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Chapter 12

The Consensualization of Stereotypes in Small Groups

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During the months leading to the genocide of the Tutsi population in Rwanda, between April and June 1994, one of the strategies carried out by the Extremist Hutu government involved relying on one of the national radio channels (The *Radio des Milles Collines*), to instigate negative stereotypes of the Tutsis in order to justify their later destruction. Propaganda typically described Tutsis as "cockroaches," "snakes," or as secret agents of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), made of exiled Tutsis, which attempted to conquer the country. Given that most Rwandese citizens own a radio, this medium enabled the government to reach the whole population. Several analysts and observers (Braeckman, 1994; Dallaire & Beardsley, 2003; Franche, 2004; Hatzfeld, 2000) suggested that this strategy instigated in the Hutu population a shared sense of the necessity to destroy the out-group and of the legitimacy of such a project. If this factor alone does not explain the genocide, it appears to have played a significant role in its occurrence.

This example illustrates how intragroup social influence can lead to the formation and diffusion of shared stereotypes that eventually contributed to one of the most gruesome instances of collective mobilization in the 20th century. Although the Rwandese example is extreme and does not reflect the [AQ1]

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ordinary effects of stereotype consensus, it shows that the emergence of such consensus is an intriguing phenomenon that can have profound, even if usually more benign, consequences on intra- and intergroup processes (Stangor & Schaller, 1996).

Obviously, the expansion of negative stereotypes of the Tutsis in the early 1990s was to a great extent the outcome of intergroup phenomena and more specifically, of the Civil War with the RPF. Social psychology has extensively studied the influence of the intergroup context on stereotypes and stereotyping (see e.g., Alexander, Brewer, & Hermann, 1999; Alexander, Brewer, & Livingston, 2005; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1998; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Poppe, 1999). Nevertheless, to be shared within a group, the interpretations of these phenomena, and the stereotypes underlying these interpretations, had to be disseminated and communicated. This "intragroup dimension" has received much less research attention. The processes through which stereotype consensus unfolds within small groups and affects intra-group dynamics, will precisely be the focus of this chapter. [AQ2]

To address this issue, we shall first consider a conceptual issue: Should we define stereotypes as consensual? Then, we shall reflect on several strategies available for examining the emergence of stereotype consensus, and its inevitable counterpart, stereotype communication, within groups. We will subsequently focus one such strategy, experimental research with small groups or dyads, and suggest that insights from the small-group literature can be meaningfully applied to the issue of stereotype consensus. In the body of this chapter, we will then review some of the literature on stereotype communication and consensus in this light.

SHOULD STEREOTYPES BE DEFINED AS CONSENSUAL?

Until the late 1960s, the scientific curiosity for stereotypes was mainly confounded with an interest for consensus: Stereotypes were defined and measured as consensual beliefs, in line with Katz and Braly's seminal paper on ethnic stereotypes among college undergraduates (Katz & Braly, 1933). This early interest for the consensus issue seems to have faded from most of the literature on social stereotypes that flourished since the 1970s (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Reynolds, 1998). Such a state of affairs can be attributed in part to John Brigham's influential review (Brigham, 1973): Brigham regretted the emphasis generations of social psychologists since Katz and Braly had placed on consensus as a defining feature of stereotypes. This emphasis, he claimed, derived from the assumption that consensus necessary reflects the use of unreliable sources of information (e.g., hearsay) regarding group characteristics. However, as this assumption was itself untested, such a preoccupation for con- [AQ3]

sensus was unwarranted in his view. Brigham's article contributed to the redirection of stereotype research toward a consideration of the motivational and cognitive factors involved in stereotyping. Rather than studying stereotypes, treated as consensual beliefs, researchers now turned their attention to the stereotyping process, considered at the level of the individual perceiver. This redirection involved a double movement: from the group to the individual on the one hand, and from content to process on the other.

At a conceptual level, this movement also implied that consensus was viewed as an unnecessary feature of stereotypes: If stereotypes are defined at an individual level, the very nature of these mental representations cannot be contingent on social sharedness alone. Yet, several authors rejected such an emphasis on individual cognitive processes. Haslam (1997; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty et al., 1998), for example, argued that stereotypes are of little scientific interest if they are not shared. Indeed, it is their sharedness that makes their supposed large-scale social effects tangible. In a different vein, Gardner (1993) proposed that some of the processes involved in stereotyping may be restricted to shared stereotypes. In this view, leaving the consensus issue aside raises the danger of overgeneralization. It was therefore important to reconsider the issue of stereotype consensus. Following this guideline, several recent contributions have addressed stereotype consensus both as a dependent (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds et al., 1998) and as an independent variable (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001).

Although we applaud this renewed interest for the consensus issue, we believe the introductcion of consensus into the definition of stereotypes is not necessary an adequate move. First, it demands to select arbitrary criteria regarding the level of consensus that needs to be achieved for a representation to be considered as a proper stereotype. Even the most frequently endorsed traits are rarely chosen by more than 50% of participants in studies using the traditional checklist procedure (Devine & Elliot, 1995; for an exception, see: Haslam et al., 1999). [AQ4]

But, in our opinion, the main problem raised by considering consensus as a necessary feature of stereotypes resides in the limitation it places on our ability to address significant social psychological phenomena. Ironically, the very process of stereotype consensualization (e.g., how a stereotype can become consensual within a group) cannot be addressed if stereotypes are considered as consensual by definition. Yet, the issue of how people's individual experiences merge to form a sense of shared reality is one of the most fascinating questions faced by social psychology (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). In comparison with the massive amount of research devoted to the individual cognitive and motivational underpinnings of stereotypes, the question of how they become socially shared has been largely neglected. For these reasons, we shall not consider consensus as a necessary feature of stereotypes.

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Note also that in this chapter, we will use the terms *stereotype sharedness* and *consensus* interchangeably. More specifically, these terms will refer to the degree to which a given trait is viewed as descriptive of a target group within another "perceiving" group. It is also important to distinguish "real" from "perceived" consensus: Members of a group may all believe that a stereotype is shared without endorsing it (Devine, 1989; Gordijn, Koomen, & Stapel, 2001). Conversely (and probably more rarely), they may all share a stereotype without knowing that it is shared.

The process through which individuals who initially had distinct beliefs about a target group come to endorse a consensual view of this group through within-group communication is known as stereotype consensualization (Haslam et al., 1998a,b). Such a process is predicated on group members' discovering and acknowledging their respective views. Hence, it also tends to lead group members to develop a shared sense of what constitutes consensual beliefs as well (e.g., perceived consensus).

