

Conformity to Sex-Typed Norms, Affect, and the Self-Concept

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The self-concept plays an important role in conformity to sex-typed social norms. Normative beliefs that men are powerful, dominant, and self-assertive and that women are caring, intimate with others, and emotionally expressive represent possible standards for whom people ought to be and whom they ideally would like to be. In the present research, to the extent that sex role norms were personally relevant for participants, norm-congruent experiences (i.e., those involving dominance for men and communion for women) yielded positive feelings and brought their actual self-concepts closer to the standards represented by ought and ideal selves.

A recurring theme in the popular psychology literature is that men and women are motivated toward different goals and values in everyday social relationships. Tannen's (1990) best-seller, *You Just Don't Understand*, suggests that women's "conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus" (p. 25), whereas men's are "negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around" (p. 25). Similarly, Gray's (1992) popular book, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, outlines sex-typed value systems, with men oriented toward "power, competency, efficiency, and achievement" (p. 16) and women toward "love, communication, beauty, and relationships" (p. 18).

The idea that men and women possess divergent motivations in social relationships is not especially novel; it elaborates on Bakan's (1966) well-known argument that men are oriented toward agency, and women, toward communion. The popularity of these ideas comes from their capturing some centrally important feature of people's experiences as men or women in our society. Indeed, they correspond to the core dimensions of sex-differentiated normative standards, as documented by psychological research on sex stereotypes (e.g., Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993; Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Swim, 1994).

To psychologists studying sex differences, these normative beliefs are important because they structure many aspects of men's and women's everyday social interaction (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1992; Wood & Rhodes, 1992). According to social role theories, sex-typed normative beliefs that specify the differential appropriateness

and differential value of social behaviors for men and women create and maintain sex differences through a variety of mechanisms: Interaction partners may exert social pressure promoting conformity to norms. For example, in behavioral confirmation, sex-stereotypic normative beliefs form the basis for perceivers' expectations about targets and, by affecting perceivers' behavior, elicit normative responses from targets (Snyder, 1992). In addition, groups can encourage normative behavior through, for example, a process of "norm sending" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

We suggest that social norms also affect behavior to the extent that they are incorporated into men's and women's self-concepts. That is, sex role norms can function like other personally adopted normative standards (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Schwartz, 1973, 1977) and can generate sex differences in social behavior through self-related processes (Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Oyserman, 1988). In particular, consensually held sex-typed norms may be adopted as personal standards against which people judge their own behavior (Grossman & Wood, 1992), and people are likely to feel good about themselves when they conform to these valued personal standards. The present research was designed to demonstrate that conformity to sex-typed norms yields favorable self-evaluations.

Motivating Properties of Sex-Typed Social Norms

Sex role stereotypes that are adopted as self-standards have the same motivational significance as other self-beliefs. Men who adopt these normative standards are oriented toward goals of dominance and independence in part as an attempt to control and predict their social world (Swann, 1987, 1990) as well as to establish a favorable position for themselves in relations with others (Higgins, 1987; Tesser, 1988). Similarly, women who adopt sex-typed norms as personal standards are oriented toward goals of connection and intimacy because these help to interpret the social world and enhance their self-concept in relations with others. Thus, identity maintenance and enhancement may underlie differences in men's and women's social interaction.

Wide-ranging empirical evidence suggests that, in the aggregate, the self-concepts of men and women in our society correspond to sex-differentiated normative standards. For example, on personality scales assessing gender-differentiating traits, men report greater instrumentality, dominance, and self-confidence

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than do women, whereas women report greater warmth, expressiveness, and concern for others than do men (e.g., Bem's, 1974, Bem Sex Role Inventory and Spence & Helmreich's, 1978, Personal Attributes Questionnaire). Similarly, research on children's spontaneous self-concepts has found that girls have a more social sense of self than do boys (McGuire & McGuire, 1988). Girls spontaneously mention a greater number of other persons in their self-descriptions than do boys, and girls are more likely than boys to mention specific others rather than broad categories of people. Additionally, among college students, men's positive self-esteem appears to be based on a belief in the unique superiority of their own abilities, whereas women's self-esteem appears to be built on relatedness to others (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992).

Sex-typed normative standards can be incorporated into people's *ideal* self, or the attributes that they hope, aspire, and wish to possess, as well as their *ought* self, or the attributes that they should possess because of duty, obligation, or responsibility (Higgins, 1987, 1996; James, 1890/1948; Kihlstrom et al., 1988; Rogers, 1961). Ideal and ought aspects of self-concepts appear to represent internal guides against which people evaluate themselves and their behaviors. Good feelings result when actual self-concepts match these personally relevant self-guides, and people may strive to attain congruency with standards as well as to avoid failing to meet them (Alexander & Higgins, 1993; Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; James, 1890/1948; Rogers, 1961). This link between social norms and feelings about the self was illustrated in Sherif's (1936/1966) claim that "if the social custom requires that the woman's place is by the hearth, then the best cook will feel herself to be the best woman. In such a case, beauty may be regarded as secondary or immodest" (p. 172).

Experimental research has provided preliminary support for the idea that norm-related aspects of the self have motivational properties. Josephs et al. (1992) provided men with feedback that indicated they were low in independent thinking, individual achievement, and competition; they also provided women with feedback that indicated they were low in nurturance, interpersonal integration, and group achievement. Given that independence, achievement, and dominance are more important components of men's self-concepts than women's and that intimate relations are a more important component of women's self-concepts than men's, threats to competence in these areas should be motivating for those who value the respective attributes. Indeed, high-self-esteem participants reacted to the feedback by trying to bring self-evaluations in sex-appropriate domains in line with their self-guides; men estimated superior future performance on the competitive achievement tasks, and women estimated superior performance on the interpersonal tasks. Low-self-esteem participants, whose self-concepts were presumably not threatened by the negative feedback, did not demonstrate these effects.

The differences between high- and low-self-esteem participants in Josephs et al.'s (1992) research were attributed to high-self-esteem participants' greater success than low-self-esteem participants' at meeting sex-typed standards in the past. This explanation assumes that sex-typed normative standards are relevant for the majority of college student participants. However, given the range of normative standards available to men and women in Western societies in recent years, it is no longer guaranteed that most

base their self-guides on sex-appropriate standards. A variety of alternate norms may inform self-guides, including ethnic and racial norms, religious values, and nontraditional sex role standards. For those who judge sex role norms irrelevant, sex-typed experiences, including the threats to identity in Josephs et al.'s (1992) study, should have little impact.

Predictions about the effects of norm-congruent experiences are thus dependent on the extent to which people endorse the relevant normative standard (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Among those who do, successfully enacted interactions that are sex role congruent are likely to yield positive feelings, regardless of past successes or failures at meeting self-standards (i.e., chronic levels of self-esteem); these people should experience reduced discrepancies with valued self-standards and increased positive feelings about the self. Sex role incongruent interactions should either have no effect on these people's self-views or, to the extent that the experience conflicts with the desired self-standard, should depress self-value. In contrast, for people who do not base their self-concepts on sex-typed norms, the extent to which an experience is norm relevant should have little impact on feelings about the self.

