Three types of conceptual approaches will contribute to the present consideration of sex role stereotypes, providing its theoretical background. The first is Tajfel’s theory of the content of social stereotypes (Tajfel 1981: chapter 7), which constitutes the general framework of the present chapter. The second consists of a number of recent developments in attribution theory, which can be grouped under the common heading of social attribution, to use Deschamps’ expression (Apfelbaum & Herzlich 1970–1; Deschamps 1974; Hewstone & Jaspar 1982; see also this book, Chapter 19). Finally, the theory of social identity as it relates to the problem of intergroup differentiation will be considered (Tajfel 1972, 1974, 1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner 1979; Turner 1975). These last two approaches serve to elaborate some of the aspects of the theory of social stereotypes.

It is possible to focus upon some common aspects in the three approaches. In the first place, they all represent an attempt to consider certain psychosocial processes within their social context. That is, they can be described as being a part of the general orientation of social psychology in Europe (Moscovici 1972; Stroeb 1979; Tajfel 1981) towards the consideration of psychosocial processes, not as if they occurred in a ‘social vacuum’, in which no differentiations exist between the elements (individuals) that constitute it, but taking into account social differentials in terms of status, power, roles, group membership, etc. They also emphasize the ways in which these social differentiations influence the processes under consideration. This approach has two types of consequence. First, whenever the analysis involves group level phenomena the aim is to develop constructs which are appropriate to that level, instead of extrapolating the use of concepts adequate to analysis of inter-individual processes. Second, and this refers mainly to the study of

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1 This chapter was written with the support of a British Council Fellowship. I am grateful to Alma Foster for help in translating it into English.
stereotypes and of attribution, the approaches considered here try to overcome the limits of a definition of the problem in exclusively cognitive terms.

The selection of these three 'social approaches, and in particular Tajfel's view of stereotypes, as the theoretical framework for the study of sex role stereotypes, reflects the need to consider this problem from a psychosocial perspective. This has also been pointed out by Fransella & Frost (1977) who, after reviewing the research in the area, advocate a change in orientation. According to their view, the main problem is not the fact that most of the evidence comes from USA college samples, as this could be solved by enlarging their representativeness, but rather that 'the research so far tells us almost nothing about why a particular social group sees the personality of women and men in its own particular way. We need to understand better the relationship between the roles expected of women in a given society and the way these are seen by people as themselves and others' (p. 53). In other words, what we need to know more about is the social and psychological meaning of sex role stereotypes. Tajfel's approach to the problem, with its particular emphasis on the social functions of stereotypes, seems to provide an adequate framework within which an attempt can be made to undertake this task.

The present work consists of a brief overview of the implications that the three social approaches outlined above have for the study of sex role stereotyping. To this end, research on sex role stereotypes, relevant to each of these approaches, will be reviewed. This implies a selection, in each of the following three sections, of the research material, and does not constitute an attempt to cover the entire field. The fourth section will summarize the conclusions of this selective review, which may serve as guidelines for future research in this area.

1. Social stereotypes and sex role stereotypes

1.1. Sex role stereotypes. It is not intended to provide here an extensive review of the work in this area, but to present a selection of the research which might contribute to a clarification of the functions that sex role stereotypes have for groups and individuals. This goal implies not only the exclusion of certain studies but the inclusion of others, which may not refer strictly to sex role stereotypes but which are relevant for purposes of clarification.

1.1.1. The descriptive approach to sex role stereotypes. Sex role stereotypes have been defined as 'consensual beliefs about the differing characteristics of men and women' (Broverman et al. 1972: 64). The main contribution of the research in this area has consisted of: (a) the description of the content of mutual sex role stereotypes; (b) information about the relative value that the traits usually attributed to either sex possess; in other words, to what extent each stereotyped image is more or less valued in its social context; (c) knowledge about the degree to which these sex role stereotypes are accepted by both sexes, and are part of the individual's self-concept; and (d) some evidence in relation to changes in the context of these stereotypes.

In relation to the content, there is, in general, a consensus about what traits are usually attributed to men and women, constituting differentiated images of both sexes. From the numerous studies in the area (see for reviews, Broverman et al. 1972; Fransella & Frost 1977; Rosenkrantz et al. 1968; Sayers 1979), we will select some of the earlier and some of the most recent work.

Among the earlier studies, that of McKee & Sherriff (1957) can be used as an example. Using check-list techniques and open-ended questions, they obtained differentiated images of both sexes. The masculine image contained traits that were categorized in three groups: the first was related to physical strength, the second to competence and rational ability, and the third to action, vigour and effectiveness. The negative aspects tended to be an exaggeration of these virtues. The traits attributed to women had to do with social skills, warmth and emotional support. As a counterpart, the defects related to excess of formalism, submission and unreasonable emotionality. McKee & Sherriff also found that there were significant differences in terms of the proportions of favourable traits attributed to either sex — to the advantage of the males. They point to the fact that women tend to use their sex stereotype more in their own self-descriptions than men do, although they show a greater degree of agreement in relation to what constitutes the male stereotype than women do about the female stereotype.

Of the more recent studies, we will refer to those conducted by Rosenkrantz et al. (1968) and Broverman et al. (1972). The conclusions drawn by the investigators were as follows (Broverman et al. 1972: 61):

1. There exists a strong consensus about the different characteristics of men and women.

2. There is a tendency to ascribe more positively valued characteristics to men than to women; positive masculine characteristics form a cluster of traits which are related to competence, rationality and assertiveness; the positive feminine characteristics centre around the dimension of warmth and expressiveness.

3. Stereotypes are accepted as a part of the self-concept, and the differences between the images of both sexes are considered desirable.

4. Individual differences in sex role concepts can be related to behaviour relevant to sex roles and to some antecedent conditions (e.g. maternal employment).
The consistent finding that the male stereotype is more positively valued has been questioned by Williams & Best (1977), who did not find differences in terms of the favourability of the male stereotype as opposed to the female stereotype.

Other investigators, such as Friedland, Crockett & Laird (1971), have questioned the assumption that sex roles are the only factors determining the attribution of instrumental traits to men and expressive traits to women. They point to the fact that in the inferential process each sex possibly tends to be associated with a social role, either instrumental or expressive, and this, in turn, will determine the ascription of the trait to one sex or another. Their argument can be summarized in the statement (p. 274): 'biological sex is specifically important as a cue to personality characteristics because sex and occupancy of social roles are inextricably intertwined'. This work points to the possibility that social roles mediate in the attributions of traits to the two sexes. This will be discussed later.

1.2. 1. Critique of the descriptive approach. It is not intended here to deal with the methodological problems present in the studies within this approach; these have been pointed out by Sayers (1979) and others. Rather, the emphasis will be on the limited contributions to the understanding of the meaning of sex role stereotyping in a given social context. We know which are the consensually agreed dimensions which tend to differentiate the perceptions of both sexes. We may speculate about the meaning of the accentuation of differences (Tajfel 1981) in these dimensions in particular. When we consider mutual stereotypes held by other groups differing in status within a permissive, achieving society, the coincidence between the dimensions which differentiate these images and those found in the area of sex role stereotypes is quite clear: in many of the studies, referring to groups of different status in societies that profess liberal values and allow frequent interpersonal contacts between the groups (Cheyne 1970; Lambert, Frankel & Tucker 1966; Mann & Taylor 1971), we find that the higher status groups tend to be characterized in terms of competence and economic success, and the lower status group in terms of the dimension of warmth, 'good-heartedness', humanitarianism (see Chapter 26). Thus, there is a parallel here with the dimensions that differentiate the perceptions of the two sexes. One could speculate that to reinforce this image of the lower status group works in favour of the higher status group in maintaining the latter's privileged position. The lower status group in turn will receive, as compensation for not achieving the power positions, a 'human' self-image which will contribute to self-esteem. The coincidence between the mutual stereotypes of different status groups lends support to Tajfel's (1981) idea of the relative lack of variety in the content of stereotypes held about minority groups.

Some authors include timid references to the social context, but these tend to be in the form of a posteriori interpretations of their findings. Huang ignored by Farnam & Frost (1977), who found a greater differentiation of sex role stereotyping in China as compared to the USA, interprets this result in terms of the predominance of the extended family in China. This kind of institution has been associated with greater sex differentiation than is the case in Western societies, where the nuclear family is predominant. The reason for this is that in the extended family more members of one sex are available to undertake a role assigned to one sex, with the consequence of less role interchange between the sexes (Barry, Bacon & Child 1977).

In general, there is no attempt to make predictions about the influence on sex role stereotypes of factors such as the dominant ideologies in particular social systems, the specific roles played by men and women in them, about the effects of other social differentials that shape the relationship between the sexes, or about the functions that they serve for specific social groups.

1.2. The individual functions of sex role stereotypes. Aiming to go a bit further than the descriptive studies in the understanding of sex role stereotypes, we shall attempt here the analysis of their functions, starting with the individual ones (cf. Tajfel 1981). We shall consider the evidence resulting from research that compares the evaluation of female and male performance on tasks, and, in particular, that concerning the valuation of effeminate women in comparison to men. If, as it appears from the findings of the descriptive studies, traits that differentiate the stereotyped images of males from those of females cluster around the dimension of competence, one might expect stereotypes to have an effect when relative competence of either sex is being judged.

