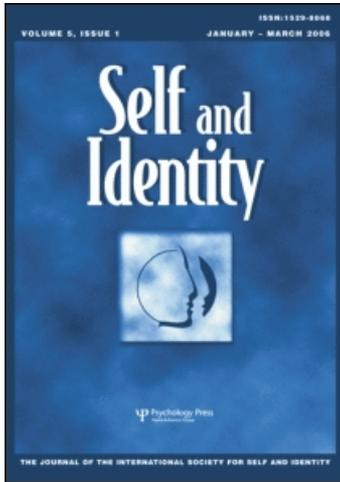
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Melissa Burkley ^a; Hart Blanton ^b

^a Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA ^b Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas, USA

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The Positive (and Negative) Consequences of Endorsing Negative Self-stereotypes

MELISSA BURKLEY

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, USA

HART BLANTON

Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas, USA

The impact of negative stereotypes can be harmful and, as a result, stereotype targets are often motivated to deny their accuracy. However, at times, targets of even the most unflattering stereotypes embrace them as valid. We identify the underlying reasons why people might embrace negative self-stereotypes and also examine the various outcomes that result from these reasons. Our discussion highlights the fact that although these outcomes are often negative, there is a growing body of work that demonstrates how these processes can also benefit the stereotype target.

Keywords: Self-stereotype; Stereotypes; Stigma.

One of the pernicious qualities of social stereotypes is that they are rarely under the control of the people targeted by them. Stereotypes often arise, it is commonly observed, because perceivers have cognitive and motivational interests in living in a simplified social world, one where other people can be judged by their categories. As often as not, these judgments are for the worse. This common view of stereotypes—however appropriate it may be in many instances—ignores a simple fact: At times the targets of even the most unflattering stereotypes embrace them as accurate. For over fifty years, researchers have tried to understand why this self-stereotyping occurs.¹

Early explanations argued that stigmatized groups could not help but internalize society's negative views (Allport, 1954; Lewin, 1948). This traditional view of the stigmatized target assumed that the reason why targets endorse negative self-stereotypes is because they can not help but adopt others' beliefs. We suggest, however, that this passive internalization is not the only process that underlies self-stereotyping. We believe that a number of different processes underlie such endorsement, and that some (but not all) of these processes may result in positive consequences for the stereotype target.

Correspondence should be addressed to: Melissa Burkley, Department of Psychology, Oklahoma State University, 116 North Murray, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078, USA.
E-mail: melissa.burkley@okstate.edu

Two Forms of Stereotype Internalization

In an earlier article (Burkley & Blanton, 2008), we identified two forms of stereotype internalization: Chronic and functional. *Chronic internalization* refers to a long-term, dispositional tendency to internalize self-stereotypes. This form represents the classic approach to stereotype endorsement whereby stereotype targets are assumed to inevitably adopt others' negative views (e.g., Allport, 1954; Lewin, 1948). Chronic internalization is assumed to be stable across time and situations. For example, if a woman chronically internalizes the stereotype that men are stronger leaders, she will rely on this belief when making judgments across a wide array of situations.

Alternatively, *functional internalization* refers to a short-term, contextualized tendency to internalize self-stereotypes. This form of internalization is assumed to vary across time and situations as a function of specific threats or social contingencies (e.g., Pickett et al., 2002). From this perspective, an individual may endorse a negative stereotype in a particular situation in order to react to a specific event, but may reject the very same stereotype when under different circumstances. For example, if a woman lost a promotion to a male co-worker, she may be likely to temporarily internalize the stereotype that men are stronger leaders in order to justify this outcome, but when voting for a presidential candidate, she may reject this same notion. This approach suggests that stigmatized targets can be strategic about their endorsements—embracing negative stereotypes when they fulfill a need and rejecting them when they do not.

The distinction between viewing stereotype endorsement as a chronic (or trait) versus a functional (or state) variable is central to our discussion. In the following, we use it to identify the multiple processes that underlie negative self-stereotyping and to identify when these processes will result in positive versus negative consequences for the stereotype target.

Chronic Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

Many early explanations of negative self-stereotyping relied on the principles of symbolic interactionism, focusing attention on the non-strategic reasons why individuals might come to internalize negative stereotypes about their groups. Based on symbolic interactionism (e.g., Blumer, 1969), and consistent with the notion of the looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902), it was thought that people came to view themselves as others do, and so stereotype targets should come to see themselves through the negative perceptions of out-group members.