Definition of Sex-Typed Norms

We have argued that normative beliefs about men's and women's social behavior can be identified from consensually held sex role stereotypes. Stereotype research has converged in identifying the ideal attributes for women as involving nurturance, intimacy, and emotional expressiveness. However, less consensus surrounds normative beliefs about the masculine ideal.

Recent cultural perspectives have adopted a unidimensional view of gender roles in which women, like members of collectivistic cultures, are oriented toward interdependence, and men, like members of individualistic cultures, are oriented toward independence (Cross & Madson, 1997; Josephs et al., 1992; Markus & Oyserman, 1988). In this view, men's self-assertiveness and desire for uniqueness reflect the more basic striving of "self as separated from others" (Cross & Madson, 1997, p. 6).¹ In contrast, research on gender stereotypes has in recent years adopted a multidimensional conception, in which normative beliefs for men include attributes such as power and assertiveness over others in addition to independence.

To evaluate the normative beliefs held by our research participants, we conducted a pretest in which an initial group of 27 undergraduate students listed the eight attributes they associated with the "ideal man in our society." They then rated each attribute on two 11-point scales that ranged from 1 (*a great deal*) to 11 (*not at all*), indicating the extent to which each reflected "independence, uniqueness, and separation from others," and "dominance, power, and assertiveness over others." The attri-

¹ Given that intimacy and social support are associated with positive well-being for both sexes (Reis, 1990, in press), recent cultural analyses that have defined normative behavior for men as the absence of closeness and intimacy appear to have focused largely on the deficiencies of male sex-typed behavior. A broader definition of normative prescriptions for men that includes power and dominance over others allows for the possibility that these are functional and may, in their own right, enhance well-being. Baumeister and Sommer (1997) make a related point in their response to Cross and Madson (1997).

butes descriptive of the ideal man were considered equally reflective of independence ($M = 4.98$) and of dominance ($M = 4.88$; $F < 1$), and ratings on the two dimensions were only moderately correlated ($r = .40$). No differences emerged between male and female raters.

The pretest findings thus support the popular psychology theorizing with which we began this article in suggesting that men ideally establish hierarchical, unequal-status relations in which they are dominant and autonomous. In contrast, women ideally establish egalitarian, equal-status relations characterized by intimacy and concern for others.

The Present Research

For women who have adopted sex-typed social norms as self-relevant standards, relationships involving intimacy and sensitivity to others are likely to have considerable motivational significance and are likely to generate positive feelings about themselves. In a parallel manner, for men who have personally adopted sex-typed norms, relationships that involve power, dominance, and independence should yield positive feelings. Men and women for whom sex-typed norms are not self-relevant are unlikely to experience positive self-related outcomes when their relationships are congruent with the norms.

Our first experiment used a questionnaire methodology in which participants recalled an interaction in which their behavior was characterized by either normative behavior for women (i.e., warmth, caring, and interpersonal concern) or by the dominance and self-assertiveness component of normative behavior for men. They then rated their emotions and responded to a scale assessing the discrepancy between their actual self-concepts and their self-standards, represented by who they would like to be ideally and who they ought to be (Higgins, 1987; Higgins et al., 1994). Ideal and ought self-standards were assessed twice, once with respect to participants' personal beliefs and then again with respect to the views of society in general. Communal and dominance relationships potentially enhance feelings about the self by aligning one's actual self with one's personal standards (i.e., sex role norms as represented in one's own beliefs) or with society's standards (i.e., the consensually held norms).

In addition, to assess the extent to which sex-typed norms were personally relevant, participants rated how important it was for them to be similar to the ideal person of their own sex and different from the ideal of the opposite sex. Our predictions, then, emerge in a three-way interaction between participant's sex, recall of communal versus dominant interactions, and the high versus low self-relevance of sex-typed norms: When recalling dominant interactions, men who report that norms are highly self-relevant should experience positive affect and should report small discrepancies between actual and ideal selves. When recalling communal interactions, women who report that norms are personally relevant should experience positive affect and small discrepancies between actual and ideal selves.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

Eighty-nine male and 164 female introductory psychology students at Texas A&M University participated in this experiment to fulfill a course requirement.

Procedure

As part of an ostensibly unrelated project, in psychology classes 1 week before the actual experiment, participants completed a measure assessing the relevance of sex role norms (see below).

The experiment itself was described as an investigation of students' feelings about their relationships with others. The first page of the questionnaire booklet asked participants to take a few minutes to think of an interaction with another person in which they acted in a "dominant, powerful, and assertive manner" or in a "warm, caring, close-to-others manner." After they had identified such an incident, participants turned the page and provided a written description of the event. The remainder of the booklet consisted of a series of scales on which they rated their feelings and their self-views (see below). Participants were then debriefed and excused.

Measures

Manipulation check. To ensure that participants had retrieved an appropriate experience, they were asked to rate on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*a moderate amount*) to 9 (*a great deal*) the extent to which the interaction involved "dominance, power, and assertiveness over others" or "warmth, caring, and concern for others."

Affective responses. On 9-point scales anchored by 1 (*very weak feelings*) and 9 (*very strong feelings*), participants rated the extent to which the interaction made them feel good and then made them feel bad. On a 9-point scale anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 9 (*strongly*), participants also rated the extent to which the interaction made them feel energized.

Beliefs about actual, ideal, and ought self-concepts. In a modified version of the belief-elicitation procedure suggested by Higgins (1987), participants first listed up to 10 attributes they believed they actually possessed. They then rated on 5-point scales ranging from 0 (*slightly*) to 4 (*extremely*) the extent to which they possessed each attribute.² Subsequent pages of the questionnaire were cut to cover only half of the page, layering over the rating scale for "actual" attributes while leaving exposed the attributes themselves. On the remaining (half) pages, participants rated on new 5-point scales how much each self-standard possessed each attribute. For personal ideals, they were told, "Think of the person you'd ideally like to be and rate the extent to which your ideal self would possess each attribute." For personal oughts, participants were told, "Consider the person you think you ought to be, and rate the extent to which the person you ought to be possesses each attribute." For society's ideal, they considered "how other people in our society define the kind of person you would ideally be," and for society's ought, they considered "how other people in our society define the kind of person you ought to be."

Analyses were conducted on discrepancy scores, which were formed by subtracting ratings of the attributes in participants' actual self-concepts from those represented in each of the four self-guide standards (Higgins, 1987). That is, discrepancy scores were calculated to represent the mean divergence (in terms of the absolute values) between the

² Our procedure for generating self-standards differs from that suggested by Higgins (1987) because we did not obtain separate attribute lists of each ideal and ought standard and then identify synonyms and antonyms across self-standards. In several earlier attempts with this procedure, we were unable to obtain sufficient reliability in judging synonyms and antonyms, despite extensive discussion and training of coders (i.e., ourselves). The data from these earlier studies thus did not yield meaningful comparisons across standards. As a result, we modified the procedure suggested by Higgins (1987), and participants in the reported research rated ideal and ought standards in terms of the attributes they had listed in response to who they actually are.

attribute ratings in each actual self–self-standard pair: actual–personal ideal, actual–personal ought, actual–society's ideal, and actual–society's ought.