INFORMATION SHAREDNESS AND CONSENSUS

Why is stereotype consensus an issue worthy of scientific interest? The most obvious reason is simply that the large-scale social effects of stereotypes derive mainly from their being shared (Klein & Snyder, 2003; Stangor & Schaller, 1996), as exemplified in the Rwandese example. The second reason involves mere scientific curiosity: Members of a social group are likely to differ in terms of the information they possess about a given out-group. They may have been in contact with different examplars or may have encountered members of this group in different contexts (e.g., as neighbors, coworkers, tourists). As a consequence, they may have been exposed to different information about the characteristics of this group; or they may be more or less familiar with this group. Whereas some of this information may be shared and known by all group members, other pieces of information may be possessed by only a few. Given this variety of experiences, the existence of some form of consensus about the characteristics of important in-groups and out-groups is not a trivial issue. Then, how do group members come to share a common view of a target group?

This question resembles one that has been the focus of small-group research (for a recent review, see: Baron & Kerr, 2003) for decades: How do members of small groups elaborate consensual decisions in spite of their variety of experiences, knowledge, and expertise? In line with its use in the group decision-making literature (Stasser & Titus, 1987), the word "sampling" can be used to refer to how information about a target group is distributed within a small group. Using this terminology, the above question becomes, "How does sampling of information affect the emergence of consensus about the characteristics of a social group?"

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HOW CAN WE STUDY STEREOTYPE CONSENSUALIZATION?

Several strategies are available for studying the processes through which stereotypes become consensual. One such strategy involves considering how the mass media portrays social groups and how these media influence recipients (for a review, see Ruscher, 2001). This strategy is based on the assumption that the actual distribution of information within a social group determines the emergence of a shared representation. Given that information provided by the mass media are most widely distributed, it is also likely to be most influential in determining the content of emerging shared representations.

[AQ5]

A second fruitful strategy involves considering how children acquire stereotypes. This strategy is premised on the assumption that acquiring the shared representation of relevant out-groups is part of the infant's socialization process (Aboud, 1989; Bennett & Sani, 2004; Hirschfeld, 1996).

Whereas both of these strategies are extremely valuable, they present methodological drawbacks that limit investigators' ability to address the actual processes involved in consensualization. First, researchers are usually dependent on the choice of information sources of influence (e.g., parents, television, etc.) choose to communicate. Like all forms of communication, this information is often strategically oriented as a function of the audience (McCann & Higgins, 1992). The factors prompting influence sources to select specific types of information about social groups in their messages are therefore likely to be neglected.

This dynamic interaction between source and target is extremely difficult to address in the context of developmental and media studies especially in view of the widespread use of correlational designs in such studies. Although experimental manipulations would be methodologically possible, inoculating stereotypes through the media or to children obviously presents ethical problems that may offset the methodological advantages of such a choice. Moreover, in such studies, the communicated information is usually already part of the audience's or child's knowledge which places barriers on our ability to study the initial processes involved in the consensualisation of representations that were not previously shared or known to be shared.

At a theoretical level, another limitation of these approaches lies in the fact that sharing information about a social group does not necessarily lead to stereotype consensus. It only does so if the shared information is collectively interpreted as forming the basis of a meaningful representation of the outgroup (Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Haslam, 1997). For example, if a popular television show mentioned every day that members of group B love football, this information could form the basis of very different stereotypes as a function of whether this information is interpreted as reflecting "laziness," "patriotism," or "team-spirit." It is only through within-group communication (e.g., consensualization) that raw information can form the basis of shared stereo-

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types. Hence, media studies cannot in and by themselves inform us on the emergence of consensual stereotypes. The construal of information about groups by audiences, and the processes through which these audiences reach a common interpretation, need to be subjected to an investigation as well. Even when individuals share information about a social group, they may fail to discuss this information and to reach a common understanding of this information.

Besides media and developmental studies, another avenue for studying the consensualization of stereotypes involves distributing information about members of a social group to a small group[1] and examining how they develop a shared representation of this group. The advantage of this strategy is that it lends itself more easily to experimental control and therefore enables researchers to address more precisely the processes hypothesized to be involved in stereotype consensualization. For example, researchers can influence group members' communicational goals, the extent to which the information they possess is shared, and the content of this information, and they can establish more easily the causal direction of the observed effects. Second, and most importantly, working with small groups enables investigators to treat groups as units of analysis, a useful asset when studying consensualization, precisely because it is a group-level phenomenon.

[AQ6]

In the following section, we investigate how small-group research has treated the emergence of consensus within groups, or dyads, as a function of the distribution of information about the discussion issue. In order to do so, we shall not only present research directly involved with stereotypes, but also theoretical frameworks considering other types of decisions or representations as we believe that this research can be meaningfully applied to stereotypes. We shall consider how these perspectives may help us understand the development of new shared stereotypes among group members who did, initially, possess different information about the target group.

Once they have been "consensualized," how do these new stereotypes influence communication about the target group? We will tackle this topic in section 3 of this chapter. As we shall see, stereotype consistent (SC) information tends to have a communicational advantage, which contributes to the maintenance of stereotypes. This may lead to a "vicious circle," with stereotype self-perpetuating through interpersonal communication.

In the last section of this chapter, we will consider some of the factors that may detract group members from communicating SC information and lead them to communicate and agree on stereotype inconsistent (IC) information. We shall argue that stereotype communication does not only serve to maintain stereotypes, but also to change them.

[1]In this chapter, a dyad will be considered as a small group.

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HOW STEREOTYPES BECOME CONSENSUAL THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Groups as Information Processors and "Social Sharedness"

Although small groups form for many reasons and have many purposes (McGrath, 1984), one of the key aspects of group interaction is information processing (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). Whether groups serve mainly a social or task-oriented function, information processing remains a vital component of the dynamics of group interaction. Hinsz et al. (1997) defined group-level information processing as "the degree to which information, ideas, or cognitive processes are shared, and are being shared, among the group members . . ." (p. 43). Such "sharedness" and/or sharing of information can relate to the task, the group, group members' interaction patterns within the group, or the general context in which the group exists. Whether information is shared prior to or during the group process can affect all aspects of information processing, including what information is attended to, how it is encoded, stored, retrieved, and integrated with other information.

Tindale and Kameda (2000; see also, Kameda, Tindale, & Davis, 2003) expanded on the Hinsz et al. (1997) definition of group information processing, focusing on the idea of "social sharedness." In essence, Tindale and Kameda argued that things that are shared to a greater degree among the members of a group tend to have more influence on group processes and outcomes than things shared to a lesser degree. The set of "things" that can be shared is still somewhat "fuzzy," but research has explored a number of the elements of the set to date. Shared preferences have received the greatest amount of research attention in the small-group literature, partially due to their ease of measurement and their prominence in early theories of group decision making (Davis, 1973; Kameda et al., 2003). A large body of research has shown that the largest preference faction within a group (e.g., the majority or plurality position) tends to become the final group response (Davis, 1982). For continuous-response dimensions, the median position or positions than minimizes the overall distance from initial member preferences tend to be chosen (Davis, 1996; Kameda et al., 2003).