In one of the earliest references to negative self-stereotyping, Lewin (1948) discussed the “self-hatred among Jews” in these terms. Lewin argued that as Jews increased their interactions with dominant out-groups, they could not help but internalize out-group perceptions. Allport (1954), in his seminal book on prejudice, discussed how this same process could lead to self-hatred among other stigmatized individuals. He stated, for instance, that African Americans “have heard so frequently that they are lazy, ignorant, dirty, and superstitious that they may half believe the accusations, and since the traits are commonly despised . . . some degree of in-group hate seems almost inevitable” (p. 152). Jones and his colleagues (1984) added to this discussion by suggesting that such internalization is most likely among individuals whose stigma is non-concealable, socially disruptive, or recently acquired (see also Goffman, 1963; Rosenberg, 1979).

Because this form of self-stereotyping is stable, it does not reflect a strategic response to specific threats and should lead to negative consequences for the individual. The majority of research on this topic has focused on three such outcomes: Out-group preferences, behavioral assimilation, and reduced self-esteem.

Negative Outcomes

The traditional view of the stigmatized target adopting others' beliefs led some researchers to a logical conclusion: that negative stereotypes could lead targets to internalize contempt for the in-group and *out-group preferences*. This can clearly be seen in Allport's (1954) discussion of the self-hatred among African Americans. This perspective has also recently resurfaced in various social cognitive models that emphasize how chronic activation of social stereotypes can cause even the targets of these beliefs to hold implicit disdain for their own groups (e.g., Rudman, Feinberg, & Fairchild, 2002).

A great deal of research has examined how the activation of negative stereotypes can lead targets to behave in ways that are consistent with the stereotype, an effect referred to as *behavioral assimilation* (e.g., Levy, 1996; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999; see Wheeler & Petty, 2001, for a review). The majority of this research, though, does not require the individual to actually endorse the negative stereotype—only knowledge of the stereotype is assumed to be necessary in order to invoke the assimilation process (Steele, 1997). However, a few studies have examined how stereotype endorsement intensifies these self-fulfilling effects. As examples, African American men who endorse negative stereotypes about their in-group show greater tendencies for juvenile delinquency (Dembo, 1988) and poorer parenting skills (Connor, 1988) than those who reject such beliefs.

Perhaps most consequentially, internalization of negative stereotypes can lead to *reduced self-esteem*, an idea that has a long history. In 1939, Clark and Clark conducted their now famous study on the link between race and self-esteem. Over two hundred African American children were presented with white- or dark-skinned dolls and were asked to select the doll that they liked best. The results showed that 66% of the children preferred the white doll. Many interpreted this result as evidence that stigmatized group membership inevitably leads to decreases in self-esteem, and this idea quickly became a mainstay in social psychology.

Fifty years later, Crocker and Major (1989) challenged this assumption. They noted that most research fails to show impaired self-esteem among all stigmatized groups. Although some groups do show evidence of low self-esteem (e.g., Native Americans, obese women), many others do not (e.g., women, African Americans; see Twenge & Crocker, 2002, for a review). Crocker and Major theorized that stigmatized targets engage in various self-protective strategies that buffer them from social rejection. Even though these researchers rejected the notion that stigmatized identity automatically decreases self-esteem, they still suggested that self-stereotype endorsement was harmful, stating that "those who have internalized society's negative views of their group should be at particular risk for low self-esteem" (p. 619). Crocker and Major thus hypothesized that although stigmatization does not inevitably lead to low self-esteem, targets who internalize negative stereotypes about their group should be vulnerable to self-esteem decrements.

Few studies have examined the link between stereotype endorsement and self-esteem, but those that have seem to indicate that endorsement decreases self-esteem. For example, women who accept gender stereotypes and allow these perceptions to

shape their self-concepts have lower self-esteem than women who reject gender stereotypes (Whitley, 1983). Similarly, juvenile delinquents who agree with negative evaluations of their group have lower self-esteem than those who reject such evaluations (Chassin & Stager, 1984). Finally, individuals with mental illness who embrace negative stereotypes about their group show lower self-esteem than those who reject these stereotypes (Ritsher, Otilingam, & Grajales, 2003).