In addition, high performance by a competent woman may be considered as an example of disconfirmation of a valued categorization, and this for two reasons. First, in some of the studies the value connotations of the male-female categorization is made explicit when information is provided about the attitudes towards women of the subjects making the judgments (e.g. Hagen & Kahn 1975; Spence & Helmreich 1972; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp 1975). One would expect that for those with more traditional attitudes, the male-female categorization would be endowed with greater value connotations than for 'liberal' subjects; thus, greater effects of categorization should appear in the judgments of the former (Tajfel 1981: chapter 4).

Second, if for most subjects sex categorization itself is correlated with
competence, and as this dimension has positive connotations, the categorization itself acquires a positive value. This, in turn, may be reflected when examples which question the adequacy of the categorization are being presented, particularly when judgments are being made in other dimensions, such as liking, which correlate with competence. The argument can be made that, if the disconfirmation had to 0 with another stereotypic dimension less valued than competence, weaker effects of sex categorization should be expected.

One of the most frequently cited studies in the search for evaluation of males and females is that of Goldberg (1968). He found that female college students tended to evaluate pieces of work (scientific articles) more highly when the author was a male than when she was a female. Pheterson (1969) with a sample of housewives and Mischel (1974) with Israeli subjects, failed to replicate these results. The latter interpreted her results in terms of the existence of greater equality between the sexes in Israeli society. Pheterson, Kiesler & Goldberg (1971), in a study with female college students, compared the evaluations of paintings when a male or a female was presented as the artist. In one of the experimental conditions the paintings were presented as just entries in a show, while in another they appeared as prize winners. Male artists were over-evaluated only in the first condition, while there was no difference between the evaluation of male and female artists in the prize-winning condition. They interpreted their results as indicating that expectancies in agreement with the stereotype tend to affect the evaluations, unless very clear evidence (the award of a prize) exists in the opposite direction. As Deaux (1976b) points out, when information is more ambiguous - such as the relative quality of a painting - the individual's judgment is guided by the prevailing stereotype, while this effect is cancelled when more precise information is available. This shows the greater efficacy of categorization in relation to ambiguous information (Tajfel 1981: chapter 5). An explanation along the same lines has been suggested by Pheterson, Kiesler & Goldberg (1971) to account for the different results obtained by Goldberg (1968) and Pheterson (1969).

In two studies by Taynor & Deaux (1973, 1975) it was found that when a woman did a masculine task (contributing to detaining a delinquent) in a competent way, and this competence was acknowledged by the authorities, she was rated as more deserving of credit than the man. More effort was attributed to her than to the man, and in one of the situations (Taynor & Deaux 1973) her performance was more highly rated. The results were interpreted, according to equity theory, as indicating that the fact of being a woman constituted a non-voluntary constraint. This would make her more deserving of credit in comparison with a subject who did not have such a constraint.

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Shaffer & Wegley (1974) obtained partial support for their hypothesis that competent women would be considered attractive to the extent that they maintained preferences for feminine roles and were not very motivated to compete for success. Hagen & Kahn (1975) tried to determine the effects on the evaluation of a competent male or female of three types of situations: two of them involved interaction (competition and cooperation) while the third consisted of the mere observation of the individual. The subjects were divided according to their attitudes towards women. As in other research reported, there was a strong effect of competence. Men showed preference for competent women only in the observation condition. The dependent measures included liking, degree in which the individual was appointed for leadership, and discrimination towards the individual. This last aspect consisted in the degree to which subjects tended to exclude the individual from their group. Both men and women tended to exclude competent men more than competent women only in the competition condition. In that same condition they appointed incompetent women as leaders. "Liberal" men tended to exclude the competent woman less, and to appoint them as leaders, although they did not appear to like them. The authors interpret their results in line with the assumptions presented at the beginning of this section. According to them, competence in women disconfirms expectations. There are several ways to react to that disconfirmation: to punish the person, to devalue her performance or to change the stereotype. In the present case, punishment appears to be the preferred alternative in the case of competition. For the traditional men who tend to exclude more the competent women, losing against a woman involves a loss of self-esteem. This is related to the belief of male superiority and, as a consequence, to the need to outperform the women. The implication is that ethnocentrism, produced by the sex classification, will only appear when there is a joint threat to the individuals' value system (related to beliefs about the structure of relationships of men and women in general) and to their self-esteem, to the extent that this is linked to that value system. This interpretation is tentative, especially in view of the partial presentation of data by the authors. Nevertheless, it suggests a way of explaining some of the subtle forms of manifestation of prejudice against women, which only appear clearly in a limited range of situations. If a focus in the structure of relationships of both social categories is that of males' relative superiority, the disconfirming instance will consist not so much in that a woman appears as competent in a masculine domain, but in that she outperforms the male. One could link this interpretation to an aspect pointed out by O'Leary (1974) in a related area. She refers to the existence in the American culture of a norm against women having authority over men of the same age and social class.
The results of research reviewed in this section seem to indicate that the effect of sexual categorization is more powerful when dealing with ambiguous information, as in those cases when the criterion for competence is not explicit. When there is objective evidence of competence, there is nevertheless a tendency to over-evaluate male performance. The existing evidence provides, on the whole, relative support for the hypothesis that when a social categorization is endowed with value - through its association with the valued attribute of competence - disconfirmatory instances tend to be discounted.