In addition, to identify the content of the listed attributes, two independent coders classified the attributes as reflecting power and dominance, intimacy and caring, or as irrelevant to these qualities (interrater reliability, Cohen's $\kappa = .74$).

Features of the interaction. Participants also provided information about the interaction they recalled. They indicated the sex of the other person(s), how many other people were involved, their relation to these others, and the setting in which the interaction took place.

Self-relevance of sex role norms. Participants were asked to think of how society defines the ideal man and the ideal woman. On two 9-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*a great deal*), participants then indicated the relevance of same-sex ideals by rating how important it was for them, personally, to be similar to the ideal man–woman and to what extent being similar to the ideal man–woman was an important part of who they are ($r = .85$). They then indicated on two 9-point scales the importance of differentiating from the opposite-sex norm by rating how important it was for them to be dissimilar to typical members of the opposite sex and to what extent being dissimilar was an important part of who they are ($r = .84$). Means were calculated across the two items assessing relevance of own-sex norms and across the two items assessing relevance of opposite-sex norms. Because our predictions were expected to hold primarily for participants who strongly endorsed the same-sex norm and rejected the opposite-sex norm, high self-relevance of sex role norms was defined to include participants whose scores fell in the top quartile on both of these scales ($n = 60$). Analyses compared this group with the remaining three-fourths of participants, for whom sex role norms were less personally relevant ($n = 192$).

Results

Data were analyzed by using a Participant's Sex \times Relationship Type (communal vs. dominant) \times Relevance of Sex Role Norms (high vs. moderate–low) analysis of variance (ANOVA) design with appropriate contrasts.

Interaction Ratings

Manipulation check. Participants generally reported that the recalled interactions involved the appropriate theme, although those recalling communal interactions judged that they had identified an interaction that more strongly fit the desired description ($M = 7.53$) than did those recalling dominant interactions ($M = 6.61$), $F(1, 244) = 6.57, p < .05$. In addition, the marginal effect for sex, $F(1, 244) = 3.22, p < .10$, revealed that women rated their interactions as more strongly reflecting the appropriate dimension ($M = 7.21$) than did men ($M = 6.96$). It is important to note, however, that the two-way interaction between sex and relationship type and the three-way interaction between sex, relationship type, and relevance were nonsignificant ($F_s < 1$). Thus, success at recalling an appropriate interaction did not vary with its sex role congruence or with relevance of sex-typed norms.

Attributes of the interactions. Because the self-relevance of sex role norms did not affect attributes of the recalled interactions, the findings are reported collapsed across this variable. As shown in Table 1, the relationship partner(s) in the scenarios varied with the communal versus dominant theme of the interaction. Communal interactions tended to involve only one other person, and this other was more likely to be female than male.

Table 1
Attributes of Recalled Interactions, Experiment 1

Attribute	Communal interaction		Dominant interaction	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Sex of partner(s)				
Male	24.49	26.58	62.50	22.22
Female	57.14	51.90	7.50	43.06
Both	18.37	21.52	30.00	34.72
Number of partners				
One	72.92	67.05	37.50	38.09
Two or more	27.08	32.95	62.50	61.91

Note. Numbers reflect the percentage of scenarios within each condition that possessed the indicated attributes.

Dominant interactions took place in larger groups rather than with single others, and these interactions tended to be within sex, involving others of the same sex as the respondent. Analyses on the relationships among the participants in the interactions yielded no systematic effects, with 45.4% occurring with friends, 12.4% with dating partners or spouses, 12.0% with roommates, and 11.2% with relatives.³ The setting in which the interactions occurred also did not vary systematically with the predictor variables, with 29.6% occurring during informal conversations, 13.6% at social occasions such as a party, and 6.4% during athletic competitions.

Affective Ratings

The anticipated three-way interaction emerged in the analyses on extent of good feelings, $F(1, 244) = 4.87, p < .05$ (see Table 2). To explore this interaction, we conducted simple two-way analyses at each level of norm relevance. As anticipated, for high-relevance participants, the Sex \times Relationship Type interaction was significant, $F(1, 244) = 7.37, p < .01$. Planned comparisons revealed that men who recalled an encounter in which they were dominant and powerful expressed more positive feelings than women who recalled this kind of interaction, $F(1, 244) = 17.73, p < .001$. In addition, for high-relevance participants, women who recalled a communal relationship reported marginally more positive feelings than did men who recalled a communal interaction, $F(1, 244) = 3.23, p < .10$. The simple two-way analysis for low-relevance participants yielded only a main effect for relationship type, $F(1, 244) = 56.65, p < .001$, reflecting stronger positive feelings to communal than dominant interactions.

Analyses on bad feelings were not expected to yield mirror-image findings to those obtained on good feelings; positive and negative affect often vary independently (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994). Indeed, bad feelings yielded a main effect for relationship type, with greater bad feelings instigated by dominant ($M = 4.20$) than by communal interactions ($M = 2.26$), $F(1, 244) = 40.01, p < .001$. In addition, a marginally significant interac-

³ These percentages do not total to 100% because a number of the responses to each question could not be classified.

Table 2
Mean Positive Affect and Actual Self–Self-Standard Discrepancy, Experiment 1

Participants' rating	Communal interaction				Dominant interaction			
	Low self-relevance		High self-relevance		Low self-relevance		High self-relevance	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Positive feelings								
<i>M</i>	7.32	7.77	6.87	7.67	5.45	5.79	7.29	5.41
<i>SD</i>	1.72	1.26	1.88	1.24	2.12	1.88	1.25	2.69
Discrepancy between actual self and:								
Personal ideal								
<i>M</i>	0.94	0.79	0.88	0.76	0.91	0.98	0.80	1.08
<i>SD</i>	0.55	0.46	0.65	0.49	0.39	0.48	0.59	0.52
Personal ought								
<i>M</i>	0.92	0.72	0.85	0.80	0.78	0.91	0.77	1.02
<i>SD</i>	0.55	0.43	0.59	0.56	0.43	0.46	0.65	0.63
Society's ideal								
<i>M</i>	0.86	0.85	0.81	0.75	0.77	0.99	0.59	1.08
<i>SD</i>	0.47	0.45	0.47	0.44	0.40	0.49	0.29	0.46
Society's ought								
<i>M</i>	0.88	0.90	0.71	0.79	0.76	0.95	0.69	1.15
<i>SD</i>	0.50	0.46	0.26	0.50	0.41	0.51	0.35	0.44

Note. Higher means reflect stronger good feelings as rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*very weak feelings*) to 9 (*very strong feelings*) and greater discrepancies between actual self and self-standards across the attributes participants listed. Attributes were rated on 5-point scales, thus discrepancies could range from 0 to 4.

tion between sex and relationship type, $F(1, 244) = 3.42, p < .10$, reflected the stronger bad feelings among women ($M = 4.49$) than among men ($M = 3.68$) recalling dominant interactions ($p < .05$) and a nonsignificant trend for men to report stronger bad feelings ($M = 2.45$) than women ($M = 2.16$) for communal interactions.

