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META-STEREOTYPES AMONG WOMEN LIVING HOMELESS: CONTENT, UNIFORMITY AND DIFFERENCES BASED ON GENDER IN MADRID, SPAIN.

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Abstract

This paper examines the content and degree of uniformity of meta-stereotypes among women living homeless in Madrid, Spain, and the differences with their male counterparts. The study took place in Madrid, with a representative sample of men living homeless (n=158) and a convenience sample of a similar size (n=138) of women living homeless. A structured interview was used to gather the information. The results show that the meta-stereotypes of women living homeless in Madrid are characterised by mainly negative or indulgent contents, with very limited positive content, and a high degree of uniformity. There are no major differences in the content of meta-stereotypes of the female interviewees in terms of their age, academic background, motherhood or nationality. Compared to men in the same situation, a larger percentage of women living homeless agree with negative and indulgent meta-stereotypes, and a smaller percentage agree with positive meta-stereotypes.

Keywords: Homeless women; Stigma; Meta-stereotypes; Gender; Social exclusion

Introduction

One of the most socially excluded communities of people are those who are homeless (Vázquez, Panadero, Martín, & Díaz-Pescador, 2015). People living homeless in Madrid (Spain) not only live in extreme poverty, but also suffer from high levels of family and social disengagement, and have great difficulty in achieving social/employment reintegration, and significant health problems (Vázquez, Panadero, & Zúñiga, 2017). Among people living homeless, women are in a particularly vulnerable situation (Arangua, Andersen & Gelberg, 2005; Ryan et al., 2009), with characteristics, needs, and life trajectories that are different from those of their male counterparts (Vázquez, Panadero & Zúñiga, 2018). In Madrid (Spain), women and men living homeless do not differ significantly in terms of their main socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age, nationality, marital status, number of children); although women are highly vulnerable compared to men in some respects (e.g. lower working life, more serious or chronic illness, greater consumption of sedatives) (Vázquez, Panadero & Pascual, in press). Moreover, women living homeless in Madrid spent the night in shelters more often, slept in the street less often, and had become homeless on more occasions compared to men (Vázquez et al., in press). Also, women living homeless in Madrid experienced more stressful life events compared to men, both in childhood and throughout their lives, especially regarding interpersonal events, including abuse (physical, sexual and psychological), problems of intimate partner violence, and psychiatric hospitalisation (Panadero & Vázquez, 2016).

The concept of a "meta-stereotype" refers to the beliefs that the members of an in-group have about the stereotypes assigned to them by an out-group (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998; Vázquez et al., 2017). As reported by authors including Hopkins et al. (2007) and Van Leeuwen, Oostenbrink and Twilt (2014), awareness of others' views of a given in-group activates impression-management motives, which can modulate personal behaviour in relation to groups or individuals outside the in-group.

Meta-stereotypes tend to refer to the psychological characteristics, attributes and behaviours of the members of the in-group (Vázquez, 2016; Vázquez et al., 2017), which may be positive or negative. The valence of meta-stereotypes (positive or negative) is a particularly important predictive factor for the emotions that modulate interactions between groups (Gordijn, 2002; Gordijn et al., 2008). The content and the degree of uniformity are also relevant features in the study of meta-stereotypes (Saiz, Merino, & Quilaqueo, 2009; Vázquez, et al., 2017). The content refers to the attributes that make up the stereotype or meta-stereotype, which imply a positive or negative evaluation of the group (Gómez, 2002). The uniformity of the meta-stereotype refers to the degree of consensus among the members of the in-group regarding the attributes assigned to them by the out-group. For an attribute to be meta-stereotypical, there must be some degree of agreement among the in-group that the out-group perceives it as possessing the attribute (Finchilescu, 2005, 2010). As suggested by Triandis, Lisansky, Setiedi, Chang, Marin, & Betancourt (1982) with regard to stereotypes, greater uniformity in meta-stereotypical beliefs may reflect a bigger relevance of these beliefs in the in-group (Vázquez et al., 2017).

The activation of negative meta-stereotypes has been associated with an increase in intergroup anxiety (Finchilescu, 2010), with the legitimization of violence and aggression towards the out-group (Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis, & Otten, 2009), with the appearance of negative feelings towards intergroup interaction (Gordijn, Finchilescu, Brix, Wijnants, & Koomen, 2008; Vorauer et al., 1998), and with negative attitudes and less favourable evaluations of the members of the out-group (Owuamalam et al., 2013). Negative meta-stereotypes of stigmatised people can also operate like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ogden, & Avades, 2011) and lead to a "stigma magnification effect" (Mikolon, Kreiner, & Wieseke, 2016), which involuntarily reinforces the out-group's negative reactions towards the stigmatised group.

Vázquez et al. (2017) reported that in Madrid, Spain, the meta-stereotypes of homeless people, who were mostly male (84%), were characterised by content that was mainly negative (reflecting a negative image) or indulgent (reflecting an ambivalent image; i.e. despite presenting negative characteristics they have a condescending and tolerant perspective, which to some extent considers homeless people as victims of circumstance, affected by the situation in which they find themselves), with very little positive content (reflecting a positive image). Moreover, meta-stereotypes of people living homeless in Madrid were highly uniform, with very few differences in their content according to basic socio-demographic variables such as age or nationality. Vázquez et al. (2017) point out that the meta-stereotypes of people living homeless in Madrid have more negative and less indulgent content than the stereotypes of the domiciled population about homeless people, which may have negative consequences in their processes of social inclusion.

Various authors (e.g. Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Vázquez et al., 2017) state that unfavourable meta-stereotypes among people living homeless (e.g. consumers of alcohol, drug users, criminals, mentally ill, dangerous, aggressive...) can lead them to tend to avoid contact with other individuals, in the belief that these people would not want to maintain contact with them. Fear and anxiety about how they can expect to be treated thus leads people living homeless to avoid contact, which hinders their social inclusion processes (Vázquez, 2016; Vázquez, Suarez, Berrios, & Panadero, 2019). Moreover, some negative and uniform meta-stereotypes (e.g. physically and psychologically worn out, lazy, idle, lack motivation, rejected by society, mentally ill, difficult to live with and to deal with, people can't be trusted, useless, they can't contribute anything to society...) may have a negative impact on the image that people living homeless have of themselves (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Klein & Azzi, 2001), and consequently on their capability to improve their circumstances (Vázquez et al., 2017).

In Spain, the women living homeless who spent the night in the street or in shelters for homeless people account for a relatively small percentage (12% - 18%) of the group of people living homeless (Muñoz, Vázquez, & Vázquez, 2004; Panadero & Vázquez, 2016; Vázquez et al., 2015). Unfortunately, this apparently limited number of women living homeless has meant that very few studies with a gender perspective of people living homeless have been carried out in Spain. This study, which focuses on women living homeless, aims to study the meta-stereotypes of this group in depth, addressing its uniformity, content and gender differences, in order to provide information that facilitates the design of interventions to enhance inclusion processes for these women, who are in especially vulnerable circumstances.

Method

Participants

The study was carried out in Madrid, Spain, with a representative sample of men living homeless (n=158) (Vázquez et al., 2018) and a sample of women living homeless of a similar size (n=138). The participants were all adults, who had spent the night before the interview in a shelter or other facility for homeless people, on the street or in other places not initially designed for sleeping: abandoned buildings, basements, metro stations, etc. (Panadero, Martín & Vázquez, 2018). Table 1 shows the basic socio-demographic characteristics of the two samples.

Table 1. Differences in socio-demographic characteristics between homeless women and men in Madrid.

	Women (n=138)	Men (n=158)	t/χ^2
Age (M years, SD)	45.52 (11.38)	47.08 (12.30)	1.123
Time spent homeless (M month, SD)	75.26 (90.54)	82.91 (99.24)	0.669
Nationality			0.538
Spanish	69.6%	73.4%	
Foreign	30.4%	26.6%	
Marital status			6.925
Single	54.4%	59.4%	
Married	3.8%	6.5%	
Legally separated or divorced	29.1%	20.3%	
Separated de facto without legal procedures	10.1%	8.7%	
Widow/er	1.9%	5.1%	
Other	0.6%	0.0%	
She/he has children	56.2%	58.0%	0.92
Number of children (M children, SD)	1.23 (1.93)	1.21 (1.84)	-0.073
In the past month s/he has slept...			
In the street	11.7%	27.8%	11.840**
In a shelter	81.9%	69.6%	5.963*
Level of education			19.167**
No education	9.4%	6.5%	
Incomplete primary education	13.0%	32.9%	
Primary education (up to 14 years old)	32.6%	32.9%	
Secondary (up to 18 years old)	27.5%	16.1%	
Higher university studies	17.4%	11.6%	
Frequency of consumption of alcohol			37.743***
Never	63.8%	29.2%	
One or fewer times a month	11.6%	14.3%	
2 - 4 times a month	7.2%	13.0%	
2 - 3 times a week	5.1%	12.3%	
4 or more times per week	12.3%	31.2%	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

As shown in Table 1, in Madrid both women and men living homeless had a mean age of around 46 years old, they had been in a homeless situation for an average of more than 6 years, and most of them were Spanish, single or separated/divorced. More than half had children, with an average of 1.2 offspring. No statistically significant differences between the women and men were observed in terms of age, marital status, nationality, having children or time spent homeless. However, differences in the place where women and men stayed overnight during the month prior to the interview were observed, as a larger percentage of women had slept in a shelter, and a smaller percentage had spent the night in the street. A larger percentage of the males had also not completed primary education, while more women had completed secondary or university education, and the women reported a lower frequency of alcohol consumption.

Data Collection Procedures.

The number and gender of people living homeless in Madrid is well determined (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2018). There is a centralised record of people who spent the night in the services of the care network for people living homeless, and the outreach teams draw up a register of people who spent the night on the street or in other transient public settings that are frequented by

homeless people, such as parks, bus/train stations, and street locations. In addition, a point-in-time count of people living homeless in Madrid takes place every two years.

The sample size of homeless men ($n = 158$) was determined beforehand, based on the number of people living homeless in Madrid (Panadero & Vázquez, 2016). The men living homeless were selected using a proportionate random sampling strategy in all the shelters and other facilities for men living homeless in Madrid (based on the capacity of each resource), and on the street -based on the number of men living homeless sleeping on the streets of Madrid (Vázquez et al., 2018). Given the relatively small number of women living homeless in Madrid who spent the night in the street or in shelters (16% of the total people living homeless; Panadero & Vázquez, 2016), in order to access a sample of a similar size to the sample of homeless men we interviewed all the women who agreed to participate ($n = 138$), in shelters and care facilities for homeless women, and on the street. The time period of conducting the interviews was eight months for the homeless men (November 2011 – June 2012) and one year for the homeless women (November 2014 – November 2015).

People living homeless who spent the night on the street or in another place not initially designed for sleeping were recruited in soup kitchens, drop-in centres, bus stations, and on the streets. We were assisted by homeless outreach teams of Madrid City Council and Spanish Red Cross, who had information about the gender and usual location of a large number of people living homeless who did not use shelters or other care facilities for homeless people. After the initial contact, interviewer confirmed that the person had spent the previous night on the street or in other place not initially designed for sleeping, i.e. in abandoned buildings, basements, metro stations, etc.

After the participants received an explanation of the objectives of the research and the processing that the data would receive, they were asked for their informed consent, and assured that their anonymity would be respected. In view of the results obtained in previous studies (Muñoz et al., 2004; Panadero & Vázquez, 2016), we assumed that a relatively high number of respondents could have a low or very low level of education, and that the number of people living homeless in Madrid of foreign origin – with potential difficulties with understanding the Spanish language – would be relatively high. As a result, a structured interview was used to gather information, which enabled us to circumvent the possible problems arising from the interviewees' difficulties with reading and/or understanding. The interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes. The instrument used to collect information on meta-stereotypes consisted of the initial instruction "I would like to know what you think people in general think about homeless people. I am going to read you some alternatives and I would like to tell me whether you agree or disagree with each one" which was followed by 57 statements (see Table 2), with "agree" and "disagree" as response alternatives. The forms with the participant's responses were stored in a locked cabinet in the University of Alcalá.

The database was developed and processed using the SPSS–22.0 for Windows statistical analysis and data management system. When making comparisons, the Chi–square (χ^2) statistic was used for nominal variables, and the "Student t" test for independent samples was used for continuous variables.

Results

The percentages of women and men living homeless in Madrid expressing agreement with various statements about the beliefs among the domiciled population concerning homeless people (meta-stereotypes) are listed in Table 2:

Table 2. Agreement among homeless women and homeless men in Madrid with various statements about the beliefs that the domiciled population has about homeless people.

In general, domiciled population think that people in a homeless situation...	Women (n=138)	Men (n=158)	χ^2
are consumers of alcohol ⁺⁺	96.0%	95.1%	0.107
are drug users ⁺⁺	96.0%	87.5%	6.183*
lack economic resources ⁺⁺⁺	94.5%	93.1%	0.236
are physically and psychologically worn out ⁺⁺⁺	94.2%	88.1%	2.954
are lazy ⁺⁺	91.9%	82.5%	5.062*
are idle ⁺⁺	91.5%	75.9%	11.141***
live hand to mouth and don't think about the future ⁺⁺⁺	90.3%	89.9%	0.011
lack motivation ⁺⁺⁺	90.2%	90.6%	0.008
are rejected by society ⁺⁺⁺	89.4%	87.1%	0.354
are criminals ⁺⁺	89.3%	71.0%	13.580***
are mentally ill ⁺⁺⁺	89.1%	71.4%	12.308***
have poor social relationships ⁺⁺	89.0%	69.9%	13.812***
are pessimists ⁺⁺⁺	89.0%	68.2%	15.710***
are difficult to live with and to deal with ⁺⁺	87.8%	77.0%	5.196*
have had a difficult past ⁺⁺⁺	87.1%	82.2%	1.117
can't be trusted ⁺⁺	86.9%	66.4%	14.937***
are distrustful ⁺⁺⁺	86.7%	80.6%	1.726
are dangerous ⁺⁺	86.7%	66.7%	14.256***
are aggressive ⁺⁺	85.2%	64.7%	14.196***
are useless, they can't contribute anything to society ⁺⁺	85.1%	60.9%	18.896***
are solitary ⁺⁺⁺	84.6%	89.1%	1.098
are rebels ⁺⁺	84.3%	69.3%	8.076**
don't wash properly, they're dirty ⁺⁺	84.1%	82.5%	0.125
have low self-esteem ⁺⁺⁺	83.8%	78.9%	0.945
are sick ⁺⁺⁺	81.3%	80.6%	0.022
are unstable, problematic ⁺⁺	80.7%	78.5%	0.180
are lazy (easy-going), irresponsible ⁺⁺	79.5%	77.1%	0.008
lack moral values ⁺⁺	77.6%	59.3%	9.588**
are malnourished ⁺⁺⁺	72.0%	73.9%	0.128
are vulnerable, defenceless ⁺⁺⁺	71.8%	65.9%	1.003
are bohemians, hustlers ⁺⁺	69.5%	69.9%	0.006
blame others for their situation ⁺⁺	68.3%	66.7%	0.078
are wasteful ⁺⁺	66.9%	64.1%	0.240
are defenceless ⁺⁺⁺	66.9%	64.3%	0.204
don't have any social skills ⁺⁺⁺	66.7%	64.0%	0.184
are unfortunate, they have been unlucky ⁺⁺⁺	65.9%	64.1%	0.094
are misunderstood ⁺⁺⁺	60.2%	60.9%	0.014
have a weak character ⁺⁺⁺	59.3%	58.7%	0.011
are free ⁺	57.4%	56.8%	0.223
deserve pity ⁺⁺⁺	56.8%	54.5%	0.135
live exclusively on the streets ⁺⁺	56.6%	56.9%	0.004
have no family ⁺⁺⁺	55.5%	56.6%	0.032
take advantage of the system ⁺⁺	54.9%	53.6%	0.044
don't attach any importance to material things ⁺	53.8%	52.6%	0.037
are victims of the system ⁺⁺⁺	48.3%	50.7%	0.150
are tough, resistant ⁺	40.5%	58.1%	7.528**
appreciate things more ⁺	36.0%	54.4%	8.304**
are caring ⁺	35.0%	49.6%	5.676*
are trusting ⁺	31.3%	36.4%	0.701
are sociable ⁺	30.8%	44.7%	5.123*
are enterprising, fighters ⁺	27.4%	32.6%	0.843
are clean ⁺	23.8%	25.2%	0.069

are normal, like everyone else †	22.1%	43.3%	13.118***
are courteous, respectful, polite †	22.0%	39.0%	8.458
are optimists †	18.6%	34.6%	7.958**
are happy †	18.5%	18.4%	0.000
are hard-working †	13.0%	23.9%	5.072*

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

† Positive meta-stereotype; †† Negative meta-stereotype; ††† Indulgent meta-stereotype

Table 2 shows that of the 57 meta-stereotypes proposed, more than half of the women agreed with 44 meta-stereotypes, while more than half of the men agreed with 47 meta-stereotypes. More than 75% of the women and men living homeless agreed with 10 indulgent meta-stereotypes (lacking motivation, lonely, with low self-esteem, physically and psychologically worn out, with a difficult past, socially rejected, lacking financial resources, living hand to mouth and not thinking about the future, distrustful, sick) and 7 negative meta-stereotypes (alcohol and drug users, lazy, complacent, conflictive, problematic, difficult to live with, not very clean, dirty). Furthermore, more than 75% of the homeless women agreed with 8 other negative meta-stereotypes (criminals, they have poor social relationships, they cannot be trusted, dangerous, aggressive, useless, they don't contribute anything to society, rebels, they lack moral values) and 2 indulgent meta-stereotypes (mentally ill, pessimists). A small percentage of the interviewees agreed with positive meta-stereotypes.

Likewise, Table 2 shows that in 21 of the 57 proposed meta-stereotypes, there are statistically significant differences in terms of the percentage of agreement among women and men living homeless. A higher percentage of the women expressed their agreement with 14 negative meta-stereotypes (alcohol consumers, lazy, complacent, criminals, with poor social relationships, conflictive and problematic, cannot be trusted, dangerous, aggressive, useless to society, lacking moral values) and 3 indulgent meta-stereotypes (mentally ill, pessimistic, rebellious). Meanwhile, higher percentages of the men agreed with 7 positive meta-stereotypes (tough and resistant, they appreciate things more, caring, sociable, normal like other people, optimists, hard-working).

The differences in agreement with the 57 meta-stereotypes were analysed according to the interviewees' age, academic background, whether they had children, nationality and usual place of overnight stay (street vs. shelter or care facility). No statistically significant differences according to age, academic background or motherhood were observed. Statistically significant differences according to nationality were only observed in the level of agreement with the meta-stereotype "People think that homeless people lack motivation," which 95.2% (79) of the Spanish women and 77.1% (27) of the foreign women agreed with ($\chi^2 = 9.661$; $p = .008$). Depending on how often the interviewees spent the night in the street or in a shelter or care facility, statistically significant differences were only observed for the level of agreement with the meta-stereotype "People think that homeless people are optimistic," as 42.9% (79) of those who slept in the street agreed with it, and 14.6% (15) of those who did not sleep in the street did so ($\chi^2 = 6.700$; $p = .019$). These results show a high level of uniformity in the meta-stereotypes used by women living homeless.

Discussion and conclusions

The meta-stereotypes of women living homeless in Madrid, Spain, who spent the night in the street or in shelters for homeless people presented a very high degree of uniformity, with no significant differences in their content depending on age, academic education, maternity, nationality or usual place of overnight stay (street vs. shelters). These data are similar to those observed for people living homeless in Madrid as a whole, of whom 84% were males (Vázquez et al., 2017), although the meta-stereotypes were more uniform among the women interviewed. The meta-stereotypes of the women living homeless interviewed were characterised by mainly negative or indulgent content, with very little positive content. This was also similar to the observations for people living homeless in Madrid (Vázquez et al., 2017). However, a larger percentage of the female interviewees agreed with the negative and indulgent meta-stereotypes, and a smaller percentage

agreed with the positive meta-stereotypes. Vázquez et al. (2017) point out that homeless people believe that domiciled people have a worse image of their group than the image that this population says it has, and this issue may be particularly pronounced among women living homeless. Unfortunately, the particularly negative valence of the meta-stereotypes of homeless women may be related to their experience of substantially negative emotions, which could hinder interactions with other groups (Gordijn, 2002; Gordijn et al., 2008). Likewise, in the Spanish cultural context, certain stereotypes related to people living homeless are particularly stigmatic when they are applied to homeless women (i.e. alcohol and drug consumers, criminals, aggressive, dangerous, dirty, social outcasts, etc.). The meta-stereotypes linked to these stereotypes could thereby lead to a "stigma magnification effect" (Mikolon, Kreiner, & Wieseke, 2016), which would inadvertently reinforce the negative reactions of domiciled people towards women living homeless. According to various authors (e.g. Mikolon, Kreiner, & Wieseke, 2016), the high degree of uniformity in the meta-stereotypes among women living homeless reflects the importance of these beliefs among the in-group, which could have significant effects on their interaction with the domiciled population. Furthermore, these particularly unfavourable and uniform meta-stereotypes could have a negative influence on the interviewees' self-image (Greenwald, & Banaji, 1995; Klein & