People vary in the extent to which they expect to be stereotyped, and these differences in “stigma consciousness” have cognitive and behavioral consequences that contribute to people’s experience of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Pinel, 1999). Here it is argued that high levels of stigma consciousness also have significant interpersonal consequences. Consistent with this claim, female participants who were high in stigma consciousness acted critically toward male participants whom they believed to be sexist. Moreover, these critical behaviors elicited unfavorable responses from the male participants, responses which then provided fodder for the women’s belief that they would not like the men. The results are discussed in light of previous work on the target’s perspective on stereotyping and call into question the wisdom of adopting a vigilant stance when interacting with out-group members. © 2001 Elsevier Science (USA)

Key Words: stigma consciousness; targets of stereotypes; intergroup tension.

Despite decades of research on the topic, the answer to the question of how to foster intergroup harmony continues to elude us. Why is it so hard for members of different groups to coexist peacefully? Although, no single answer to this question exists, I propose that the problem intensifies when people adopt a vigilant, distrustful stance when interacting with out-group members.

There are no doubt good reasons why people might adopt a vigilant stance when in the company of out-group members. People who suspect that they might be discriminated against can sometimes compensate for this possibility and thus prevent it from happening (Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995). Moreover, the results of several research investigations indicate that the belief that one is being discriminated against allows people to maintain their global self-esteem (e.g., Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991) and performance self-esteem (Ruggero & Taylor, 1997) in the face of negative feedback. Together, this work suggests positive consequences associated with believing that one lives in a prejudiced world.

Unfortunately, several negative consequences seem to accompany this belief as well. Although believing one has been (or will be) discriminated against can protect one’s performance self-esteem, it also can negatively impact one’s self-certainty (Brown, Pinel, Rentfrow, & Lee, 2001) and job satisfaction (Pinel, Chua, & Paulin, 2001). In addition, targets who believe that they might be discriminated against prior to performing a stereotype-relevant task often suffer from anxiety and impaired performance (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

I argue that the belief that one lives in a prejudiced world also has some very negative interpersonal consequences. Although believing one’s interaction partner to be prejudiced sometimes enables people to avoid being stereotyped (Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995), this belief could also set in motion a chain of events that perpetuates intergroup tension and divisiveness. Consistent with the idea, researchers have observed that people who expect to be treated negatively often elicit negative reactions from others (Curtis & Miller, 1986; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998; Farina, Allen, & Saul, 1968; Farina, Gliha, Boudreau, Allen, & Sherman, 1971). In one study, Farina et al. (1968) led some of their participants
(heretofore “targets”) to believe that their interaction partners (heretofore “perceivers”) thought they were either mentally ill or had a sexual preference for members of the same sex. Although the perceivers did not actually believe the targets to be members of these stigmatized groups, these perceivers initiated conversation with the targets less frequently than did perceivers paired with targets in a control condition. These findings suggest that something about the targets’ behavior elicited these responses from the unknowing perceivers.

More direct evidence that targets of negative beliefs sometimes behave in ways to elicit negativity from their interaction partners comes from Curtis and Miller’s (1986) study. These researchers observed that targets who believed their interaction partners disliked them, as compared to targets who thought their interaction partners liked them, actually disclosed less to their partners, exuded less warmth, and disagreed with their partners more. Not surprisingly, these behaviors seemed to have a negative impact on the relationship: participants interacting with targets who thought they were disliked actually liked those targets less than did participants who interacted with targets who thought they were liked.

Curtis and Miller’s (1986) study has important implications for intergroup interactions. As is the case with people who believe their interaction partner does not like them personally, people who believe that their interaction partner does not like members of their group might behave in ways that disrupt the interaction. This should be particularly true for people who are highly attuned to their stereotyped status, i.e., people high in stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999).