Although majorities/pluralities tend to define the final group response, there are a number of situations where minority positions do prevail (Laughlin, 1980; Laughlin & Ellis, 1986; Tindale, Smith, Steiner, Filkins, & Sheffey, 1996). Laughlin and his associates have consistently demonstrated that minorities favoring "correct" alternatives on tasks where the "correctness" of the alternative can be "demonstrated" during group discussion can often win out over incorrect majorities. Laughlin and Ellis (1986) argued that one of the key aspects of this process concerned the shared background knowledge members had about the task. If all members of the group shared knowledge about how "correctness" would be defined for a given task, even if they could not themselves dis-

cover the correct answer, they would recognize it if one or more of the other group members proposed it as an alternative. Thus, for highly demonstrable tasks, it only takes one or two members of a group to prefer the correct alternative in order for the group to eventually reach consensus and choose it.

When discussions concern individual and groups' psychological traits, the material that serves to elaborate stereotypes, this criterion of demonstrability is usually not fulfilled. A stereotype is indeed a multifacted representation that includes descriptive information relevant to central tendancy ("Group B is on average more x than group A") as well as to variability ("All members of Group B are "x"). It also includes explanatory information about the underlying source of these surface features (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). Contrary to the situations studied by Laughlin, in the context of a small group, it is often impossible for a minority to convincingly "demonstrate" that any of these criteria is successfully fulfilled and therefore that a stereotype espoused by the majority is incorrect.

Tindale et al. (1996) extended Laughlin and Ellis' perspective to group decision making generally through the concept of a "shared-task representation." Shared-task representations are task-relevant cognitions or cognitive processes that are shared among most or all of the group members. Task relevant means that the cognitions or processes have implications for (e.g., favor) a particular response alternative. Whenever a group shares a particular task representation, alternatives consistent with the representation are easier to defend and thus more likely to end up as the group's collective choice. Evidence for the effects of shared-task representations has come from focusing on asymmetries in the social influence processes of interacting groups. Both majorities and minorities favoring alternatives consistent with a shared task representation tend to be more influential than equal-sized factions favoring alternatives inconsistent with the representation. In many cases, research has shown that minorities favoring the alternative in line with the shared representation win out over majorities favoring other alternatives (Tindale, 1993; Tindale et al., 1996).

A number of different types of shared-task representations have been studied. For example, Tindale, Sheffey and Scott (1993) showed that a shared "loss oriented" frame for Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) "Asian Disease" problem led groups to choose the risky alternative even when a majority of members originally favored the less risky or certain alternative. McCoun and Kerr (1988) have shown that the shared-processing objective given to mock criminal juries (e.g., vote guilty only if you have no reasonable doubts about the defendant's guilt) leads factions favoring "not guilty" to be more influential than equal-sized factions favoring guilty. Smith, Dykema-Engblade, Walker, Niven, and McGough (2000) found that couching arguments against the death penalty in shared religious beliefs was far more influential in changing group members' attitudes that were similar, nonreligious arguments. Finally, Tindale (1993) found that for problems where cognitive heuristics used to estimate probabili-

ties were highly shared, members using the heuristics were more influential than members who responded in more normatively correct ways.

There are many situations where a shared stereotype could function as a shared task representation. For example, if a personnel committee was attempting to choose among applicants for an entrepreneurial leadership position, shared gender stereotypes could influence the group to use more masculine characteristics as selection criteria, thus potentially favoring male candidates. There is also some evidence that shared stereotypes could affect jury decisions. Bodenhausen and Wyer (1985) found that mock jurors were more likely to judge a defendant guilty if the crime matched stereotypes associated with his or her ethnicity.

Evidence for the social sharedess effect is prevalent at the information level as well. Probably the best example stems from the seminal work by Stasser and Titus (1985; 1987). Stasser and Titus attempted to assess how well groups would process information that we distributed across group members using a "hidden-profile" paradigm. This paradigm gives certain pieces of information to all group members, while giving other pieces of information to only one of the members. For example, in a three-person group trying to decide which of two job candidates to hire (A or B), each group member may know the same two positive pieces of information about candidate B. In addition, they may each know one different positive piece of information about candidate A. Thus, each member would tend to prefer B, because he or she has more positive information about B than about A. However, if members discuss all of the information they possess, they will discover that there are three pieces of positive information about A and only two pieces of positive information about B. Using this paradigm, Stasser and Titus found that groups mainly discuss shared information and more often than not reach consensus on a nonoptimal choice. The basic findings that groups tend to discuss shared as opposed to unshared information and that shared information plays a larger role in determining the final group outcome have now been replicated numerous times (see Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996 for a review).

Stasser and Titus (1985; 1987) showed that a rather simple probabilistic model (information-sampling model) did a fairly good job of describing the data from their experiments. The model is based on a binomial probability distribution and simply predicts that the likelihood of a given piece of information being brought up in discussion is a function of the likelihood of any given member being able to recall the piece of information and the number of members who have the information at their disposal. Thus, pieces of information that are shared by all of the group members have a sampling advantage for being brought up over information that is only available to one member. In the hidden-profile paradigm, often groups reach consensus on the nonoptimal choice alternative before much of the unshared information has a chance to come out. Thus, this model argues that the dominance of shared information is a natural process of basic group dynamics.

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Klein, Jacobs, Gemoets, Licata, and Lambert (2003: Study 1) applied Stasser's paradigm to the consensualisation of social stereotypes. Information about three groups, A, B, and C, was designed so that there was more information supporting group A's sociability and B's competence than the reverse. Thus, prevalent information suggested that group A was more sociable and less competent than group B. This information was, however, distributed among three members of a discussion group differently. In the "representative" condition, information representative of the prevalent information was shared and information contradicting these differences was unshared. As a result, participants had individually more information supporting the view that A is more sociable but less competent than B. In the "unrepresentative" condition, information unrepresentative of the prevalent information was shared. As a consequence, each member of the discussion group had more information that reflected the opposite of the "accurate" preponderance of the evidence, so that group A would have been seen to be more competent and less sociable than group B. In the "all-shared" condition, all participants received all the information about the three target groups. Note, however, that all the information was collectively available in all conditions. Participants' impressions of the groups was measured before and after a 10-minute discussion in which group members had to collectively decide which target group was most competent and sociable. Consistent with Stasser's perspective, group members were more likely to communicate shared than unshared information. The discussion also had an effect on participants' emerging impressions of the target group. They were indeed less consistent with the stereotype in the unrepresentative condition than in the other conditions: In this condition, the discussion of unshared information, which was inconsistent with the stereotype of the target groups, led to less stereotypical impressions than in the two other conditions. Importantly, in all conditions, the discussion led to a greater certainty in the validity of the stereotypes and to a greater consensus in the perception of the three groups (as indicated by a lower variance in judgments within the discussion group) compared to prediscussion judgments. Thus, in line with classic social-influence research (Asch, 1956; Moscovici, 1976), intragroup consensus seemed to lead to greater certainty. Hence, this study demonstrates that the *distribution* of information about a target group across communicators strongly affects the emerging consensual representation of the target group, even if all members have access to the same information collectively. However, the very discussion of this information increases consensus indicating that consensus is driven not only by information sharedness but by a collective interpretation of this information.

Using a different paradigm, Gigone and Hastie (1993, 1996) demonstrated a similar trend in group information processing, which they refer to as the "common knowledge effect." Their theoretical and empirical framework revolved around Brunswik's (1956) "lens model" of judgment. Gigone and Hastie had three-person groups estimate the grade that different students

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would receive in a college course based on six different information cues (e.g., entrance exam score, high school GPA, other workload, etc.). Each group member first made an estimate based on the information he or she had been given, and then the group discussed and reached consensus on an estimate for the group. Different experimental conditions altered the number of members of the group who received each cue: either one, two, or all three. A series of regression analyses generally showed that information became more important for the group estimate to the degree it was shared by a greater number of members. It also was more likely to be discussed if it was shared to a greater degree. However, the information-sharing effect was mediated by individual member preferences; when individual member preferences were entered into the regression equation, all of the information effects became nonsignificant.

Based on the above research, it appears that shared stereotypes could affect group decision making through different routes. First, information (e.g., trait attributes) associated with a stereotype that is shared among all group members may be more likely to come up during a discussion than information uniquely known by only one member. Thus, the discussion could be dominated by SC information when all members share the stereotype. In addition, each member's judgment or choice preference could be influenced by the stereotype and subsequently guide the group as a whole to a SC choice. In this way, even stereotypes that are not considered "socially acceptable" and, thus, would not be openly discussed, could still influence group decisions.

A number of other factors have also been shown to affect the likelihood of shared information dominating group discussions. Larson, Foster-Fishman, and Keys (1994) showed that shared information is particularly likely to come out early as opposed to later in group discussions. They demonstrated that the temporal difference can be explained in terms of a modification of the information-sampling model by Stasser and Titus (1985) by assuming sampling without replacement. Thus, once much of the shared information has been brought up, most of the new information that is left is unshared. The processing goals or performance norms assigned to groups can also influence how much shared versus unshared information is discussed. Stasser and Stewart (1992) showed that shared information is especially likely to dominate if group members feel that they are making a decision as opposed to solving a problem. It seems that defining the situation as a solvable problem or emphasizing accuracy makes thorough information processing a higher priority: thus more information (including unshared information) gets discussed. There is also evidence that assigned roles or known member expertise can attenuate the dominance of shared over unshared information (Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995). Groups where each member is assigned to be the "expert" on a particular decision alternative discussed more of the unshared information on each alternative. It is conceivable that such a situation, the "accuracy norm" is made salient: In view of their assigned expertise, group members probably feel that they have an obligation to be as accurate as possible. However, it

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seems that role or expertise assignments must be public, or "shared" among the group members, in order for it to improve information sharing.

Much of the work on the shared information bias or common-knowledge effect has dealt with structural or task-oriented aspects of the group and its environment. However, recent work has shown that other more self-relevant processes may also be at play. Wittenbaum, Hubbell, and Zuckerman (1999) have argued and shown that group members are motivated to present mainly shared information and are more impressed with other members who do the same. They found that dyads discussing shared information evaluated themselves and their partners more positively (in terms of competence) than did dyads discussing unshared information. Wittenbaum et al. explain these findings in terms of common ground and mutual validation or enhancement. Providing information that others know tends to lead to nods of approval and agreement, whereas presenting unshared information may lead to skepticism. Also, when someone else brings up information as important that others also feel is important, it provides common ground for the discussion. The bias toward providing shared information seems to be stronger for lower- rather than higher-status members (Wittenbaum, 1998), which fits with the notion that providing shared information helps to enhance one's standing in the group.

Another, quite distinct perspective that may explain the prevalence of shared information in small-group discussion is the self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). According to this framework, individuals endorse group norms to the extent that they define themselves as members of this group. As a function of the social context, however, different categories may be salient, and lead people to choose different self-categorizations. Group members may therefore adhere to different norms. The actual content of these norms follows the principle of metacontrast: People are likely to choose norms that best differentiate their ingroup from salient outgroups. In this perspective, consensus is predicated on social validation. People will consider a specific view as correct to the extent that it is socially validated by other individuals sharing the same group membership (Turner, 1991).

However, group norms are not necessarily given and uncontroversial. Individual group members may disagree as to what constitutes an appropriate group norm. In such cases, self-categorization theory argues that group members will strive to *consensualize* these norms, e.g., to reach an agreement as to what constitutes the group's norms. When individual group members share a common self-categorization, interpersonal, within-group, communication will serve this function. Hence, for shared information to become the basis of group consensus, it needs first to be articulated with the group identity and integrated in the group's "frame of reference."

In this view, stereotypes are considered as group norms that are inherently variable depending on the evolution of the social context. When group members share a common self-category, they will try to develop a shared representa-

tion of the group (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, Eggins, Nolan and et al., 1998). Theoretically, the prevalence of shared information in small-discussion groups may then be explained by the fact that shared information can more easily facilitate the emergence of a consensus than unshared information. In line with this assumption, when groups are driven by a consensus goal, they indeed tend to value shared information more, which leads them to elaborate a consensus on the basis of such information (Postmes, Spears, & Cihangir, 2001).

STEREOTYPE CONSENSUALIZATION AND COMMUNICATION

In his influential chapter, Tajfel (1981) argued that understanding stereotype sharedness demanded the consideration of the means through which stereotypes were diffused within groups and communities. One of the primary insights we can extract from our review so far is that information sharedness has a powerful influence on the emergence of stereotype consensus. Based on the different perspectives we have highlighted, it seems that shared information is more likely to influence initial preferences as well as consensual representations and decisions, although this influence may be moderated by several factors.

According to several of the perspectives we have highlighted (Wittenbaum's mutual enhancement perspective, the social identity perspective, and even Stasser's probabilistic model of information pooling), the influence of sharedness on group consensus seems to be predicated using a process of social validation that takes place through group discussion and/or interaction. In other words, group members need to communicate about the target group and *consensualize* their interpretation.