Aversive Side-effects

The negative outcomes described above are not only harmful in their own right, they also promote a variety of undesired “side-effects.” These include depression, poorer recovery from illness, and a host of physiological impairments. An illustrative example comes from Ritsher et al. (2003), who found that people with mental illness who endorse negative in-group stereotypes show greater depressive symptoms, less personal empowerment and poorer recovery orientation than those who do not endorse these stereotypes. But perhaps most disturbing are the results from a twenty-year longitudinal study on older adults by Levy, Slade, Kunkel, and Kasi (2002). They found that older adults who held negative views of aging lived 7.5 years less than those who held more positive views. Furthermore, this effect of stereotypes on survival was partially mediated by the older adults’ will to live. Although this study did not look at internalization of stereotypes specifically, it strongly suggests that older adults who accept stereotypes about their age group will be at risk for a wide range of negative health outcomes.

Why Not Resist? Epistemic Needs

In summary, it appears that when negative stereotypes about an in-group are viewed by targets as chronic, trait qualities, a variety of negative psychological and physical outcomes can follow. One might then expect targets to resist their influence; to discredit the unflattering views that target them and their groups. But a need for well-being is not the only goal that drives behavior, and so there will be times when other concerns will cause people to embrace even the very stereotypes that promote negative identities. One motive that can have this effect is the epistemic need to understand and predict the external and social world.

In his self-verification theory, Swann (1983) suggested that the self-concept provides people with a sense of stability and an understanding of their place in the world. People are therefore motivated to maintain their self-concept through self-verification strivings and, at times, this desire for a coherent identity can override the desire for a positive identity. For example, Swann and his colleagues have shown that the desire for self-certainty can cause people with low self-esteem to seek contact with others who reinforce their own negative self-views (Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992). Although people do not “want” negative self-views—in the sense that people do not experience positive emotions when negative views are affirmed—they may try to verify these negative conceptions if it will help them live in a world they can understand and predict.

Negative stereotypes can be one source of these negative self-conceptions, and embracing these views can provide a person with a means for gaining greater self-certainty. For instance, a woman who feels that her analytic shortcomings stem from her gender might not gain a feeling of self-worth from this belief, but she might gain a greater sense of who she is and how she should structure her life. A wide range of

gender roles seem to work in this way, such that both men and women embrace some of the stereotypic positive and negative aspects of their gender, with the “payoff” being the belief that both men and women live in comprehensible and predictable social worlds (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 2001).

One way in which stereotypes may fulfill such epistemic needs is by providing a meaningful frame of reference for the stigmatized target. A lesson from social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) is that environmental barriers often restrict a person’s frame of reference, such that they only compare with the people they encounter on a regular basis (e.g., Harter, 1986; Marsh, 1987). This can cause individuals with low abilities to have higher competency perceptions than those with higher abilities—provided that their daily interactions generate favorable comparisons (e.g., Harter, 1986; Marsh, 1987). Social stereotypes can have similar effects. They can focus attention on others who are targeted by the same stereotypes and away from those who are not. As a result, people may resist comparisons with a broader social comparison frame (e.g., out-group members), even if doing so might benefit their self-esteem.

This latter point was highlighted by Blanton, Christie, and Dye (2002). In a series of laboratory studies, they found evidence that among women who endorsed the view that women are inferior to men at math (a minority view in their sample that was nonetheless embraced by a number of participants), their self-esteem was based more on social comparisons with women than men. This pattern was observed even in situations in which comparisons to men might raise self-esteem (because of the inferior performance of a salient male comparison other) and comparisons to a female target might threaten self-esteem (because of the superior performance of a salient female comparison other). In essence, belief in the gender stereotype seemed to focus women’s attention on the (unflattering) social comparison with the other woman, even though there could have been some benefit to self-esteem had they momentarily rejected the stereotype to take pride from out-performing a given male on a math task (and see Biernat, 2003; Miller, 1984).

This finding offers a view of in-group comparisons that differs somewhat from that of Crocker and Major (1989; Major, 1994). They treated in-group comparisons as a strategic response that the stigmatized can pursue in order to protect self-esteem. Because of prejudice and discrimination, stigmatized members are relatively disadvantaged compared to dominant out-group members. When stigmatized individuals make inter-group comparisons, they then open themselves up to social comparison situations in which they are at a disadvantage compared to non-stigmatized individuals. The findings by Blanton et al. (2002) expand on this analysis by showing how individuals might pursue in-group comparisons, even when doing so will threaten the self. At times, in-group comparisons might sting—just as it might sting to view negative in-group stereotypes as legitimate. However, even unflattering perceptions such as this can at times help a person gain a greater sense of self, which might give desired certainty to later perceptions, actions, and inferences (and see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994).