**Stigma Consciousness**

Stigma consciousness refers to individual differences in the extent to which members of stereotyped groups believe that their stereotyped status permeates interactions with members of the out-group, or, in the extent to which they believe they live in a “stereotyping” world (Pinel, 1999). People who are high in stigma consciousness believe that stereotypes about their group play a tremendous role in their lives, particularly with respect to the way out-group members treat them; people low in stigma consciousness, although certainly aware of stereotypes about their group (Crocker & Major, 1989), barely give their stereotyped status a moment’s thought.

To capture this individual difference among targets of stereotypes, Pinel (1999) developed the Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (the SCQ). First developed for use with women, this questionnaire has now been validated for use with people of many different races and ethnicities, gay men and lesbians, service workers, and remedial students, among others. This 10-item measure asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement to statements pertaining to the extent to which stereotypes about their group affect them and play a role in their interactions with members of the out-group. Sample items from the SCQ for Women include “When interacting with men, I feel as though they interpret all of my behaviors in terms of the fact that I am a woman” and “Stereotypes about women have not affected me personally.” To modify the questionnaire for use with a particular group, one simply changes the in-group and the out-group to which the item refers.

To date, the research conducted on stigma consciousness indicates that it represents an important way in which targets of stereotypes may differ from one another. Regardless of the particular group under study, the individuals comprising those groups do not all experience their stereotyped status in the same way. Furthermore, although one would expect people’s levels of stigma consciousness to fluctuate depending on situational factors (e.g., being the sole woman in a group of men; for a related argument see Cohen & Swim, 1995), data on the test–retest reliability of the SCQ suggest that levels of stigma consciousness remain relatively stable over a 1-month period, $r (42) = .76$, $p < .01$.

Of course, individual differences in stigma consciousness would mean little if they did not relate to important psychological variables. Indeed, Pinel and her colleagues have documented several negative consequences associated with high levels of stigma consciousness. At the intrapersonal level, Pinel (1999) observed that people high in stigma consciousness, in comparison to people low in stigma consciousness, are more likely to perceive discrimination against themselves and their group. At the behavioral level, researchers have observed that people high in stigma consciousness forego opportunities to remedy stereotypes about their group (Pinel, 1999, Study 6) and are those most vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat (Brown, Pinel, Rentfrow, & Lee, 2001).

The research conducted to date on stigma consciousness consistently supports the notion that people high in stigma consciousness are highly attuned to stereotype-relevant situations and strongly affected by them. If so, then women high in stigma consciousness should be particularly disturbed when interacting with a man whom they believe to be sexist and, consequently, particularly likely to adopt an interpersonal style that can create more intergroup tension than would otherwise exist. In this article I present one study testing this hypothesis.

**OVERVIEW**

Opposite-sex dyads participated in an experiment on “joint decision making.” Female participants, who were either high or low in stigma consciousness, received information indicating that their male partner was either sexist (sexist condition) or nonsexist (nonsexist condition) or received information irrelevant to their partner’s attitudes.
toward women (control condition). In actuality, all of the males had moderate attitudes toward women.

Following this “information” manipulation, participants received an opportunity to evaluate one another and learn of their evaluation; first the female participants evaluated their male partner; the men then read these evaluations and evaluated their female interaction partner. Finally, the women read these evaluations and indicated how much they liked their male interaction partner.

Women who are high in stigma consciousness should be particularly sensitive to information indicating that their male partner is indeed sexist. For this reason, I expected that female participants would rate their male partners most negatively when those females were high in stigma consciousness and believed their partners were sexist. Moreover, I expected the men to follow suit: specifically, I predicted that male participants paired with women high in stigma consciousness who believed the males to be sexist would rate their female partners more negatively than would male participants in any other condition. Finally, I expected female participants to like their male partners the least when those females were high in stigma consciousness and believed that their male partner was sexist.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Fifty-nine female and 59 male students participated in the experiment for partial fulfillment of a requirement for their introductory psychology course. All of the women had scored in the upper or lower third of the frequency distribution of the SCQ for Women, which was administered during a massive pretesting session held at the beginning of the semester. Theoretically, scores on the SCQ range from 0 to 60; in actuality, they ranged from 5 to 59. The frequency distribution for women is only slightly negatively skewed (skewness = −.18; M = 33.5; Median = 34; Mode = 33); it therefore would appear as though my participants were low in stigma consciousness and high in stigma consciousness in both the relative sense and the theoretical sense of the term.