In communicational terms, the consensualization process can be described in terms of "grounding" (Clark, 1996; Clark & Brennan, 1991; Krauss & Fussell, 1996). Common ground refers to a set of assumptions that are (a) shared, (b) known to be shared, (c) that are known to be shared and known to be shared by a group of individual discussants. These assumptions can concern different aspects of the communication process such as the information that has already been exchanged, the purpose of the conversation, background, information about the discussants' characteristic, but also general information (such as social stereotypes) known to be shared by members of a given group. This latter set of information is called "generalized" common ground and encompasses cultural knowledge. By contrast, contextual common ground refers to the set of information that is mutually shared by discussants. It evolves as the conversation(s) between discussants unfold.

Consensualizing stereotypes involves integrating them in this common ground, or *grounding* them. Grounding is a two-way process by which one person presents new information resulting in the other person's acceptance

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through either verbal or nonverbal means. To achieve this goal, several exchanges may be needed. Consider the following example:

A—Bobby made strozzapretti al pesto yesterday [Presentation]

B—Strozza what?

A—Strozzapretti. A kind of pasta

B—O, I see! (*acceptance*)

The interpretation of new information involves establishing logical, or pseudological, links with other information already shared by discussants. These links can take several forms, such as inclusion (e.g., "strozzapretti are a kind of pasta"), comparison (e.g., "it is like penne"), transformation (e.g., "that's what you get if you turn a macaroni on itself"), etc. Information may be easier to ground when it is consistent with other assumptions already shared by discussants. Indeed, inconsistent information may need to be reinterpreted, accounted for, to be properly grounded. It is therefore likely that this grounding process unfolds more smoothly when members of small groups communicate shared information, as this information is easier to integrate by an audience already familiar with it. In this respect, "mutual enhancement" and "social validation" can be viewed as manifestations of successful grounding: By mutually enhancing each others' expression of shared information, members of small groups acknowledge that this information has been successfully grounded. Thereby, the shared information will be easily grounded and form the basis of a consensual stereotype.

As this analysis highlights, the process of stereotype consensualization within small groups is necessarily based on the existence of communication channels through which group members may share the information they have about other group members. The actual content of the emerging stereotype will be dependent on the nature of the information group members choose to communicate through these channels. Understanding the emergence of stereotype consensus not only demands to know what each group member believes about a given group but what makes him or her choose to communicate this information and to whom.

HOW STEREOTYPES ARE MAINTAINED THROUGH COMMUNICATION

Once new stereotypes have been consensualized, they can be maintained only if they are regularly or continuously communicated in the context of interpersonal exchanges (Kashima, Klein, & Clark, 2005). This can be done by either talking about the group as a whole or describing individual group members in line with the stereotype (Schaller & Conway, 2001; Schaller, Conway, & Tanchuk, 2002). This reproduction of stereotypes through communication is the topic of this section. Although this "reconsensualization" can involve many

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communication channels, in this section, as in the rest of the chapter, we will focus on interpersonal, face-to-face communication.

Stereotype Communication: The Evidence

Regardless of the paradigm being used, most of the literature concurs in suggesting that SC information has a communicational advantage: Although features of the communicational context may moderate this trend, when communicators have the choice to either communicate SC or SI information about an individual, they tend to opt for the former (for a recent review, see Kashima et al., 2005). For example, this has been observed in the serial-reproduction paradigm (for a review, see: McIntyre, Lyons, Clark, & Kashima, 2004) in which individuals tell a story involving a character who performs both SC and SI behaviors to a second individual, who tells it to a third, etc. It has also been found to occur among dyads discussing an unknown target face to face (see Ruscher, 1998 for a review) as well as in small groups conversing about an entire group (Harasty, 1997).

Grounding Stereotypes

Which factors may promote the communication of stereotype-consistent information in such interpersonal exchanges? Technically, a stereotype can only be maintained if it is continuously or regularly "regrounded" in communication. This grounding process can unfold more or less smoothly depending on various factors. For example, intimate speakers may experience less difficulty grounding each others' utterances because their common ground is more extensive.

Based on our description of the grounding process, effectively communicating information that is consistent with the common ground (e.g., that can be easily inferred from already shared assumptions) should require fewer resources (e.g., in terms of communication time, number of utterances, or length of utterances) than communicating information that is either inconsistent or irrelevant with respect to the common ground. Inconsistent or irrelevant information runs a greater risk of generating controversy or of being "misunderstood" by the audience, as it is harder to reconcile with existing assumptions. This may in part explain why communicators tend to preferentially communicate information that is consistent with existing stereotypes when they have the opportunity to do so.

Support for this assumption was found in a study by Ruscher and Duval (1998, Study 1). In this study, participants received information about a target person described as an alcoholic, discussed their impression of this target for three minutes, and then jointly described the target to an imaginary mutual friend. In the shared condition, both communicators had the same set of SC and SI information about the target, whereas in the unique condition, the in-

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formation about the target was distributed so that the communicators had different sets of SC and SI information. In their joint description, participants in the unique condition spent more time communicating SI, but not SC, information than dyads in the shared condition. This finding can be interpreted in terms of differential groundability of SC and SI information. When SI information was shared between the participants (shared condition), they could ground it as easily as SC information; however, when SI information was not shared (unique condition), it took them longer to ground SI information than SC information.

Communicating information that is consistent with the common ground does not only convey an informational value. Kashima et al. (2005) argue that it also serves to indicate one's "connection" with the audience. Claiming common ground is a way to enhance politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Indeed, Clark (cited by Kashima et al., 2005) found that stereotype-consistent information was more likely to be communicated to the extent that it was viewed as consistent with the common ground. This observation echoes the finding by Wittenbaum and her colleagues (cf. above) showing that communication of shared information in small group is "mutually enhanced" through verbal and nonverbal means. For example, a member of a personnel committee might mention that a particular candidate's young age might make her or him less suitable for an important leadership position. This would fit with stereotypes of leaders as more mature and experienced and might receive virtually automatic agreement from the other group members (Lord & Maher, 1990). Thus, even if age in this particular circumstance was irrelevant, the person making the point would be perceived as insightful and the others would feel that their perceptions on that issue were validated. Group members who communicate such information receive feedback indicating that they are perceived as more competent. This enhancement can also be considered as a politeness strategy that serves to enhance group members' face.

Direct evidence for the influence of grounding in the communication of stereotypes comes from a study by Klein and Lyons (2005). In this study, participants read a description of an (imaginary) group of Pacific islanders, the Jamayans. The purpose of this task was to lead participants to form a stereotype about this group. After this task, participants were asked to discuss their view of this group with another participant who was also present in the laboratory. Then, they had to read a story involving a character, Jai. Participants in the discussion condition wrote their story either for their discussion partner or for an unknown person. In this story, Jai performed several behaviors, some of which were consistent with the stereotype of Jamayans and some were not. Judges then counted the number of SC and SI behaviors that were included in the story. Results indicated that participants were more likely to communicate SC behaviors, and less likely to communicate SI behaviors when they narrated their story to the audience with whom they had previously discussed rather than an unknown participant. It is likely that the discussion served to make the stereotypes part of the discussants' contextual common ground. In

other words, it instigated not only sharedness, but *a sense of sharedness*, and a common interpretation of Jamayans' traits and characteristics. SC Information about Jay narrated in the story could then easily be grounded in this mutually shared stereotype. Further evidence in support of this interpretation comes from a control condition, in which participants did not discuss with their partner but merely individually listed their thoughts about Jamayans. In this condition, participants were less likely to use SC information and more likely to use SI information in their story to their "partner" (e.g., another participant in the laboratory) than when they had previously discussed with this person.

A preliminary conclusion: The vicious circle of stereotype communication

We have reviewed two types of evidence so far. First, we have reported findings suggesting that when group members discuss the information they possess about an unknown group, they tend to develop an interpretation of this group that is primarily influenced by shared information, even when unshared information is more "accurate." This is due in part to the preferential communication of shared information. Second, we have found that, when stereotypes are part of the "generalized common ground" of a group, information consistent with these stereotypes tends to be preferentially communicated as well.

Taken together, these findings suggest that stereotypes may tend to "self-reproduce": To the extent that information consistent with a stereotype is shared, or even perceived as such, it may be communicated more easily and facilitate the emergence of this very stereotype within the group. The existence of this stereotype seems to facilitate the communication of SC information, and thereby reinforces the stereotype which in turn drives an SC bias in communication, etc. Hence, all the conditions seem to be set for the emergence of a vicious circle in which stereotypes reproduce themselves effortlessly. In the next section, we shall suggest that this vision of stereotypes as self-perpetuating hydra may be a bit too pessimistic: in several important contexts and situations, this cycle can be broken or even vanish completely.

HOW STEREOTYPES CAN CHANGE THROUGH COMMUNICATION

There are several reasons why stereotypes may fail to "self-perpetutate". One reason, that we shall hardly discuss here, involves what has been loosely defined as "the social context" in the social-identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). As we mentioned, stereotypes may only maintain themselves to the extent that they provide the basis for a common interpretation of the target group and of its relation to the out-group. If, due to the evolution of the intergroup context, this stereotype

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cannot meaningfully account for the out-group's behavior, group members may seek to consensualize a new, or modified stereotype. The vast literature on minority influence (for a review, see: Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, & Busceme, 1994) suggests that if this stereotype offers a more meaningful interpretational framework, such attempts may prove successful, even if their sources constitute a minority. However, for changes in the intergroup context to influence the content of shared stereotypes, these new and more meaningful stereotypes need to be communicated within the group. In other words, the inadequacy of current stereotypes to the social context is not sufficient to change these stereotypes. Such an inadequacy needs to be rhetorically constructed as such and effectively communicated within the group. Some group members need to articulate these new stereotypes and influence other group members into adhering to these new stereotypes. This often will be the function of group leaders: For example, Klein and Licata (2003) have shown how, in the late 1950s, the Congolese nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba developed new stereotypes of Belgians and Congolese in order to mobilize his audiences into supporting his project of independence for the Congo.

Second, although "biases" promoting the communication of shared or stereotype-consistent information are well documented, there are some situations in which such biases can be attenuated, thereby breaking the "vicious circle" of stereotype maintenance. Sometimes, people will strive to communicate unshared, or IC information. We shall examine two lines of evidence supporting this claim: one is based on the application of Grice's maxims to stereotype communication and the other on Burnstein and Vinokur's persuasive arguments perspective.

Grice's Maxim of Quantity and the Communication of IC Information

According to Grice's theory of conversational implicature, communicators are expected to obey the "cooperative principle": "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which you are engaged." (p. 308). It is only by making this assumption that audiences can understand the meaning of an utterance. Consider for example the following exchange:

> A—Do you like Francis?
> B—He is stingy.

A can construe B's answer as meaning, "No, I don't like him" only to the extent that B is viewed as a cooperative conversational partner e.g., by assuming that B's statement indeed constitutes an answer to A's question and that B shares A's evaluation of "stinginess" as an undesirable characteristic.

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Grice has suggested that communicators were expected to obey a variety of specific communicational rules subsumed under this general principle. One of these rules is the "maxim of quantity," which is stated by Grice (1975) as follows: "(i) Make your contribution as informative as is required for the purpose of the exchange and (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required" (p. 308). To illustrate the use of this maxim, let us remain in the domain of Italian cuisine and consider the following exchange:

[AQ9]

A: What's in these raviolis?

B: Ricotta. It is an Italian cheese.

B's answer reflects the assumption that A is ignorant of ricotta. Giving an informative answer therefore demands to specify the food category to which it belongs. If B's assumption is correct, he may therefore be considered to observe the maxim of quantity. By contrast, if B's assumption is incorrect and if A knows what ricotta is, B's utterance would convey more than what is needed and would fail to respect the maxim of quantity. Failing to specify what ricotta is might also be considered a violation of the maxim of quantity if A expects more than a simple label for what he is consuming. This analysis illustrates the two violations of the maxim of quantity: reiterating what is already part of the mutual knowledge and failing to communicate novel (and relevant) information.

Based on this communicational rule, we would hence expect communicators to focus more on information that is novel to the audience rather than on information already espoused by the audience. More specifically, assuming that the audience is aware of the group membership of a target, communicators may be expected to communicate IC information when they wish to be particularly informative to their audience.

Hence, information that cannot be directly derived from the common ground can have the comparative advantage of being more informative than information that is inconsistent with it because it is more likely to violate existing assumptions or to add new assumptions to the existing common ground. How does this apply to the stereotyping domain?

In line with this analysis, Clark (cited by Kashima et al., 2005) found that, when communicating about an individual target, communicators rated IC information as more informative than SC information. There is also evidence that speakers who are motivated to develop an accurate representation of a particular target tend to devote more communication time to IC information (Ruscher, Hammer, & Hammer, 1996). By contrast, when their purpose is to develop a shared impression of the target, speakers devote relatively more time to stereotype-consistent information probably because it is more easily "groundable."

Second, to the extent that common ground allows speakers to easily infer assumptions from presented information, it may also be useful resource when they are under communicational pressure e.g., when they may only communicate a limited number of utterances (e.g., because they have limited time,

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or use a poor code such as SMS or morse). In such conditions, speakers may abstain from communication information that is already part of the common ground and focus on information that is inconsistent with it because it is more informative.

