

Gender Stereotypes and Gender Attitudes

Social perception appears to rest on a complicated interplay of social-group related and individual factors: An individual's social-group membership might or might not influence impression formation. Several paradigms have been developed in social cognition in order to tease apart individual and group-related factors. According to traditional gender stereotypes, men in general are assumed to possess more task competence than women, whereas women in general possess more social skills. Social role theory postulates that these stereotypes are rooted in the different frequencies with which men and women are observed in different social roles (women as caregivers, men as breadwinners). However, these social roles are changing. Particularly, more and more women participate in the workforce. Thus, the stereotypic male-competence association should be decreasing, whereas the women-warmth association might persist. We introduce one series of studies where the role of these gender stereotypes for the ascription of task competence and social skills to individual males and females was investigated. A second series of studies tested implicit associations of competence and warmth with men and women in general, using diverse samples and different implicit measures. In line with changing social roles, little evidence of differences in competence associations was found, whereas women-warmth associations seem to persist. This might be one basis for the general preference for women that is alluded to in the "women are wonderful" effect. Taken together, our findings suggest that gender stereotypes do not threaten competence judgments of women, but that men might need to show more evidence of their social skills than women.