To ensure that only men with moderate attitudes toward women would participate in the study, extreme scorers on Spence and Helmreich’s (1972) Attitudes Toward Women Questionnaire (AWS) were not recruited for participation. Here, extreme scorers included anyone who, after reverse coding, responded to each item with the most extreme response available (i.e., all “strongly disagree” or all “strongly agree”).

The data for 3 male–female pairs were not analyzed. In 1 of these pairs, the man and woman had been acquainted prior to participating in the study; in the other 2 pairs, the female expressed suspicion during the postexperimental interview. This left 26 male–female pairs in which the woman was low in stigma consciousness (M = 24.92) and 30 male–female pairs in which the woman was high in stigma consciousness (M = 42.23). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three information conditions in the 2 (stigma consciousness of woman: low, high) × 3 (information: control, nonsexist, sexist) design. The experimenter was blind with respect to the women’s stigma consciousness levels.

Procedure

One male and one female participated in each experimental session. When participants arrived for the experiment, a female experimenter escorted them to two separate lab cubicles. Once both participants had arrived, the experimenter introduced them (individually) to an investigation on joint decision making. Specifically, she explained that the journalism department had recently developed the prestigious “Journalist for a Day” award for junior and senior journalism majors and that they and another participant would be deciding who they thought should be the third recipient of this award. Participants learned that the recipient of this award wins a day-long opportunity to provide news coverage of an outdoor festival of his/her choice along with valuable experience that would make him/her a competitive candidate for graduate school.

Manipulating women’s beliefs about their partner. After participants read and signed their consent forms, they completed “several questionnaires relevant to hiring decisions.” Specifically, participants completed one short demographic form, two filler questionnaires, and the AWS.

After participants had completed their packets, the experimenter provided them with their partner’s supposed packet. All of the packets were arranged such that the demographic form was presented first, so that participants would know the sex of their partner immediately. Men in all three conditions and women in the control condition received the packet with the AWS removed. In contrast, females in the sexist and nonsexist conditions received a packet in which the actual AWS responses of their partners had been replaced by AWS responses indicating either that their partner endorsed liberal attitudes toward women (he strongly disagreed with 12 of the 15 AWS items and disagreed with the remaining 3) or conservative attitudes toward women (i.e., he strongly agreed with 12 of the 15 items and agreed with the remaining 3). These AWS responses were arranged such that they always followed the demographic form but preceded the filler questionnaires.

When the participants had reviewed their partner’s packets, the experimenter proceeded with the instructions for the “decision-making” phase of the experiment.

The “decision-making” phase. During this phase of the experiment, participants first learned that they would be (1) reviewing the applications of two candidates, (2) writing arguments in favor of one of the candidates and that the
After providing participants with the above roadmap of the decision-making phase of the experiment, the experimenter gave them approximately 3 min to review the application materials of the two candidates for the third prize. A separate sample of pilot participants had indicated that the quality of the two applicants was virtually identical. Thus, the applicants differed only with respect to their sex and their year in college: the female was a junior journalism major and the male was a senior journalism major. By differentiating the candidates in this way, each candidate seemed like a good choice. For instance, one could make a case for declaring the woman the winner because no woman had yet been granted the award. One could also make a case for declaring the man the winner, however, because he would not have another opportunity to apply for the award.

Women’s behavior toward their partners. After they had reviewed the application materials, the experimenter informed participants that they would be writing arguments in favor of just one candidate, casually grabbed one of the applications, and said, “Here, why don’t you write arguments in favor of this candidate.” Unbeknown to the participants, the experimenter made sure always to assign the male candidate to the men and the female candidate to the women.