This desire for certainty might also extend beyond perceptions about the self to include perceptions about how and why the world operates in the way it does. In an influential set of papers on system justification theory, Jost (2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994) argued that people want to believe in the ideological integrity of societal status hierarchies, including the distribution of resources and the division of social roles. He further argued that the desire for a meaningful ideology is especially strong among those who belong to low-status groups. His reasoning was that

disadvantaged group members need to believe that there is a reason and purpose for their position in society. One way they can justify such arrangements is by embracing negative self-stereotypes. As an example, Jost and Banaji (1994) pointed to the women's rights movement. Prior to this movement, the idea that women were intellectually inferior to men justified the restriction of women in the work force. According to system-justification theory, not only were men motivated to endorse this belief, but women were as well. For them, it helped explain their position in society and why they were not personally trying to disrupt the status quo.

Jost and colleagues further argued that this need for system justification is sufficiently strong that at times it will override the individual's need for positive self and group evaluations. That is, "stereotypes are documented as serving ideological functions in addition to or, better, frequently in opposition to, motivational functions associated with personal and group defense" (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 9). Stereotypes might therefore explain why some groups suffer and others experience success, and they can do so in ways that makes these differences appear natural and inevitable. Even negative in-group stereotypes might thus provide a sense of control and security, particularly to those who are likely to feel powerless given their lower status in society (e.g., Jost & Burgess, 2000).

In sum, chronic internalization of negative stereotypes may be "bad" for an individual in the way that Allport and Lewin have described it, but it also may be "good" in the way that the theories of Swann and Jost imply. Although such self-stereotyping can be at odds with one's desire to hold positive self-views, at times they can fulfill the desire for order and meaning in life. A different pattern emerges, however, when self-stereotyping is framed as a strategic, momentary response to threats.

Functional Internalization of Negative Stereotypes

Functional internalization is a context-dependent form of stereotype endorsement, meaning that an individual may self-stereotype in a particular situation in order to reach a desired conclusion, but may reject the very same stereotype under different circumstances when a different conclusion is desired. Since this form of internalization occurs in order to fulfill self-motives, it should typically result in positive consequences for the individual, so long as it is engaged at an appropriate time to dampen a specific threat.

In this section, we turn our attention to a growing body of work that considers this aspect of self-stereotyping and the differing reasons why targets engage in functional internalization of negative stereotypes. The majority of this work suggests that such internalization is driven by situational fluctuations in two underlying motives: assimilation/differentiation needs and self-esteem needs. In reviewing each motive, we also discuss the positive consequences that may result when a target internalizes stereotypes to fulfill these needs.

Assimilation and Differentiation Needs

Consider the sense of self that one can gain from social comparisons and how social stereotypes might inform these appraisals. In her optimal distinctiveness theory, Brewer (1991, 1993) suggested that people have opposing needs to feel in-group inclusion and belonging (*assimilation need*) and to feel personally distinct and unique (*differentiation need*). When in-group inclusiveness is high, the differentiation need is

activated and the assimilation need is weak. When in-group inclusiveness is low, the assimilation need is activated and the differentiation need is weak. Because of this tension between opposing needs, Brewer suggested that people seek out social identities that will fulfill both needs simultaneously (and see Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Recently Pickett and colleagues (2002) suggested that self-stereotypes allow people to fulfill either of these opposing needs. Self-stereotypes produce a sense of group belonging, thereby fulfilling the need for assimilation, but these stereotypes also distinguish one's in-group from the out-group, thereby fulfilling the need for differentiation. Thus, when either of these needs is activated, a stigmatized individual should be more likely to endorse self-stereotypes as a way of restoring balance.