If this is the case, shared stereotypes may constitute a useful resource for communicating information under situations of communicational pressure. For example, when describing a target belonging to a given social category, pressured speakers may preferentially communicate information that is inconsistent with the stereotype associated with this social category in an effort to be particularly informative. Klein, Demoulin, Licata, and Lambert (in press) precisely tested this prediction. They handed participants a description of a hypothetical target categorized as an engineer. This description included 14 traits that were consistent with the stereotype of engineers (e.g., intelligent, rational, etc.) and traits that were inconsistent with this stereotype (e.g., warm, sensitive). Participants were asked to use five of these traits to describe the target to an audience. It was explicitly stated that they should pick these five traits to try to ensure that the audience have the richest possible view of the target. The crucial manipulation concerned the audience, who was either described as being aware that the target was an engineer or unaware of it. Consistent with the "maxim of quantity" hypothesis, when the audience was unaware of this information, participants were more likely to communicate SC traits, and by the same token less likely to communicate SI traits, than when the target was aware of it. Thus, participants seemed particularly likely to communicate SI information if it had a relative informational value compared to SC information, e.g., when the audience was aware of the target's group membership and could therefore access the stereotype.

Although these studies suggest that people may communicate IC information in an effort to follow the maxim of quantity, they do not involve a real interaction within the group. A study by Klein et al.'s (2003: study 2) responds to this drawback by suggesting that stereotypes, when they are in generalized common ground, play an important role in determining informativeness within small-discussion groups. In this study, members of triads received some information that was shared in the whole triad (shared information), and other information that was unique to each participant (unshared information). In the congruent condition, *unshared* information was consistent with the stereotypical differences between the groups A and B, where members of group A were presented as petanque players and group B as "statisticians" (petanque players are viewed as sociable and unintelligent and computer engineers as unsociable but intelligent). In the incongruent condition, the group labels were reversed, so that unshared information was inconsistent with the stereotypical differences between the two groups. Participants then discussed for 10 minutes and were asked to choose which was the most "competent" and the most "sociable" group. If people follow the maxim of quantity, unshared

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information would have more informational value when it was inconsistent with the existing stereotypes than when it was consistent with them. In line with this reasoning, people were more likely to discuss unshared information if it was *inconsistent* with the labels associated to group A and B than if it was *consistent*. This discussion apparently had an influence on their emerging impressions: Group members perceived the target groups in less stereotypical terms when unshared information was inconsistent than when it was consistent with these labels.

PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS AND THE COMMUNICATION OF IC INFORMATION

In this section, we shall consider work by Brauer, Judd, and Jacquelin (2001) who conducted two studies designed to examine the conditions under which group discussion does and does not lead to more stereotypic perceptions. In one of their studies, Brauer et al. gave groups of three participant's information about a hypothetical target group. The information took the form of different behaviors that had presumably been performed by members of the target group and that referred either to the dimension of selfishness or violence. Three fourths of these described selfish and violent behaviors. The remainder described behaviors that were inconsistent with this general stereotype e.g., they described altruistic and pacifistic behaviors. Thus, the group was stereotypically described as selfish and violent, but there were numerous IC behaviors.The distribution of the different behaviors across group members was varied, so that the IC information was shared in half of the groups and unshared in the other half of the groups. In the *shared* condition, each group member read three times as many stereotypic than IC behaviors on each of the two trait dimensions used to describe the target group. In the *unshared* condition, one group member saw two thirds of the IC behaviors while the other two group members saw relatively few of them (each of them saw one sixth of the counterstereottypic behaviors). The total numbers of behaviors read by each group member was held constant, so that in the unshared condition, the participant who saw more IC behaviors saw fewer stereotypic ones. The other between-group manipulation varied whether or not there was group discussion. Half of the groups were asked to discuss their impressions about the target group and then filled out dependent measures assessing perceived dispersion, perceived stereotypicality, and liking for the target group. The other half of the groups did not engage in a group discussion and filled out the dependent measures immediately after having read the behaviors.

The relevant means for the perceived stereotypicality ratings are reported in Fig. 12–1. The informal group discussion led to more stereotypical perceptions of the target group, but only when the IC information was shared rather than

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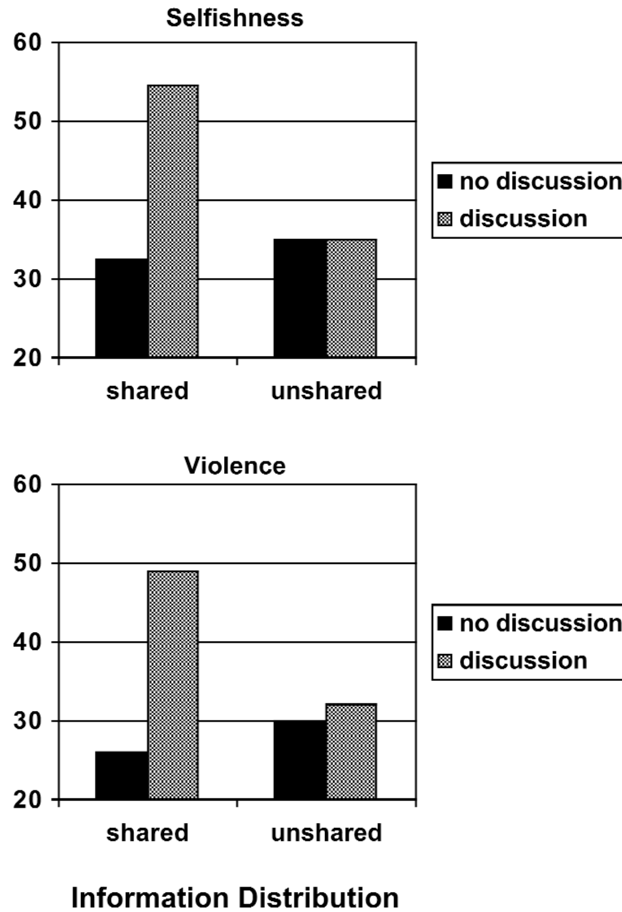

FIGURE 12–1. Perceived stereotypicality on the selfishness dimension (top panel) and the violence dimension (bottom panel) as a function of discussion condition and information distribution (Study 2 of Brauer, Judd, & Jacquelin, 2001).

unshared. Analyses on the liking measure showed that groups in the discussion/shared condition liked the target group significantly less than groups in the other three conditions. The coded group discussions revealed that groups in the unshared condition discussed sterotypic information less and counterstereotypical information more than groups in the shared condition. To summarize, discussion led to more stereotyping when each of the group members was familiar with the same proportion of stereotypic (three fourths) and countersterotypic (one fourth) information (in the shared condition). However, no