The partial character of the evidence obtained points to the need to continue research in this area. An interesting question which remains to be answered is what constitutes a disconfirming instance in the domain of intersex relationship: competence of women in a masculine area, or the fact that women outperform men? Hagen & Kahn's (1975) results point in the latter direction.

1.5. The social functions of sex role stereotypes. In this section the social functions served by sex role stereotypes will be discussed. One should bear in mind that the evidence presented is rather fragmentary and that this analysis represents, at best, an attempt to show a posteriori the link between sex role stereotypes and the functions of justification, explanation of social causality, and intergroup differentiation (Tajfel 1981).

The special characteristics of the relationship between the sexes makes it difficult to find instances of open conflict which leads to a 'diffusion of hostile and derogatory images' of all the members of either sex category. It is possible, however, to find situations in which those images have been used against certain subgroups within the category.

We shall first refer to the function of justification, to the extent that it can be separated from the other two functions, which will be considered later, together with the other two theoretical approaches: that of social attribution and that of intergroup differentiation.

1.5.1. The justification function of sex role stereotypes. There are two areas which might be considered: justification of the persistence of discrimination between the sexes, and justification of specific actions committed against members of the outgroup by members of the dominant group, in this case men.

With reference to the first aspect, one can include some contributions by authors linked to the feminist movement, who draw attention to the patterns of justification in sex discrimination. Ben & Ben (1970) analysed the influence of what they call the 'nonconscious ideology' about the 'natural' role of women, on the 'subtle practices aimed at keeping her at her place'. Their analysis refers to a population, American college students of the 1960s, that appeared to be in favour of equality and that placed a great value on the development of the individual. Nonconscious ideology is defined 'as a set of beliefs that are implicitly accepted but maintained out of consciousness, because alternative conceptions of the world continue to be unimaginable' (p. 91). This ideology exists in contradiction to some of the values of this population, which are described in the following way: 'the major prescription for this college generation is that each individual should be encouraged to discover and fulfill his own unique potentials and identity unfiltered by society's presumptions' (p. 91).

At the basis of this prescription is the belief in equality. The co-existence of a nonconscious ideology about 'woman's natural role' and the value of interpersonal equality leads to special forms of justification. This consists in viewing the differences between the sexes as corresponding to two equal but complementary positions. As a consequence, inequalities and discriminatory practices are subtly concealed.

One interesting conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is the link between the subtle nature of justifications and the liberal characteristics of those who maintain them. This can be related to Tajfel's idea (1978) that the more a superior status group considers status differences relative to another group as illegitimate and in conflict with its values, the more inclined will be to create justificatory ideologies.

O'Leary (1974) has pointed to the relationship between sex role stereotypes and the justification of obstacles to women's promotion in industry, which she refers to as 'the myth concerning competence and commitment' in work. There are beliefs which are widely held, without supporting evidence, by those in charge of promotion within organizations, about women's attitudes towards work: for example, that they only work for 'pin' money, so they are worse candidates for promotion; that they are basically concerned with the socio-emotional aspects of their jobs, while there is evidence that women consider the competence of their supervisor as a much more important factor than the opportunity to make friends at work. Other unsubstantiated beliefs were that women had greater satisfaction in jobs that would not involve intellectual demands and that they valued self-actualization and promotion less than men.

The link between these justifications and the content of sex role stereotypes is quite clear. Central to these beliefs was the attribution to women of a lack of traits associated with the competence dimension (independence, competitiveness, ambition, logic) and the emphasis on needs related to the warmth.
and expressiveness dimensions. It seems that sex role stereotypes provide the basis to justify the fact that power positions in industrial organizations are reserved for men.