In a series of supportive studies, Pickett et al. (2002) demonstrated that when individuals receive information indicating they are very different from their in-group (activating assimilation needs) or not different from other out-groups (activating differentiation needs), they show greater stereotype endorsement than those in a no-need condition. Their model placed no priority on either positive or negative stereotyping. So, just as someone might gain an optimally distinct sense of self by endorsing a positive group stereotype (e.g., "We men are problem solvers"), so might one achieve this outcome by endorsing a negative group stereotype (e.g., "We men are insensitive"). Pickett and colleagues appreciated, however, that negative stereotypes can come at a greater cost to the self. They thus predicted (and found) that only those who were high in group identification used both positive and negative stereotypes to fulfill differentiation needs whereas those low in group identification only used positive stereotypes. For low identifiers, embracing a negative group identity may be too threatening, but for high identifiers, this cost may be outweighed by the importance of assimilation needs. This latter finding illustrates how people must balance competing motives when a specific self-motive might be served by embracing a stigmatizing stereotype.

Self-esteem Needs

Inherent in work discussed so far is the assumption that self-stereotyping runs contrary to an individual's desire for positive self-regard: People address epistemic concerns or their desire for optimal distinctiveness with negative stereotypes, despite the potential negative consequences these tendencies might have for self-esteem. In fact, the tendency to endorse negative stereotypes often is interpreted as evidence that some other motivation (e.g., system justification, optimal distinctiveness) has taken priority over the self-esteem motive. Pickett et al. (2002) stated, for instance, that: "Although negative self-stereotyping is inherently problematic for group members, this sacrifice may be worth the benefit of achieving enhanced intragroup assimilation or intergroup differentiation" (p. 545).

At times, negative stereotyping probably can be viewed as a "necessary evil"—a less than desirable way of addressing an understandable goal. Burkley and Blanton (2008) argued, however, that there are some circumstances where negative stereotyping can *protect* the self against esteem threats. This can occur when negative stereotypes are embraced strategically in response to the momentary threats to self-esteem that can arise from stereotypic failures and shortcomings. By endorsing a negative stereotype after a stereotypic failure, targets can shift blame away from the self and towards the group. This saves targets from the potential shame of admitting that a failure was the result of their personal merits.

Anecdotally, it does seem to us that negative stereotypes can serve as excuses for performance failures. As examples, negative stereotypes might allow blondes to excuse their unintelligent or embarrassing responses (“blondes are dumb”), white men to excuse their poor athletic performances (“white men can’t jump”), women to excuse their math failures (“women are bad at math”), older adults to excuse their memory lapses (“old people are forgetful”), and professors to excuse their tendency to forget meetings and deadlines (“professors are absentminded”). In each of these cases, a stereotype can be invoked as a self-protective strategy by attributing the failure to group membership, rather than individual qualities. Ironically, this suggests that people may protect themselves against the threat of stereotypic failures by embracing the very stereotypes that would have predicted these same outcomes.

To test the idea that negative stereotypes can be strategically used to serve self-esteem needs, Burkley and Blanton (2008) conducted a series of studies that focused on the stereotype that women are less skilled at math compared to men. In their first study, women completed a math test and received feedback indicating they had performed poorly. Half of the women then read a list of negative stereotypes regarding women and math, whereas the other half was not shown these stereotypes. Afterwards, the women’s self-esteem was assessed. As predicted, women who failed the math test showed higher self-esteem when they were reminded of the relevant gender stereotypes. At first blush, this result might defy common sense—reminding women of the low expectations for their group could decrease, not increase, self-esteem. However, this is the pattern one would anticipate if negative stereotypes can protect individuals against momentary stereotypic failures.

In their second study, Burkley and Blanton compared responses of men and women who had been told they did poorly in a math test. Half were given an opportunity to rate their agreement with gender stereotypes regarding math ability before the math failure and half were given the stereotype task after the failure feedback. As predicted, women given an opportunity to endorse the negative stereotypes after the math failure showed higher stereotype endorsement and, more importantly, they showed higher self-esteem than women who made these ratings before the math failure. This pattern suggested that the women “ramped up” their stereotype endorsement in response to the failure feedback and that this strategy protected their self-esteem against this threat. In contrast, women who were given the opportunity to rate the stereotypes before the feedback did not know to be strategic and so they were not able to use the stereotypes to excuse their subsequent failure. As a result, they experienced a stronger hit to their self-esteem following the math failure. Importantly, there were no differences in stereotype endorsement or self-esteem ratings for the men in this study as a function of condition. Unlike women, men could not embrace the gender stereotype as a way of deflecting a math failure because the expectations for this group were positive.