Analyses on the feeling of being energized yielded only an interaction between sex and relationship type, $F(1, 242) = 4.64, p < .05$, reflecting that men felt more energized by dominant interactions ($M = 6.51$) than did women ($M = 5.92; p < .05$), whereas communal interactions yielded a nonsignificant trend in the opposite direction ($M_s = 5.94$ and 6.37 for men and women, respectively).

Self-Concept Beliefs About Actual, Ideal, and Ought Selves

Discrepancies between participants' actual self-ratings and each of the four self-standards were analyzed according to Participant's Sex \times Relationship Type (communal vs. dominant) \times Relevance of Sex Role Norms (high vs. moderate–low) \times Type of Self-Standard (actual–personal ideal, actual–personal ought vs. actual–society's ideal vs. actual–society's ought) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor (see Table 2). A main effect for sex, $F(1, 215) = 5.10, p < .05$, reflected the larger discrepancies for women ($M = 0.89$) than men ($M = 0.80$). The only other effect to approach significance was the marginal interaction between sex and relevance, $F(1, 215) = 2.78, p < .10$. Although this interaction did not achieve standard levels of

significance, exploratory follow-up analyses were conducted to examine the pattern for each type of self-standard separately. These univariate analyses revealed a consistent pattern of Sex \times Relationship Type interactions: actual–personal ideal, $F(1, 236) = 3.72, p < .06$; actual–personal ought, $F(1, 236) = 3.68, p < .06$; actual–society's ideal, $F(1, 236) = 7.13, p < .01$; and actual–society's ought, $F(1, 217) = 2.78, p < .10$. The pattern of means suggested that dominance interactions reduced discrepancies for men in comparison to women, and communal interactions reduced discrepancies for women in comparison to men. For all of the standards of comparison except personal ideals, simple effects tests yielded sex effects to recall of dominance relations, $F(1, 236) = 2.81, p < .10$ for personal ought, $F(1, 236) = 11.07, p < .01$ for society's ideal, and $F(1, 217) = 8.20, p < .01$ for society's ought. However, sex effects were not as strong with communal interactions, and only the comparison between actual and personal ought approached significance, $F(1, 236) = 3.20, p < .10$. It may be that the overall finding that women had higher discrepancies than men masked the tendency for communal relations to lower women's discrepancies more than men's. Indeed, within-sex comparisons for women revealed significantly smaller discrepancies to communal than to dominant interactions for three of the four self-standards ($p_s < .05$ for all comparisons except society's ought).

Analyses were also conducted on the percentage of attributes (out of total listed) that reflected communal qualities and the percentage that reflected dominant ones. For percentage of communal attributes, a marginal interaction was obtained between

sex and relationship type, $F(1, 235) = 3.01, p < .10$. Simple effects tests revealed that women who recalled communal interactions listed a greater percentage of communal attributes ($M = 29.2\%$) than did any other condition (M s = 23.4%, 22.8%, and 23.5%, for male-dominant, male-communal, and female-dominant, respectively; p s $< .05$). Analyses on percentage of dominant attributes revealed a significant sex effect, $F(1, 235) = 5.27, p < .05$, although the interaction between sex and relationship type was not significant, $F(1, 235) = 2.01, ns$; men listed a greater percentage of these attributes when recalling a dominant interaction ($M = 6.6\%$) than did women ($M = 4.5\%$) and similarly listed a greater percentage when recalling a communal interaction ($M = 5.5\%$) than did women ($M = 4.0\%$).

Correlations Among Measures

Good feelings were negatively correlated with bad feelings ($r = -.65, p < .001$) and were positively correlated with feelings of being energized ($r = .38, p < .001$). Good feelings tended to be associated with smaller actual self-self-standard discrepancies (r s ranged from $-.20, p < .01$ to $-.08, ns$) and bad feelings tended to be associated with larger discrepancies (r s ranged from $.22, p < .01$ to $.09, ns$).

Discussion

This initial questionnaire experiment suggested that positive feelings about the self in a social interaction depend on the extent to which the interaction reflects the stereotypic sex role norms of dominance for men and warmth and intimacy for women. It also provided some initial, albeit limited, support for the idea that sex role congruent experiences direct affect primarily for people who have incorporated sex-typed norms into their self-concepts.

Ratings of good feelings after recalling a dominant or communal interaction provided the strongest support for our hypotheses. Among participants who indicated that it was important for them to be similar to same-sex norms and to differentiate from opposite-sex norms, men reported more positive feelings than did women after recalling interactions involving dominance, assertiveness, and power, whereas women reported (marginally) more positive feelings than did men after recalling interactions involving warmth, caring, and concern for others. No sex differences emerged in good feelings for participants who reported that sex-typed norms were less relevant self-guides.

The personal relevance of sex role norms had no effect on size of the discrepancies between participants' ratings of who they actually are and ratings of self-standards, reflected in who they would ideally like to be and who they ought to be. In general, discrepancies were smaller with recall of sex role congruent interactions, regardless of whether participants considered sex role norms personally relevant. Thus, men showed smaller discrepancies than did women between their actual selves and their ideal or ought self-standards when recalling a dominant interaction. A less marked trend for women to show smaller discrepancies than men when recalling a communal interaction was also apparent. These results were generally uniform across ideal and ought self-standards and across the origin

of these standards in participants' personal beliefs or in societal beliefs. Uniformity across the origin of the self-standards is consistent with the notion that participants had, in general, embraced the societal standards in their own belief systems.

In general, then, the findings of the first experiment suggest that people feel better about themselves when engaging in sex role congruent behaviors and that this effect, at least for ratings of good feelings, is stronger for people who personally endorse sex role norms. Although the predicted pattern emerged nicely on ratings of good feelings, the patterns obtained on self-discrepancy were weaker and less consistent. We suspect that part of the unreliability in effects stems from our methodology. The questionnaire approach provided a realistic, ecologically valid test of our hypotheses by having participants recall an experience from their everyday lives in which they assumed a dominant or a communal role in relation to others. However, it provided minimal control over the kind of interactions participants selected or the extent to which they were able to retrieve the emotion-inducing aspects of those earlier experiences.

The lack of experimental control also renders our results vulnerable to several alternate explanations. Perhaps participants felt especially good about themselves when they were easily able to complete the experimental instructions and identify an appropriate scenario. The good feelings reported by high-relevance participants recalling sex role congruent interactions may thus have arisen from their sense of task mastery. However, participants' reports of the extent to which the retrieved scenarios matched the experimental instructions do not support this interpretation. Participants who judged sex role norms highly relevant did not report that they were especially successful at retrieving sex role congruent scenarios.

Alternatively, the types of interactions recalled may be responsible for the obtained effects. Perhaps women, especially those for whom sex role norms were highly relevant, were able to recall successful, personally gratifying communal interactions more than men. In a like manner, men, especially those judging norms as highly self-relevant, may have been able to recall positively toned dominant interactions more than women. In this account, the obtained effects stem not from the sex role congruence of the recalled interactions, but rather from their affective tone or some other feature that covaried with the experimental groupings. Indeed, the analyses suggested a variety of systematic differences in the scenarios recalled. The manipulation check revealed that participants were more successful at recalling an appropriate communal than dominant interaction. Furthermore, content analyses of the interactions revealed that communal ones tended to involve only one other person and that this other was more likely to be female than male. Dominant interactions emerged in relations with single others as well as in relations with groups of two or more (see Baumeister & Sommer, 1997), and these others tended to be of the same sex as the participant.

The second experiment identified the effects of sex-typed relationships on self-evaluation in a laboratory context that provided greater control over the interactions studied. Participants experienced sex role congruent or noncongruent relations by empathizing with a series of slide depictions of communal or dominant relationships. In general, our predictions for the second experiment were identical to those for the initial investiga-

tion, except that we anticipated that stronger effects would emerge in this more highly controlled setting.

Experiment 2

Initial Pretesting to Select Depictions of Relationships

Thirty-four male and 34 female undergraduate introductory psychology students from Texas A&M University participated in the pretest. A set of 179 pictures of interpersonal relationships was compiled from a variety of sources including current magazines, personal photographs, books, and newspapers. Participants were presented with a slide of each picture for 5 s and rated, on four 9-point scales anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 9 (*very*), the extent to which the pictures represented people who were (a) controlled by others, weak, and submissive; (b) isolated, alone, and disconnected from others; (c) connected to, caring about, and close to others; and (d) powerful, dominant, and in command of others. Participants were told to use an "objective perspective" rather than a personal, subjective stance.

On the basis of these ratings, 15 slides were selected to represent communal relationships, and 15 were selected to represent dominant relationships. Slides were selected so that they (a) received high ratings on the target dimension but neutral ratings on the other dimensions, (b) were perceived similarly by male and female raters, and (c) included a representation of male and female stimulus persons for each relationship type (i.e., for communal slides, four had female focal characters, four had male focal characters, and seven had mixed-sex groupings; for dominance slides, four had female focal characters, seven had male focal characters, and four had mixed-sex groupings).

The set of communal slides included, for example, depictions of an elderly woman hugging a male teenager, two Boston Celtics basketball players hugging each other, and a father showing a greeting card to his wife and children. Analyses revealed that the communal slides received ratings in caring ($M_s = 8.19$ and 8.55 for male and female raters, respectively) that were significantly higher than the midpoint of the rating scale (i.e., 4.50 , $p_s < .05$ for both sexes). Ratings of submission ($M_s = 4.65$ and 3.71 for men and women) and dominance ($M_s = 4.39$ and 4.35 for men and women) did not differ from each other or from the scale midpoint. Ratings of isolation ($M_s = 3.22$ and 2.67 for men and women) did not vary across the sex of the rater, although they were marginally different from the scale midpoint ($p_s < .10$).

The set of dominant slides included depictions of a female boxer practicing with her coach, four men debating, and a uniformed woman leading others in a military parade. Analyses revealed that these slides were rated significantly higher in dominance ($M_s = 6.85$ and 7.05 for male and female raters, respectively) than the scale midpoint ($p_s < .05$ for both sexes), whereas ratings of caring ($M_s = 4.22$ and 4.19 for men and women), submission ($M_s = 4.43$ and 4.72 for men and women), and isolation ($M_s = 4.59$ and 4.69 for men and women) did not differ from each other or from the scale midpoint.⁴

The pretesting thus demonstrated that the slide depictions appropriately captured the central features of sex-typed normative interactions. The communal interactions involved warmth

and intimacy and were neutral with respect to dominance, whereas the dominant interactions involved power and assertion over others but were neutral with respect to communion.

Method

Participants

One hundred twenty-five male and 90 female introductory psychology students from Texas A&M University participated to fulfill a course requirement.

Procedure

In same-sex groups of approximately 25 persons, participants were told that they would give their reactions to slides depicting people in various settings. They first completed the measure of self-relevance of sex role norms (see below).

While viewing the set of communal or dominance slides, participants were instructed to spend the first 10 s for each slide imagining themselves in the scene depicted. They were not supposed to identify with any one character in particular but rather to vicariously experience each of the situations. Participants then spent 10 s recording how good, bad, and aroused each relationship made them feel (see below). In its entirety, the slide show took approximately 5 min. Finally, participants responded to questionnaires assessing the discrepancy between their actual, ought, and ideal self-concepts (Higgins, 1987). They were then debriefed and dismissed.

Measures

Affective responses to individual slides. After imagining themselves in the scene depicted in each slide, participants indicated "how they felt right now." On scales anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 9 (*extremely*), participants indicated the extent to which the picture (a) gave them positive feelings, (b) gave them negative feelings, and (c) made them feel aroused. Participants provided these ratings for each of the 15 slides, and analyses were conducted on scores aggregated across the total set of slides to yield a mean for good feelings (coefficient alpha across the 15 slides was $.91$), for bad feelings ($\alpha = .86$), and for aroused ($\alpha = .89$).

Preliminary analyses were also conducted on the raw (nonaggregated) slide ratings to determine whether participants identified more strongly with slides that depicted same- rather than opposite-sex characters and whether they might, as a result, have given more intense affect ratings to same-sex slides. ANOVAs were performed on the affect ratings for the communal slides and then the dominance slides by using a 2 (participant's sex) \times 3 (slide characters: men, women, or mixed-sex groupings) design with repeated measures on the last variable. For the communal slides, the critical Participant's Sex \times Slide Character's Sex interaction was not significant for ratings of good feelings or arousal. The interaction for ratings of bad feelings, $F(2, 420) = 2.90$, $p < .06$, reflected that women indicated stronger bad feelings to mixed-sex interactions than did men, whereas participants did not differ in their reactions to slides depicting only men or only women. None of the interactions reached significance for the dominance slides.

Beliefs about actual, ideal, and ought self-concepts. By using the belief-elicitation procedure described in Experiment 1, participants listed up to 10 attributes they actually possessed, rated on 5-point scales the extent to which they possessed each attribute, and then rated on new

⁴ The dominant slides selected thus presented unambiguous interactions in which viewers identified with the assertive, powerful individual and did not feel submissive to another person's dominance.

5-point scales how much each of the four self-standards possessed each attribute (i.e., personal ideal, personal ought, society's ideal, and society's ought). Discrepancy scores were formed by subtracting ratings of actual attributes from those in each of the four self-guide standards (Higgins, 1987), yielding the mean divergence (in absolute values) between the attribute ratings in the actual–personal ideal pair, the actual–personal ought pair, the actual–society's ideal pair, and the actual–society's ought pair.

In addition, the attributes participants listed were categorized by two independent coders as reflecting communal attributes, dominant attributes, or as unrelated to either of these qualities (intrater reliability, Cohen's $\kappa = .81$).

Self-relevance of sex role norms. Participants rated the personal relevance of same-sex and opposite-sex norms on the four scales used in Experiment 1. As in the prior experiment, high self-relevance of sex role norms was defined as those participants scoring in the top fourth of the distribution on both scales. Analyses compared this high norm-relevance group ($n = 45$) to those for whom sex role norms were less personally relevant ($n = 166$).