Once the men and women had completed their arguments, the experimenter instructed the women to read each of their partner’s arguments and to rate each argument on 7-point scales ranging from “not at all” to “extremely” with respect to its quality and the extent to which they agreed with it. These quality and agreement ratings were averaged and used as the unit of analysis ($\alpha = .85$).

Men’s behavior toward their partners. Once the men rated the men’s arguments, the men examined those ratings. Next, the men read the women’s arguments and rated them on the same two dimensions described above. As with the women, these quality and agreement ratings were averaged and used as the unit of analysis ($\alpha = .84$).

Women’s final impressions of their partners. After the men finished rating the women’s arguments, the women reviewed those ratings. They then completed a 5-item measure of the extent to which they believed they were compatible with their partner. Specifically, women indicated, on 7-point scales ranging from “not at all” to “extremely,” the extent to which they agreed with items such as “The other participant and I probably disagree about a lot of things.” Four of the five items were combined to form an index of perceived compatibility ($\alpha = .91$); the remaining item was not included because it lowered alpha.

The experiment ended with a postexperimental interview during which the experimenter probed for suspicion and verified that the women in the sexist and nonsexist conditions had noticed their partner’s attitudes toward women. All had. Finally, the experimenter thoroughly debriefed, thanked, and excused each participant.

RESULTS

Because I use simultaneous regression to conduct my mediational analyses, for consistency’s sake, I analyzed all data reported here through use of simultaneous regression (for a review of contrast coding in linear regression, see Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Women’s Behavior toward the Men

I expected women high in stigma consciousness who believed their partner to be sexist to give their partner more negative ratings than women in the remaining five conditions. I tested this prediction through use of contrast coding in linear regression (see Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1995). Specifically, I entered the following contrast into my regression equation: 5, -1, -1, -1, -1, -1. In addition, in this same regression equation, I compared each group to the subsequent groups to test the four remaining orthogonal contrasts (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The contrast coding for both the primary contrast of interest and the remaining orthogonal contrasts (ROC’s) can be seen in Table 1.

The results of the regression analysis revealed that women high in stigma consciousness in the sexist condition did indeed rate their partner’s arguments more negatively than did women in the remaining conditions, $t(50) = 4.42$, $p < .01$, $\beta = -.51$. A test of the remaining orthogonal contrasts revealed a similar but weaker tendency for women low in stigma consciousness to rate their partner most
TABLE 2  
Women’s Argument Ratings as a Function of Stigma Consciousness and Information Condition  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigma consciousness</th>
<th>Information condition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The greater the value the more favorable the rating.*

negatively when they believed him to be sexist, \( t(50) = 2.1, p < .05, \beta = -.24 \). For ease of interpretation, I present the means for each condition in Table 2.

**Men’s Reactions to the Women**

Just as with the women’s ratings, I expected that men who interacted with women who were high in stigma consciousness and believed the men to be sexist would rate the women’s arguments more negatively than men in any of the remaining five conditions. A planned contrast with the same weights noted above confirmed this prediction, \( r(50) = 2.99, p < .01, \beta = -.38 \). None of the remaining contrasts emerged as significant, \( r \)’s ranging from 1.09 to .05, *ns*. As can be seen in Table 3, men in the high stigma consciousness/sexist condition did indeed give their female partners more negative ratings than did men all other conditions.

Given that the ratings of the men in the high stigma consciousness/sexist condition mirrored those of their partners, I next asked whether the women’s responses actually mediated the link between information condition and the men’s argument ratings. To answer this question, I computed the same analysis described above, adding the women’s ratings of their male partner’s arguments to the regression equation (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). When women’s argument ratings were controlled for in this way, the effect of information condition and stigma consciousness on the men’s argument ratings disappeared, \( t < 1 \), suggesting that the women’s ratings of the men’s arguments elicited the men’s behavior. These mediational analyses are illustrated in Fig. 1a.

**Women’s Final Beliefs about Their Partners**

Did women who believed their partner was sexist and who were high in stigma consciousness think they would be incompatible with their partner? A planned contrast testing this prediction suggests that this was indeed the case, \( t(50) = 7.13, p < .01, \beta = -.63 \). Table 4 shows that women perceived less compatibility between themselves and their partner when they were high in stigma consciousness and in the sexist condition than when in any of the remaining conditions. Looking at Table 3, we also see that women high in stigma consciousness in the nonsexist condition, compared to all subsequent groups, perceived the greatest amount of compatibility between themselves and their partner and that women low in stigma consciousness believed they would be least compatible with their male interaction partners when they believed them to be sexist. Indeed, the orthogonal contrasts testing these differences proved to be statistically significant, \( t \)’s \((50) = 3.03, 3.63, p’s < .05, \beta’s = .27, -.32, \) respectively.

Did the men’s argument ratings mediate these findings pertaining to perceived compatibility? The results of the analyses conducted on men’s argument ratings suggest that men’s argument ratings meet the criteria for mediation only for the primary contrast; for this contrast (and not the others reported above), men’s argument ratings followed the same pattern as did women’s perceptions of compatibility. I thus pursued this mediational question further by adding men’s argument ratings to the regression equation for perceived compatibility. The results of this analysis indicate that women high in stigma consciousness in the sexist condition continued to report the least amount of compatibility between themselves and their partner, \( r(49) = 5.92, p < .05, \beta = -.51 \). However, the results of a Sobel test indicated that this effect dropped significantly when men’s argument ratings were controlled for in this way, \( z = 2.7, p < .05 \) (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). These results thus provide evidence that men’s argument ratings mediated—at least partially—the tendency for women high in stigma consciousness in the sexist condition to like their partners the least. These mediational analyses are presented in Fig. 1b.

**DISCUSSION**

The study reported here extends the previous work on stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999) by illustrating that high levels of stigma consciousness have interpersonal conse-
quences that contribute to people’s experience of stereotyping and intergroup tension. When women high in stigma consciousness expected their partner to be sexist, they gave their partner critical ratings and thereby elicited negative evaluations from their partners. Moreover, these negative evaluations from the men led the women to conclude that the two of them would be incompatible.

One might wonder why, in the control condition, women high in stigma consciousness were just as nice to their partners as women low in stigma consciousness. This null effect seems less surprising, however, in light of research on the boundary conditions of stereotyping (e.g., Gill, 1999). Gill (1999) observed that perceivers refrain from using their general attitudes in situations in which they have received individuating information about a particular target. The control condition in the study reported here represented one such situation: Women in this condition received individuation information about their male partners in the form of demographic information as well as information relevant to their work ethic. Applying Gill’s (1999) analysis here, women high in stigma consciousness may have rated the men in the control group generously because they no longer viewed them stereotypically.

Integrating the Current Study with Past Research

The present research extends previous work examining how beliefs about one’s interaction partner influence the nature of the interaction (Curtis & Miller, 1986; Farina, Allen, & Saul, 1968; Farina, Gliha, Boudreau, Allen, & Sherman, 1971; Snyder, 1984; Snyder & Stukas, 1998; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977) by illustrating how this process unfolds in an intergroup context. Moreover, the present study identifies the role that individual differences, i.e., stigma consciousness, play in this process.

At first blush, evidence that women high in stigma consciousness sometimes behave in ways that contribute to intergroup unrest might seem to conflict with research examining the conditions under which people forestall negative interactions with others. Specifically, some researchers have proposed that people who believe their interaction partners view them negatively can behave in ways to counteract their partner’s negative beliefs about them (Hilton & Darley, 1985; Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995). For example, Hilton and Darley

![FIG. 1](a) Mediational model illustrating role of women’s ratings in eliciting men’s ratings. (b) Mediational model illustrating role of men’s ratings in eliciting women’s perceptions of compatibility. Standardized beta weights are depicted here; values in parentheses refer to mediated effects; *P < .05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigma consciousness</th>
<th>Information condition</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonsexist</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexist</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The greater the value the more favorable the rating.
(1985) observed that people who knew that their interaction partner expected them to have a “cold personality” did not provide behavioral confirmation for that expectancy. More recently, Miller and her colleagues (Miller & Myers, 1998; Miller, Rothblum, Felicio, & Brand, 1995) have observed similar findings among people who are heavyweight as well as those who are relatively unattractive.

There are at least two related reasons why the results of Hilton and Darley (1985) and Miller et al. (1995) should not be expected to generalize to situations such as the one investigated in the present study. First, in both Hilton and Darley’s (1985) study and Miller et al.’s (1995) studies, their participants were right to assume that their interaction partners held certain views of them. In the current study, however, the women had erroneous beliefs about how the men actually viewed them and women in general. It is conceivable that intergroup interactions unfold quite differently (and more successfully) when the people involved in those interactions have accurate impressions of how their interaction partner views them than when the people involved have erroneous impressions of their interaction partners (for a related argument see Feldman Barrett & Swim, 1998). Second, because both Hilton and Darley (1985) and Miller et al. (1995) manipulated the beliefs of both people involved in the interaction, it is quite possible that both people modified their behaviors in an effort to control the nature of the upcoming interaction.

Consistent with the above analysis, Devine and colleagues (Devine, Evett, & Vasquez-Suson, 1996) note that both individuals involved in a given interaction have concerns and expectations that combine to influence the nature of the subsequent interaction. Specifically, these researchers have observed that, in intergroup settings involving a member of a majority and minority group, people who are low in prejudice are motivated to convey a nonprejudiced impression. This research points to the importance of extending the current study by taking into account the role that both members of an interaction play in determining its outcome.

Are High Levels of Stigma Consciousness Uniformly Deleterious?

The growing body of work documenting the deleterious consequences associated with high levels of stigma consciousness might lead one to wonder whether believing one’s interaction partner is prejudiced could ever be beneficial. Consider, however, work on attributional ambiguity (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1992; Major & Crocker, 1993), which suggests that some positive effects are indeed associated with believing people are prejudiced. Does this mean that targets of stereotypes are in a no-win situation?

Perhaps the key to answering this question lies in making a distinction between expecting to be stereotyped before entering into a stereotype-relevant situation and suspecting that one has been stereotyped after experiencing the outcome of a stereotype-relevant situation. People who expect to be stereotyped before the fact might feel anxious about confirming that stereotype (see Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995) or uncomfortable interacting with an out-group member. In contrast, people who suspect they have been stereotyped after the fact would not be expected to experience this anxiety and would therefore be better able to benefit from attributing any negative experiences in stereotype-relevant situations to prejudice.

Recent data collected by Pinel and Chua’s (2001, Study Two) findings notwithstanding, in some cases it might still be advisable to enter into stereotype-relevant situations with the belief that out-group members are prejudiced. Consider the tragedy of Rosewood, when an entire black community was massacred by a group of white men because a white woman purported to have been sexually harassed by a black man. When one’s surroundings are so clearly marked by prejudice and malfeasance—as is the case for the survivors of Rosewood—it seems clear that expecting to be stereotyped could serve a self-protective, perhaps even life-saving, function. From this perspective, perhaps the deleterious consequences of believing one lives in a prejudiced world apply primarily to those occasions when one’s interaction partner does not strongly endorse stereotypes about one’s group (for a similar argument see Feldman Barrett & Swim, 1998).

CODA

With so much emphasis being placed on the negatives associated with the belief that one lives in a prejudiced world, it can be difficult to see the positives implicit in this research. Yet evidence that people’s levels of stigma consciousness influence their perceived and actual experience of stereotyping suggests a way of tackling stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination that is perhaps far simpler and more effective than attempting to change the world and the social structures that sustain group differences. By keeping their levels of stigma consciousness in check, targets can change the way in which their interactions unfold, with one out-group member at a time.
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