In their third study, Burkley and Blanton demonstrated that the tendency for women to embrace gender stereotypes following failure was linked to the self-esteem motive. This study relied on the well-established tendency for people high in trait self-esteem to engage in more self-protective strategies, especially following a self-threat (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Consistent with this view, women high in trait self-esteem showed greater tendencies to increase their endorsement of stereotypes following failure than women low in self-esteem. Interestingly, the pattern also suggested that in the absence of failure feedback, higher self-esteem was associated with less stereotype endorsement; whereas in the presence of failure feedback, higher self-esteem was associated with greater stereotype endorsement. This pattern is

consistent with the chronic versus functional distinction made earlier: Those low in self-esteem appeared to be more accepting of the negative stereotypes than those high, except when such beliefs might function to buffer self-esteem from a temporary stereotypic failing. In those instances, it was the high self-esteem individuals who embraced the stereotypes.

When Beneficial Effects Backfire

Although functional self-stereotyping can be adaptive to the individual, it may come at a cost. We identify two potential costs that can occur when targets use self-stereotypes to fulfill self-motives. First, internalizing negative stereotypes can harm the individual by reducing personal strivings. Second, it can harm society as a whole, by reducing stigmatized individuals' pursuit of social justice.

Reduced Personal Strivings

Although the tendency to embrace negative stereotypes can be beneficial, it can backfire by causing a reduction in pursuing counter-stereotypic goals. For example, if a woman fails a math test and then endorses the stereotype that women are bad at math, this may protect her self-esteem in the moment but decrease her motivation to excel at math in the future. If she truly believes that women have poor math abilities, she will likely see any attempts to improve her math skills as futile. Over the long haul, she may disidentify with the math domain and may distance herself from math-related pursuits entirely.

One basis for making such a prediction can be found in the research on implicit theories of intelligence. A number of studies have shown that whether people view their abilities as fixed versus malleable can affect how they respond to failure. Specifically, those who perceive their skills as nonmalleable (i.e., entity theorists) are more likely to display decreased task motivation and persistence following failure feedback (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995). These reactions in turn lead to impaired performance on subsequent tasks (e.g., Henderson & Dweck, 1990). Conversely, those who perceive their skills as improvable (i.e., incremental theorists) react to failure with increased motivation, task persistence and generation of problem-solving strategies in an attempt to improve their performance on subsequent tasks. When stigmatized targets endorse stereotypes, they are essentially adopting an entity perspective, stating that a particular trait is linked to group membership and therefore unchangeable. Consequently, negative stereotyping will likely produce the same effects that are typically associated with an entity perspective.

As an initial examination of this framework, Burkley (2007) tested whether women who embrace negative stereotypes after failure display decreased motivation and identification with the math domain. In this study, women completed a math test and received failure feedback. Half of the women were given an opportunity to use negative gender stereotypes to excuse the math failure (rated stereotypes after failure) and half were denied this opportunity (rated stereotypes before math test). Next, all the women were informed that they would be taking a second math test at the end of the experimental session, and that before doing so, they would be given an opportunity to complete an optional math tutorial. They were informed that this tutorial included a review of basic math concepts and participants were encouraged to work on the tutorial for as long as they wanted. The amount of time spent on the tutorial was recorded and served as a measure of motivation to improve one's math

skills. After the women worked on the tutorial for as long as they wanted, they completed several questions designed to assess identification and engagement with the math domain. For instance, the women rated how identified they were with the math domain, how much they enjoyed math, and how likely it would be for them to pursue a math major or math career.

The results showed that women who were given the opportunity to embrace the negative stereotypes after failure quit the tutorial earlier than those who were denied this opportunity. This result provided behavioral evidence that the tendency to invoke negative stereotypes as a means of protecting the self from stereotypic failures also reduces efforts to develop counter-stereotypic skills. This result mirrors research on other self-protective strategies, which has demonstrated that students who try to protect the self from academic failures show a decrease in grades, future academic plans, and mastery goal orientation (e.g., Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001; Martin, Marsh, Williamson, & Debus, 2003). This study also found more long-term consequences to this strategy—women who used the stereotypes to protect their self-esteem also stated that they enjoyed math less, were less identified with the math domain, and indicated they would be less likely to pursue a math major or a career in a math-related field, compared to women denied this opportunity.