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polarizing effects of discussion were found when the IC information was concentrated within one group member, and thus group members differed in the proportion of stereotypic to countersterotypic information they were familiar with (in the unshared condition). These results are entirely consistent with Burnstein and Vinokur's (1977) persuasive arguments approach: Group members have a preference for putting forward belief-supporting arguments during the group discussion. In the dispersed condition, all group members are familiar with both stereotypic and IC information. As such, the IC information does not have a great interest value, and group members talk longer about the information that is consistent with their prediscussion attitudes, e.g., the stereotypic information. As a result, their perceptions of the target group polarize during the group discussion. The situation is entirely different in the unshared condition. Given that the IC information is held primarily by one group member, two group members start out with a very stereotypic view of the target group; whereas the third group member starts out with a less stereotypic view. Not surprisingly, the discussion focuses largely on the IC behaviors and the extent to which they should be considered valid and diagnostic evidence. These results nicely illustrate the grounding perspective. When people have the same access to stereotypic and IC information about a group, they prefer to talk about information that is easy to communicate and that supports everybody's beliefs, e.g., stereotypic information. A common ground is already established, and they simply refer to this common ground by discussing stereotypic information. If however, people differ in the extent to which they are familiar with IC information, they have to establish a common ground by talking about the information that is new and controversial, e.g., the IC information. In other words, the IC information has to be scrutinized for its validity, reinterpreted, and accounted for. This process of establishing a common ground leads group members to talk more about IC behaviors, and the group discussion does not lead to more stereotypical perceptions

[AQ11]

RELEVANCE AS AN INTEGRATING PRINCIPLE

Sperber and Wilson (1995) reformulated Grice's maxims by suggesting that they are all based on the assumption that communicators follow what they called "the principle of relevance": they try to maximize the effect of their utterances on the audience at the minimal interpretative cost for their audience. Work on the application of the maxim of quantity to stereotype communication can be easily interpreted in this light: When information is limited, and the audience knows the target's social category, speakers tend to focus on the information that maximizes this ratio e.g., IC information. But it has the potential to offer a much broader interpretation of the relative

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prevalence of SC versus inconsistent information in the communication of social information. For example, the role of group leaders in articulating new stereotypes can be considered in this perspective: New stereotypes should be communicated to the extent that they are perceived relevant in view of the evolution of the social context. When such changes take place, their relevance should become much higher e.g., their effects on the audience should be greater because they have a greater potential to effectively modify the audience's assumptions about the target group. By comparison, in such conditions, their interpretative "cost" reduces as well: IC information, that was hard to reconcile with the "former" social context can suddenly become more easily interpretable. Consider the use by Patrice Lumumba of the stereotype of European colonizers as ruthless exploiters (studied by Klein & Licata, 2003). This stereotype may have become easier to communicate in the late 1950s when other Third-world countries had experienced extremely violent wars of independence or when, after the independence of Congo, the Belgian government encouraged the secession of Katanga, the richest region of Congo and tried to keep military control on it.

The persuasive argument's account can be considered in this light as well: In Brauer et al.'s studies, IC information is communicated to the extent that it can be meaningfully integrated in an alternative view of the target group. This view is all the more effective in Sperber and Wilson's sense, and therefore relevant, to the extent that other group members start out with more extremely stereotypic vision of the target group.

In other words, under conditions in which IC information becomes communicationally relevant and has more potential to change the audience's assumptions at a minimal interpretational cost, it becomes more likely to be communicated.

It is also important to consider an important moderator of the communication of IC information: The effects we have reviewed in this section mainly take place when communicators are primarily motivated by a desire to be informative and accurate. As we have seen, it is also in these conditions that the members of small groups are likely to pool unshared information.

By contrast, when communicators' primary goal is to create a social connection with the audience, we have seen that SC information may be favored because its "effects," with respect to that goal, are probably stronger than the effects of IC information. It is also generally easier to interpret than IC information.

Overall, our analysis suggests that, the relevance of a specific utterance always needs to be considered in relation to a specific goal, e.g., mobilizing the audience, modifying his or her view of a target group, creating a social connection, fostering a consensus, etc. In this perspective, trying to determine which information is communicationally relevant or not may demand to assess costs and effects on a variety of dimensions (e.g., in terms of information processing but also in terms of the quality of the relationship to the audience). [AQ12] This means that it is relevant to draw general rules as to the nature of the

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moderators that will promote the communication of stereotype-inconsistent information.

CONCLUSION

We opened this chapter with a tragic example illustrating how stereotype consensus can breed terror and violence. Our purpose was to examine how social psychology could contribute to an understanding of both the formation and consequences of such stereotype consensus. To this end, we reviewed some of the evidence bearing on the emergence of stereotype consensus in situations in which information about a target group was unevenly distributed with some information more likely to be shared than others. Most of the findings we have considered highlight that groups tend to "consensualize" their stereotypes based on shared rather than unshared information, even if this unshared information is actually more "accurate." Then, we considered how existing stereotypes may influence the communication of social information in small groups, and the emergence of consensual representations or decisions on the basis of such information. We showed that SC information was much more likely to be communicated and to be integrated in such representations and decisions than inconsistent information. Through this route, social stereotypes can be maintained via a consistent "regrounding" in small groups. Such a conclusion seems to echo the findings of social cognitive work on stereotype formation and application. For example, in an influential chapter, Bargh (1999) described a creature he called a "cognitive monster" who was eternally doomed to perceiving others in terms of automatically activated stereotypes without being able to rely on IC information. Is there a "communicational monster" as well, eternally condemned to maintain the existing stereotypes when communicating about others? At the end of this chapter, we can conclude that this creature may exist but is not human. Just like bacteria, stereotypes need a friendly environment to proliferate. Changes in the social context, and particularly in the texture of intergroup relations, may make them less meaningful in the interpretations of these relations and reduce the likelihood that information consistent with these stereotypes will be communicated. We highlighted a communicational principle, the principle of relevance, which may sometimes promote the communication of IC information. Although the resistances to stereotype change are strong in any group, communicators and minorities who can effectively articulate the evolution of the social context with a convincing view of the target group, ultimately achieve to modify stereotypes.

In sum, within-group communication does promote stereotype consensualization. Once stereotypes have been consensualized, group members may even find it much easier to communicate about SC than inconsistent information. However, it is also through communication only that these very same stereotypes do change.

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[AQ1]AU: I replaced XX with 20. Change okay ?

[AQ2]AU: Reference says 2001.

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[AQ14] AU: Please insert citation for Haslam, 1997 or delete this reference.

[AQ15]AU: Please supply cituation for Kreuger, 1996 or delete this reference.