Sex stereotyping may also be related to the justification of specific actions against women. The evidence for this comes from various sources. In a study by Hunter (1976) on different images of women through history, the author makes an interesting suggestion. According to her, the vision of women as a source of evil, related to certain aspects of Christian tradition present in the early church fathers' writings about sexuality, could have been the basis for the witch persecution that took place in the Middle Ages. Although initially both men and women were accused of sorcery, later it became a feminine crime. The word 'witch' was identified with the feminine gender. According to Hunter:

The chief cause of identification of witches and women was the character of their accusers. The inquisitors were celibate clerics who had been taught that women were mentally and morally inferior and insatiably carnal. The inherent evilness of woman made her the perfect tool for the devil. (p. 11)

The explanation might be seen as an oversimplification of a complex phenomenon. The problem still remains as to why these actions were widely adopted by large numbers of people. Nevertheless, it is an attempt to explain the link between an action which was progressively directed against members of a social category, and the image of them held by a group endowed with great power and status within a society.

The justification of actions against members of the outgroup can also be exemplified within the context of sex stereotyping, by a series of studies on attitudes related to rape. There are two types of studies. The first tries to relate certain social representations about rape to attitudes and characteristics of the population, or specific groups. The second concerns attributions about the responsibility of the rape victims.

In the first group, there are two correlational studies which centre around the myths about rape. These myths discussed by Brownmiller (1975), consist of beliefs that 'all women wish to be raped', 'rapists are sex-starved or insane or both', 'women ask for it', etc. (cf. Burt 1980).

Feild (1978) studied the relationship between attitudes towards rape (in connection with these myths) and certain characteristics of the population (age, sex, race and educational level), attitudes towards women, degree of contact with victims and rapists, and knowledge of the problem. There were four groups of subjects: members of a community, police, rapists and counsellors. Sex of the subjects was one of the factors which predicted attitudes towards rape. Males in the general population group, and in the police, attributed more responsibility to women in the precipitation of rape. Secondly, attitudes towards women were related to six of the dimensions found in the analysis of attitudes towards rape. Feild points out that 'the magnitude and direction of the correlations support the contention that people who view women in traditional roles are likely to see rape as being a woman's fault, motivated by a need of sex, where punishment for rape should be harsh since the property is now used, and because of the act a raped woman is a less attractive individual' (p. 172). In opposition to it, more liberal attitudes towards women were related to a view of rape as caused by a power motivation and which did not involve a loss of attractiveness of the victim. Less expected was the finding that the views of the subjects from the general population and that of the police were more similar to the views of the rapists than to those of the counsellors. This latter group was constituted entirely of women with feminist attitudes. Feild, in the interpretation of his results, refers to Brownmiller's view that in general society have a more favourable ideology towards rape than women, and that police often share this stereotyped view prevailing in the masculine culture.

The second group of studies refers to attributions of responsibility to rape victims. Most of them can be included within the frame of reference of equity theory and more specifically of the 'just world' belief hypothesis (Lerner 1977, 1980). According to this, individuals tend to think that people get what they deserve, as a function of their personal characteristics of goodness or badness, and as a consequence of their behaviour. This belief leads to 'a process of victimization, which consists of assuming that a person who suffers some sort of bad experience deserves it. This serves to maintain the 'just world' belief.

But several studies (e.g. Calhoun, Selby & Warring 1976; Kanckar & Kobsawalla 1980; Smith et al 1976) indicate some limitations of the 'just world' hypothesis: when relevant social information about the victim is available, the patterns of attribution do not conform to the just world hypothesis, but seem to be guided more by that information. Secondly, they point to sex differences in the degree and the patterns of attribution of responsibility.

On the whole, the studies concerning rape indicate that to a certain extent the justification of an action against a member of a social category is not an individual question but that prevailing stereotypes provide a ready-made cultural justification for it. The use of them seems to depend on the category membership of the subjects making the judgment. This interpretation must be related to a critique of equity theory presented in Chapter 13 of this book (see also Tafel 1982).
2. Social attribution and sex role stereotypes

2.1. Sex role stereotypes and the function of explanation. There are two possible ways to approach the function of explanation fulfilled by sex role stereotypes. One of them is to establish a connection between certain images of men and women prevailing in society and the attribution to one of the sexes of some social event. The second has to do with the effect of sex categorization on attributions concerning members of sex categories. Most of the empirical evidence concerns this latter aspect.