Reduced Pursuit of Social Change

Negative stereotypes can not only be costly for the people who endorse them; they also can be costly for society. This is because the tendency to endorse negative self-stereotypes can decrease a person's tendency to question social hierarchies and rectify unjust social arrangements. Talented and competent individuals may withdraw from valued pursuits, if their talents and competencies are counter-stereotypic.

System justification theory asserts an explanatory framework that is informative in this regard. Accordingly, negative stereotypes not only reflect existing social arrangements, they decrease justice pursuits (Jost, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994), and this in turn helps them to reproduce. With regards to gender stereotypes more specifically, many have argued that they serve as belief systems that help to rationalize and justify the sexual division of labor (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990). This feature of stereotypes causes them to be perpetuating—targets who endorse legitimizing stereotypes will often select social roles that are consistent with these stereotypic expectations. When stigmatized individuals internalize negative stereotypes, even momentarily, they may be less likely to question the status quo or pursue non-stereotypic roles in the future. As a consequence, status hierarchies can be preserved by the very people who are disadvantaged by them (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Research on social comparisons suggests other ways that the endorsement of negative stereotypes can decrease people's tendencies to challenge unfair systems. The majority of this work has focused on the concept of depressed entitlement among women (e.g., Bylsma & Major, 1994; Crosby, 1982). *Depressed entitlement* refers to women's tendency to be satisfied with lower pay than men. This response seems to occur in part because women assess pay fairness by only comparing their pay to other women (Major, 1987, 1994), and this tendency in turn appears to be driven in part by a tendency to accept status quo arrangements, believing such arrangements are not open to change (Blanton, George, & Crocker, 2001). Although both male and female workers prefer in-group comparisons, women are often the

ones to suffer from this strategy, because historically they are the target of discriminatory practices. When women only compare their outcomes to other women, they are less likely to detect discrimination practices and this in turn reinforces the stability of an unfair system (Bylsma & Major, 1994).

So, even when there are momentary adaptive advantages to embracing negative stereotypes, this tendency can become maladaptive if the individual continues to turn to them as a means of promoting desired impressions. This observation reinforces the earlier argument, that self-stereotyping can act as a strategy that has some short-term benefits to individuals who are combating momentary threats, but this same tendency can undermine individuals if it becomes a stable way of perceiving the self in relation to others. In this way, self-stereotyping is analogous to comfort food—it may alleviate immediate discomfort, but over time, the cumulative effects can be detrimental.²

What about Positive Stereotypes?

Our current discussion focused exclusively on the reasons for and consequences of *negative* stereotype endorsement. The reason for this is that the majority of research and discussions regarding stereotypes focus on their negative facets. Our discussion used the distinction between chronic and functional internalization to shed light on the conditions that help determine when negative stereotypes will lead to negative versus positive consequences. However, it is possible that this distinction could also promote a better understanding regarding positive stereotypes: Positive self-stereotypes are probably endorsed in both chronic and functional ways and they may result in both negative and positive consequences, depending upon the situational circumstances (e.g., see Pickett et al., 2002). We see this possibility as a question deserving of future research attention.

Conclusion

The impact of negative stereotypes is undeniably harmful for the individuals that are targeted by them. Decades of research has demonstrated that endorsement of negative stereotypes can lead to out-group favoritism, reduced self-esteem and in some instances can even result in disease and death. However, emerging research points to contrary situations where negative stereotypes can be of use to those who are targeted by them. Under certain contexts, negative stereotypes can explain current social arrangements, promote in-group social comparisons, fulfill assimilation and differentiation needs, and buffer self-esteem against stereotypic failures. Clearly, a variety of different motives underlies negative stereotype endorsement and therefore it can result in both negative and positive outcomes for the individual. This burgeoning area of research provides a new perspective on a very old topic in social psychology and offers a more complete picture of what it is like to be a stereotype target in modern society.

Notes

1. The term “self-stereotyping” has been operationalized in two ways within the literature. The first definition is based on the notion of prototypicality and can be defined as the tendency to feel similar to the typical group member (e.g., Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). The second definition portrays self-stereotyping as the

- tendency to view stereotypic traits as descriptive of the in-group or the self (e.g., Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002). In this article, we adopt the latter definition.
2. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this analogy.

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