Results

The data were analyzed according to Participant's Sex \times Relationship Type (communal vs. dominant) \times Self-Relevance of Sex Role Norms (high vs. moderate–low) ANOVA designs.

Affect Ratings

Ratings of good feelings yielded the predicted three-way interaction, $F(1, 200) = 5.71, p < .05$. This interaction was explored with simple two-way ANOVAs within levels of norm relevance. As anticipated, among high-relevance participants, the interaction between sex and relationship type was significant, $F(1, 200) = 17.36, p < .001$. Simple effects decomposition indicated that high-relevance women reported significantly greater good feelings than did high-relevance men on viewing communal relationships, $F(1, 200) = 50.98, p < .001$, and high-relevance men reported greater good feelings than did women on viewing dominance relationships, $F(1, 200) = 4.90, p < .05$ (see Table 3). Among participants rating sex role norms as not highly relevant, the interaction between sex and relationship type was also significant, $F(1, 200) = 8.80, p < .01$, although simple effects tests revealed a sex difference only for communal interactions, with low-relevance women responding more positively than men, $F(1, 200) = 8.99, p < .01$, and no sex difference emerged with dominance interactions. In addition, the overall ANOVA design yielded a significant two-way interaction between sex and relationship type, $F(1, 200) = 20.58, p < .001$, which is best interpreted in the context of the predicted three-way interaction. The overall design also yielded main effects reflecting greater good feelings for communal than for dominance relationships, $F(1, 200) = 262.40, p < .001$, and greater good feelings among women than men, $F(1, 200) = 10.67, p < .001$. These main effects also appeared in the simple two-way analyses.

Ratings of bad feelings yielded a significant two-way interaction between sex and relationship type, $F(1, 199) = 11.63, p < .001$, reflecting that women ($M = 3.93$) reported greater bad feelings for dominance depictions than did men ($M = 3.26$), $F(1, 199) = 6.62, p < .01$, and no sex difference emerged in bad feelings for the communal relationships ($M_s = 1.84$ and

2.03 for women and men, respectively). In addition, the main effect for relationship type, $F(1, 199) = 153.87, p < .001$, reflected stronger bad feelings for dominance ($M = 3.55$) than for communal relationships ($M = 1.95$).

Ratings of arousal yielded a significant three-way interaction, $F(1, 200) = 3.96, p < .05$, which was explored with simple two-way ANOVAs within levels of norm relevance. Among high norm-relevance participants, the Sex \times Relationship Type interaction was significant, $F(1, 200) = 9.94, p < .01$, and simple effects tests revealed that women reported higher levels of arousal on viewing communal relationships than did men, $F(1, 200) = 21.29, p < .001$, and men reported marginally more arousal than women on viewing dominance relationships, $F(1, 200) = 6.04, p < .10$ (see Table 3). The two-way interaction for low-relevance participants also approached significance, $F(1, 200) = 3.28, p < .10$. In addition, the overall ANOVA yielded a significant two-way interaction between sex and relationship type, $F(1, 200) = 9.28, p < .01$, which is best interpreted in the context of the predicted three-way interaction.

Self-Concept Beliefs About Actual, Ideal, and Ought Selves

Discrepancies between participants' actual self-ratings and each of the four self-standards were analyzed with a Sex \times Interaction Type \times Self-Relevance \times Type of Self-Standard (personal ideals vs. personal oughts vs. society's ideals vs. society's oughts) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last variable. As can be seen in Table 3, the anticipated three-way interaction pattern emerged across all of the actual self–self-standard discrepancies, $F(1, 194) = 7.60, p < .01$, and did not vary with type of standard rated ($F < 1$). In addition, the Sex \times Relationship Type interaction was significant, $F(1, 194) = 9.91, p < .01$, and this is best interpreted in the context of the predicted three-way interaction.

Univariate analyses on the actual self–self-standard discrepancies similarly revealed interactions between sex, relationship type, and self-relevance of norm (all $p_s < .06$). To explore these further, we conducted two-way analyses within level of norm relevance. For participants judging sex role norms highly relevant, the Sex \times Relationship Type interaction was significant for all self-standards, $F(1, 202) = 13.98, p < .001$ for actual–personal ideal; $F(1, 201) = 8.63, p < .01$ for actual–personal ought; $F(1, 196) = 5.30, p < .05$ for actual–society's ideal; and $F(1, 198) = 7.72, p < .01$ for actual–society's ought. Simple effects decomposition demonstrated further that the pattern of this interaction among high-relevance participants was as anticipated: When exposed to communal relationships, women had lower discrepancy scores than did men ($p_s < .05$ for all self-standards except society's ideal, which did not yield a significant sex difference). When exposed to dominance relationships, men had lower discrepancy scores than did women ($p_s < .001$). When simple two-way analyses were conducted on participants who rated sex-role norms less relevant, the Sex \times Relationship Type interaction did not approach significance for any self-standard.

Analyses were also conducted on the content coding of the listed attributes. Percentage of communal attributes yielded a significant interaction between sex and relationship type, $F(1,$

Table 3
Mean Positive Affect, Arousal, and Actual Self–Self-Standard Discrepancy, Experiment 2

Participants' rating	Communal relationships				Dominant relationships			
	Low self-relevance		High self-relevance		Low self-relevance		High self-relevance	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Good feelings								
<i>M</i>	7.40	5.91	8.05	6.05	4.40	4.25	4.43	5.05
<i>SD</i>	0.80	1.05	0.74	1.39	0.91	0.92	1.07	0.73
Arousal								
<i>M</i>	5.06	3.79	5.83	3.99	4.05	4.42	4.00	4.98
<i>SD</i>	0.61	1.56	1.97	1.96	1.20	1.10	1.44	0.88
Discrepancy between actual self and:								
Personal ideal								
<i>M</i>	0.84	0.89	0.54	1.04	0.81	0.95	1.21	0.63
<i>SD</i>	0.47	0.61	0.39	0.89	0.38	0.51	0.61	0.30
Personal ought								
<i>M</i>	0.57	0.85	0.60	0.92	0.65	0.84	1.14	0.63
<i>SD</i>	0.47	0.68	0.39	0.56	0.21	0.35	0.50	0.32
Society's ideal								
<i>M</i>	0.73	0.88	0.85	1.03	0.79	0.92	1.27	0.75
<i>SD</i>	0.44	0.61	0.49	0.74	0.37	0.47	0.66	0.28
Society's ought								
<i>M</i>	0.81	1.01	0.76	1.10	0.77	1.05	1.15	0.67
<i>SD</i>	0.44	0.56	0.48	0.59	0.46	0.48	0.57	0.37

Note. Higher means reflect greater good feelings and arousal on scales ranging from 1 (*very weak feelings*) to 9 (*very strong feelings*) and greater discrepancies between actual self and self-standards across the attributes participants listed. Attributes were rated on 5-point scales, thus discrepancies could range from 0 to 4.

193) = 6.85, $p < .01$, reflecting that, after viewing communal interactions, women generated a greater percentage of such attributes ($M = 34.0\%$) than did men ($M = 21.9\%$), $F(1, 193) = 17.66$, $p < .001$, whereas no differences emerged in communal qualities to dominant interactions ($M_s = 26.0\%$ and 25.7% for women and men, respectively). Analyses on percentage of dominant attributes did not yield any significant effects. As in Study 1, few dominance-related attributes were listed by any participants ($M = 8.1\%$). This does not stem from a weakness in the manipulation; dominant interactions were sufficiently potent to reduce self–self-standard discrepancies for high norm-relevant men. Instead, the low frequency of dominant attributes may reflect our difficulties in discriminating dominant attributes from related constructs in participants' self-descriptions. For example, we did not classify performance indicators (e.g., obtaining an advanced degree) as dominant attributes, although in real life they enable self-assertion in addition to reflecting competence and providing freedom in choice of career. In hindsight, it would have been useful to have obtained participants' direct ratings of the meaning of the attributes and to have relied on these in our analyses.

Correlations Among Measures

Moderate to large correlations emerged within the ratings of affect and of self-discrepancy. That is, good and bad feelings were related ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$) and arousal was related to good feelings ($r = .51$, $p < .01$) but not to bad feelings ($r =$

$-.03$). The discrepancies between actual self and the various self-standards were also correlated (r_s ranged from $.57$ to $.85$, $ps < .01$). In addition, meaningful correlations emerged between these types of measures. Good feelings were associated with smaller discrepancies with personal standards ($r_s = -.25$ and $-.17$ for actual–personal ideal and actual–personal ought, respectively, $ps < .05$) and bad feelings were related to larger discrepancies with personal standards ($r_s = .18$ and $.18$ for actual–personal ideal and actual–personal ought, respectively, $ps < .05$).

Discussion

The highly controlled setting of Experiment 2 provided clear evidence that, for people who judge sex role norms to be self-relevant, a positive self-concept results from sex role congruent experiences. Dominant interactions generated stronger positive feelings and greater consistency between actual self and valued self-standards among high-relevance men than women, and communal interactions generated greater positive feelings and greater consistency with valued self-standards among high-relevance women than men.

As in Experiment 1, the comparisons with ideal and ought self-standards proved uniform across the source of the standard—whether participants envisioned these standards as represented by society's prescriptions or according to their own, personal interpretations. This correspondence between society's and participants' personal standards supports the idea that parti-

participants who judged societal sex role norms as highly relevant have adopted these standards as part of their own self-concept and incorporated them into their own personal self-guides.

Although our preferred explanation for the obtained results highlights motivational processes, information-processing mechanisms may also have been implicated in the present research. For example, women, especially those who considered sex-typed norms self-relevant, may have more easily identified with the communal interactions than did men and imagined themselves in the depicted scenes. Similarly, men for whom the norm was personally relevant may have identified more with the dominant interactions than did women. In general, we suspect that personally relevant norms direct processing of information much like other self-perceptions. Norm-relevant attributes likely direct attention to related features of an interaction, enhancing the salience of communal or dominant behaviors. Self-attributes may also direct interpretation of behaviors, yielding interpretations in which behaviors are contrasted from or assimilated to prototypic communal or dominant acts. Self-attributes may also enhance subsequent recall from memory of attribute-related behaviors. However, information-processing mechanisms alone are not sufficient to account for the effect of norm-relevant experiences on self-evaluation in the present research. The content coding on participants' listed attributes in the self-discrepancy measures revealed that exposure to communal interactions enhanced the salience of communal attributes in women's self-concepts more than in men's. However, increases in participants' good feelings occurred only for women who judged that the sex role norm was personally relevant. For those who judged it less relevant, the relationship depictions apparently increased salience of sex-appropriate attributes, but these did not yield an increase in favorable self-evaluation. Thus, the extent to which experiences matched valued self-standards appeared to be critical in generating the present effects.

Although our hypotheses were restricted to participants for whom sex-typed social norms were self-relevant, it is interesting to consider the responses of those for whom the norms were not highly relevant. Low-relevance participants might represent those who have adopted nontraditional sex role norms, and thus might be expected to respond in the reverse manner to high-relevance participants (i.e., women more positive to dominance interactions than men and men more positive to communal interactions than women). However, no consistent pattern emerged across measures for low-relevance participants: On positive affect, they demonstrated a similar but significantly weaker effect than did the high-relevance ones, and on the actual self-self-standard discrepancy scores, no differences emerged among those low in relevance. In an attempt to identify more clearly the unique responses of low-relevance participants, we conducted additional analyses that separated the low-relevance group into those for whom the norm was neutral in relevance ($n = 100$) from those for whom the norm was especially low in relevance ($n = 66$). For the extremely low-relevance group, the type of interaction had little effect, and only a sex difference emerged such that women gave higher ratings of positive affect than men and reported lower actual self-self-standard discrepancies than did men. Thus, the low-relevance group did not yield meaningful results, whether we defined low relevance liberally to include

those giving neutral ratings or narrowly to include only those for whom the norm was very low in relevance.

Low-relevance participants' failure to respond systematically to our variations in interaction supports our claim that, for this group, sex-typed social norms are not important motivators of social behavior and thus do not elicit any coherent, integrated reactions. It may be that low-relevance participants are responsive to an alternate set of norms for men and women, perhaps ones that do not involve communal or dominance relations. Alternately, low-relevance persons may not be sensitive to any sex-related normative standards for social behavior and instead may use other normative self-guides, such as the norms of humanitarian or religious values. It is also possible that our low norm-relevance participants represent a developmental stage of late adolescence-early adulthood in which people are still clarifying their self-standards and have not yet clearly articulated any particular set of standards to direct responses in a coherent manner.

Our analysis of normative effects has emphasized the positive, self-enhancing consequences of conforming to valued social norms. It is also possible that the present findings reflect declines in the favorability of self-concept beliefs that occur with experiences that are noncongruent with valued norms (i.e., dominance for women and communion for men). It is fortunate that we obtained in Experiment 2 preslide and postslide assessments of self-esteem in addition to the affect and self-discrepancy measures.⁵ Although the self-esteem scales did not prove to

⁵ In addition to the measures reported in the text, Experiment 2 also assessed participants' self-esteem on a number of standard scales, including Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Inventory, the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (Helmreich, Stapp, & Ervin, 1974), Heatherton and Polivy's (1991) State Self-Esteem Scale, and Kammann and Flett's (1983) Affectometer 2. Although we had initially anticipated that, for people who valued sex-typed norms, self-esteem ratings would vary with norm congruence of interactions, few meaningful patterns emerged. This result is perhaps not surprising for Rosenberg's measure, which taps global, stable self-evaluation. Furthermore, the content of the other scales may not have been ideal to test our hypotheses. The Texas Social Behavior Inventory assesses primarily social dominance and self-assertion, and Heatherton and Polivy's social subscale emphasizes self-presentation to others and concern with others' evaluation. These three scales did not tap intimacy, warmth, and other communal bases for positive self-evaluation, despite the fact that these featured prominently in participants' spontaneously generated self-descriptions. The Affectometer 2 (Kammann & Flett, 1983) is a global measure of current self-evaluation and appeared to be the most promising measure for our purposes. Participants indicated on unnumbered lines anchored by *not at all* and *all of the time*, the extent to which each of the 40 scale items described them (e.g., "I like myself"). Pre- and postslide ratings were calculated by measuring the distance (in centimeters) of participants' ratings from one of the scale end points (i.e., ranging from 0 to 14.3 cm). Analyses on change in ratings on the Affectometer 2 are reported in the discussion. In addition, initial, preslide assessment scores on this scale were useful for determining whether the obtained pattern of findings was uniform across initial self-esteem. The upper and lower quartile groups of participants were selected, and analyses were conducted by using a Sex \times Relationship Type \times Pre-Self-Esteem design. As we had anticipated, the positive effects of sex role congruent interactions were not dependent on participants' preslide self-esteem. The only consistent pattern was that participants who entered the study with higher self-esteem gave more favorable self-evaluations during the experiment.