As to the first aspect, Hunter (1976), in her analysis of women's image throughout history, points to a fact that might be relevant to the present discussion. Referring to the image of inferiority of women prevailing in the classical world, she stresses the fact that in Rome, in Imperial times, women achieved a high degree of emancipation. This, however, produced a strongly reaction which led to a distorted view of the process, and in consequence to the belief that it was the cause of a series of social ills, among them the decline of morals, the destruction of the family, and even the decadence of the Empire. This suggests a possible relevance to present-day studies of social representations concerning women's liberation, to determine what causal links tend to be established in people's minds in relation to it, what factors caused them, and what are their consequences. Women's liberation as a complex social event requiring explanation, or as the origin of a causal chain, might have particular interest as a subject for examination, particularly in societies which have undergone rapid social change while highly stereotyped views about women are still widely shared by different social groups.

In a study of the change of the image of the career woman in the USA, Helson (1972) points to different interpretations of research on career women in different periods, according to societal trends favourable to the work of women or opposed to it. One special area which appears to have been affected by the changing interpretations is that of the effect of maternal employment on the behaviour of children.

In a review of research on the influence of sex role stereotypes on attributions, Deaux (1976a) presents a theoretical model deriving from attribution theory which may serve to integrate the findings. She tries to relate two types of contributions: on the one hand some developments of attribution theory resulting from the work of Weiner and colleagues (Weiner 1974; Weiner et al. 1971) and, on the other, results of research on sex role stereotypes.

According to Deaux (1976a), when trying to explain an actor's performance (e.g. success or failure), the pattern of attribution will be determined by previous expectations of the observer. Expected behaviour will be attributed
to stable causes and unexpected performance to unstable causes. Previous expectations concerning male and female actors will be determined, in turn, by the prevailing stereotypes and, in particular, by expected competence, a trait which is central in the stereotype of males. Deaux presents evidence from a number of studies (Feather & Simon 1974; Feldman-Summers & Kiesler 1974) which, in general, lend support to her model. Good performance by a male actor is attributed relatively more to ability (stable cause), while good performance by a female actor is attributed relatively more to effort or to other unstable causes (e.g. luck).

2.2. Comments on the research on attribution and sex categorization. Several authors (Sax, Greenberg & Bar-Tal 1974) have raised objections to the classification of causes in terms of stability. They stress the point that effort attributions may also refer to a trait linked to motivation, and may appear as stable as attributions of ability for the subject who makes the attributions.

In relation to this, there is the problem of the meaning and value accorded by subjects to the alternative causes used to explain behaviour. Kiesler (1975) argues that with the existing evidence it is not possible to determine whether the success of women in the real world is more negatively viewed than that of men. She bases her argument on the fact that ability may have various connotations when applied to men and women, and that there is no clear evidence as to whether it refers to intelligence or to skill. On the other hand, she points out that attributions of effort may also have a very connotation. When effort is viewed as the product of a need for achievement, and when a high performance in a task appears as the result of overcoming a series of barriers to achieving an end, then to attribute behaviour to effort is something positive. A later study by Nicholls (1975) may help to reduce the ambiguity over the interpretation of effort attributions. His starting-point was the evidence put forward by Weiner that when an actor attributes his/her performance to effort, this has stronger affective reactions than attributions of ability. Subjects tend to feel more responsible for the effort exerted, and this in turn generates feelings of pride when success accompanies effort, or of shame when lack of effort is the cause of failure. Nicholls found support for this, but only in the case of attributions concerning performance in specific tasks. When subjects were asked to think in general about their performance in the future, they preferred high ability to high effort, and they would rather be considered highly able than highly motivated. Although Nicholls's study refers to self-attribution, it may clarify the meaning of attributing the performance of an actor to effort. Later we will discuss some of the implications of this finding.

A second limitation of the studies is the lack of information about the
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create a link between theory and research and the formulation of a number of hypotheses which directly apply to the dynamics of group differentiation in society. At the same time, it provides a general theoretical framework for the examination of stereotypes in specific social contexts, which allows for predictions about the direction of change in their content.

In my opinion three sets of ideas have been crucial to this development: (a) the notion of the intergroup–interpersonal continuum and the associated structure of beliefs; (b) the concept of inadequate social identity and the consequences of it; and (c) the concept of insecure and secure social identity. These three contributions by Tajfel (1974, 1981) and Turner (1975, 1981) have provided the main conceptual framework from which specific hypotheses about intergroup differentiation in a given social context can be formulated.

An analysis by Williams & Giles (1978) on the status of women in society constitutes the first systematic attempt to view the relationship between the sexes from an intergroup perspective. Using the social identity–intergroup differentiation framework, they consider the problems arising from women's inadequate social identity, and the different strategies used by women in society to overcome these problems. What I intend to do here, in adopting a similar perspective, is to reconsider some of the evidence reported in the previous sections, in order to determine to what extent sex role stereotypes serve the function of intergroup differentiation.

One prior problem which needs to be confronted is to what extent the sexes can be considered as groups. Other authors (e.g., Hacker 1954, Williams & Giles 1978) have referred to it. Some of the arguments could be summarized, in a very general way, by pointing out that members of these two social categories tend to interact largely at the interpersonal end of the intergroup–interpersonal continuum (see Tajfel 1981). Yet the presence of status and power differences between men and women in society, the consensus on defined differences in perceptions of other sex, and the pervasiveness of sex discrimination as reported in different sources (Collins 1973; Fidell 1970; Hochschild 1973), although they may appear in disguised forms, as 'quasi-equality' (Holter 1971), 'nonconscious ideology' (Bern & Bern 1970), or other subtle forms, as pointed out by Williams & Giles (1978), may yet be considered as possible causes (in the case of status and power) or indicators (as in the case of stereotypes and discrimination) that the behavior between the sexes can also sometimes be located near to the intergroup end of the continuum.

Nevertheless, a definition of social group seems to be required in order to decide about the adequacy of adopting an intergroup perspective. Tajfel's definition of a social group (1978) includes two sets of criteria, which he characterizes as external and internal. As external criteria he refers to outside
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It should also be pointed out that there is evidence that men's evaluation has more impact on women's self-esteem than evaluations given by other women (Dion 1975). This would constitute another indication of the way the dominant group exerts an influence on women's views of themselves.

As only few studies have been done within this perspective (Deschamps & Doise 1978; Doise & Weinberger 1972–3). I shall also attempt to interpret in this sense the evidence reported previously in the areas of evaluation of male and female performance and competence, and in that of attraction. One should bear in mind, however, that since in those studies no attempts were made to produce intergroup effects by making group membership salient, these interpretations are, at best, tentative.

The Doise & Weinberger study (1972–3) is of interest because it provides evidence of changes in the degree of sex stereotyping when interaction between the sexes occurs, either at the interpersonal or the intergroup end of the continuum. The results indicated that while in the individual encounter there was a reduction of differences between the images of both sexes and a tendency to value the female image, the reverse effect was obtained when the males anticipated a collective encounter.

The study of Deschamps & Doise (1978) was aimed primarily at comparing the intergroup effects on mutual stereotypes of boys and girls, using a simple categorization (division by sex) or crossed categorization (division by sex, plus division by an experimentally induced category). In the simple categorization condition both groups tended to show ingroup bias, attributing more positive traits to the ingroup and more negative traits to the outgroup. This tendency was more marked in boys than in girls. The latter showed a tendency to attribute more positive traits and fewer negative traits to boys than they received from them. These results are interpreted as reflecting the 'sociological asymmetry' of the two groups.

As for the evidence provided by research outside the intergroup framework, we will concentrate on the interpretation of results in the areas of evaluation and attribution. It seems that, in general, women share with men the tendency to over-evaluate males' performance. This might be interpreted as an indication of the tendency for women to accept the dominant view of male superiority in the competence dimension. As, in general, no information is provided about the degree of identification with their sex category, one may only speculate that they lacked awareness of group membership as women and that there was an implicit acceptance of the existing status quo.

A third point refers to the ambivalence of 'liberal' men towards competent women. It has already been mentioned that perhaps in this group, which might consider differences in career opportunities for men and women as
on expectations, I am more inclined to think that maintenance of intergroup differences also plays an important role. One could speculate that the women managers in Deaux's study might be engaged in an individualistic strategy to achieve positive social identity, that of social mobility (Tajfel 1974), while still accepting the differences and the superiority of the dominant group. This interpretation is merely tentative, as we lack information about how these men and women would explain the success of the other sex group. It remains true, however, that women do not 'dare' to make ability attributions when these would be fully justified. This could be taken as an indirect and implicit acceptance of the status quo of intergroup differences.

The next point to be stressed is the different results obtained in these studies, depending on the population used. In the Feather & Simon (1975) study, in which a greater attributional bias against women was found, the population could be described as having a view of the status differences between men and women as stable and legitimate (Tajfel 1981). The indirect information gathered by the authors led to their conclusion that this particular group may have had fairly well-defined and traditional concepts of their sex role in which their valued achievement was being a good wife and a mother supported by a husband in a financially secure occupation of relatively high status' (p. 311). Thus, these subjects could be described as engaging in yet another form of the social mobility strategy, characterized elsewhere as the 'two-person career' (Papanek 1974).

