Warmth and Competence on the Witness Stand: Implications for Male and Female Expert Witness Credibility

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Introduction

Credibility is an important aspect of person perception. Social perception literature describes competence and warmth as the credibility domains that drive stereotypes (Fiske et al., 1999, 2002). Psychology-law literature describes components of credibility (Brodsky, Griffin & Cramer, 2010), two of which (knowledge and likeability) overlap conceptually with competence and warmth.

Present Study

Social role theory posits that men and women are subjected to different normative expectations for behaviors (Eagly, 1987).

Hypotheses

Men must be perceived as competent to be credible
Warm or competent women might be perceived as credible
Women may have more pathways to being perceived as credible: women may be “successful” in three of the four combinations (all except cold/incompetent), whereas men may only be “successful” in two of the four combinations (the competence standard must be met).

Results

Most credible: high in likeability and knowledge
Least credible: low in both
Replicates the person perception literature
Extends it by showing how warmth and competence overlap with likeability and knowledge in the psycholegal domain
Unexpectedly, men were perceived as more competent, likeable, knowledgeable, and elicited higher ratings of agreement regardless of condition.

Discussion

Most credible: high in likeability and knowledge
Least credible: low in both

- Replicates the person perception literature
- Extends it by showing how warmth and competence overlap with likeability and knowledge in the psycholegal domain
- Unexpectedly, men were perceived as more competent, likeable, knowledgeable, and elicited higher ratings of agreement regardless of condition.
- However, when it came to the jurors’ ultimate decision (sentence), no significant differences were found.
- Suggest that although stereotypes of men and women may influence intermediate judgments, ultimate decisions may not be influenced by such stereotypic cues.
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