be very sensitive to the effects of sex-typed interactions, the comparison between pre- and postexposure scores on the Affectometer 2 (Kammann & Flett, 1983) is worth considering, because it provides insight into the direction of change. A Sex \times Relationship Type \times Relevance of Sex Role Norm \times Pre-Versus Postslide Assessment ANOVA with repeated measures on the last variable yielded the anticipated four-way interaction, $F(1, 186) = 3.89, p = .05$. Simple effects tests revealed that, for participants rating sex role norms highly relevant, men viewing dominance relationships increased in self-esteem ($M_{\text{change}} = .18$) marginally more than did women ($M_{\text{change}} = -.02$), $F(1, 186) = 3.47, p < .07$, and women viewing communal relationships increased in self-esteem ($M_{\text{change}} = .30$) more than did men ($M_{\text{change}} = .07$), $F(1, 186) = 4.39, p < .05$. Note that norm-noncongruent experiences essentially had no effect: High-relevance women did not shift significantly to dominance interactions and high-relevance men did not shift significantly to communal interactions. In addition, no clear effects were obtained for participants for whom sex role norms were not self-relevant.

The lack of effects for noncongruent interactions might seem surprising given that our definition of high norm relevance included the importance of manifesting same-sex normative behavior and avoiding opposite-sex norms. However, the more potent effect of norm-congruent relationships (compared with noncongruent relationships) is consistent with the idea that people's self-concepts are more likely to derive from those qualities they possess (e.g., for women, "I am nurturant") than the qualities they lack (e.g., "I am not dominant;" see McGuire & McGuire's, 1992, 1996, cognitive positivity bias). In general, we suspect that the respective impact of norm-congruent and noncongruent behavior varies with behavioral domain. Sex role norms for dominance and communal interactions are not associated with strong negative sanctions, and thus failure to conform may not generate strong emotions. However, negative feelings on transgression may be powerful determinants of norm compliance in other domains, such as when people violate social norms concerning aggression.

General Discussion

At a general level, this research was designed to augment theories of social norms that have considered how normative beliefs structure interaction with others, forming the basis for interaction partners' expectations and imposing external constraints on the actor's behavior in that interaction. These earlier accounts considered consensually shared normative beliefs and specified processes that should be especially impactful in public, role-regulated contexts (Wood & Karten, 1986; Wood & Rhodes, 1992). We suggest that normative prescriptions can also generate norm-congruent behavior through self-related processes, at least when they are incorporated into personal beliefs about appropriate and desirable behavior for oneself.

Theories of norms have in the past distinguished between injunctive or prescriptive norms, which represent what people should do or would ideally do, and descriptive norms, which represent what most people do (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Schaffer, 1983). Injunctive norms motivate action because of the potential rewards for conforming behavior and punishments for nonconforming behavior. The present research demon-

strated that these rewards include the good feelings and positive self-concept that result from acting in valued, norm-congruent ways. Descriptive norms, in contrast, provide guides to useful, adaptive behavior. Unlike injunctive norms, the impact of descriptive norms should not depend on the relevance of the norm for self-identity. Instead, descriptive norms are likely to direct behavior when people are concerned with the effectiveness of their actions and are motivated to rely on the information provided by social consensus. For example, when highly uncertain about a task, people have been found to rely on others' judgments to define the correct response (Sherif, 1936/1966).

Self-relevant norms represent a broad class of rules and beliefs in addition to social stereotypes. Groups establish norms that can form an important part of the self-identity of group members and others who value the group (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Conformity to valued group norms is likely to yield the kinds of positive feelings about the self found in the present experiment (Oakes & Turner, 1980; Pool, Wood, & Leck, 1997; Wood, Pool, Leck, & Purvis, 1996). However, conforming to social norms does not always yield positive self-beliefs. Some social stereotypes do not represent ideals but instead identify negative attributes and poor achievement outcomes by certain social groups (e.g., women's math performance, African Americans' academic performance). Conformity to these kinds of norms may be self-affirming but not yield a positive self-concept. According to Steele (1997), the perception that such norms are self-relevant and apply to one's performance in a particular domain represents "stereotype threat." People experiencing this threat perform below their capabilities and may disidentify with the domain (e.g., women judging math as irrelevant to self).

The present experiments examined a single link in the relation between norm-relevant experiences and the self-concept. In everyday life, norms are likely to have a reciprocal relation to behavior: Norm-relevant interactions lead to particular self-evaluations (as in the present research), and in turn, the desire for positive or affirming self-evaluations directs exposure to and structuring of interactions. Thus, the tendency for people to select into certain social roles and to establish certain types of relationships with others in daily life can be understood as part of the process of obtaining a favorable, affirmative self-definition. Women for whom sex role norms are personally relevant are likely to seek out and establish intimate, emotionally expressive, nurturant relations with others, in part because these relations yield a favorable self-evaluation and affirm their self-concepts. In a similar manner, men for whom sex role norms are personally relevant may select themselves into and establish social interactions that involve dominance, power, and self-assertion.

The idea that social norms can inform people's self-concepts and direct behavior through self-related processes may explain the sometimes surprising stability of normative beliefs. As we noted at the beginning of this article, sex differences in social orientation have continued to be a focus of the popular psychology literature, despite the increasing convergence of men's and women's roles in Western societies in the past decades. Changes in sex stereotypes corresponding to these converging roles will likely involve revision of consensually held images of men and women as well as of the personally adopted self-guides of indi-

vidual men and women. Indeed, given that only about one fourth of the college students in our research considered normative sex role standards as important self-guides, it may be that such change is well under way.

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Sternberg Appointed Editor of *Contemporary Psychology* (*APA Review of Books*), 1999–2004

The Publications and Communications Board of the American Psychological Association announces the appointment of Robert J. Sternberg, Yale University, as editor of *Contemporary Psychology (APA Review of Books)* for a 6-year term beginning in 1999.

Sternberg, at the request of the Publications and Communications Board, as well as many readers, will be embarking on a program to make the journal more timely, more interesting, and more relevant to psychologists during his editor-elect year in 1998. Some of the changes envisioned include fewer but longer and more thoughtful reviews of books, reviews only of "new" books (with a few noteworthy exceptions), comparative textbook reviews at strategic times of the year, and changes in publication frequency and pricing. Sternberg welcomes suggestions for improving the journal and serving reader needs.

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