The more 'sexocentric' attributions of the female subjects in the Johnson-Summers & Kiesler (1974) study were interpreted by them as due to the influence of the women's liberation movement. As was mentioned earlier, all these interpretations remain speculative, but they serve to point us in the need to adopt an intergroup perspective, which might allow predictions to be made concerning the direction of the attributional bias.

4. Conclusions

In this section suggestions will be made about possible lines of research on sex role stereotypes. The position adopted here, following Tajfel's views (1981), is that of giving priority to the study of the social functions of sex role stereotypes and, in particular, to that of intergroup differentiation. Its integrative character has already been mentioned, also the fact that the other functions can be seen as serving to preserve a positive group distinctiveness. We will attempt to outline some specific aspects which might be studied.

First, more research is needed to determine how sex role stereotypes serve the function of intergroup differentiation. One area open to further
development is the study of changes in the content of sex role stereotypes as a result of making membership in sex categories salient. Such studies should be conducted within specific social systems. On the other hand, to make predictions about the direction of change in the content of stereotypes, one must determine the degree of identification with the sex group of the individual member. This refers not only to self-stereotyping but also to the level of group belongingness achieved.

One related problem to be examined is what factors determine the selection of certain dimensions for comparison in which sex groups choose to accentuate their differences, once the category membership is made salient. We do not share Williams’ (1980) view that women’s groups do not define their relationship to other groups in social comparison terms. Rather, we think that they might choose different sets of dimensions for comparison. The problem of why certain dimensions are selected has also been pointed out in the more general area of mutual stereotyping by different status groups (van Knippenberg, 1978). The results obtained by this author indicate that such groups, in conditions of increased salience of group membership, tend to accentuate their differences in a dimension which appears to be central and of greatest value to their social identity. Van Knippenberg found that the higher status groups acknowledged the superiority of the lower status groups in some dimensions which would not threaten their position of privilege, while retaining their superiority in a restricted area, which happens to have superior value connotations in the wider social context (see Chapter 27). We suggest that parallel studies should be conducted in the area of sex role stereotypes to determine whether similar patterns appear. Further developments could include the study of sex stereotypes of groups of men and women within a specific social system, differing from each other in status (e.g., in a hospital, mutual stereotypes of male and female doctors and nurses).

Another possible area of enquiry would be the comparison of the content and degree of sex role stereotyping in social systems which differ from each other in terms of predominance of the social change–social mobility structure of beliefs concerning women.

Problems of inadequate social identity in women, and their influence in sex role stereotypes, could be considered by studying women’s groups, defined in terms of the different strategies (group or individualistic) chosen to solve their inadequate social identity, and how these are reflected in their stereotypes of men and women, and in their patterns of attribution when confronted with anti-stereotypic behaviour. One could predict, for example, that those using group strategies would show more ingroup bias reflected in stereotypes and attributions.

A second area of research would consist of approaching other social functions of sex role stereotypes as ways of preserving positive group distinctiveness. This would involve the study of changes in patterns of justifications and attributions in conditions of increased group salience of membership in sex categories. One way to consider the justificatory nature of sex role stereotypes would be to compare their content in conditions in which sex discrimination has taken place with those in which it has not.

It has already been pointed out that patterns of attribution appear as particularly sensitive to the subtlety of sex discrimination. The review of research in this area suggests several observations, some of them of a practical nature. We need more open-ended techniques to determine the meaning of these patterns, to give different causal attributions, particularly their evaluative component for the subjects who make them. This evaluative aspect may be the most important in this context, for example, when subjects are faced with having to explain anti-stereotypic behaviour by a member of the outgroup; the value connotation of the attribution may be more relevant than its internal or external character.

In addition to this, some attempts should be made to widen the scope of Deaux’s model. We believe that attributions are based on expectations which are not neutral. That is, there is something more to preserve than the mere predictability of the social environment, when subjects are making attributions about the behaviour of members of the opposite sex: this is the preservation of the existing relationships between the sex categories, which guarantees a privileged position for males in certain areas. If we study attributions concerning women’s success in tasks not frequently undertaken by them, we might vary the status dimension of the task in order to detect the effects on attributions. One could predict that the higher the status and value accorded to a task by a particular male group, and the more central to their positive distinctiveness is their competence in that task, the more likely it is that success by women might be perceived as a threat. This perceived threat would, therefore, involve attributions aiming to devalue female success. This example constitutes only one particular instance of a more general and interesting problem: what attributions are being made when the behaviour of members of a sex category involves a threat to the existing structure of relationships between the sexes in a particular social context?
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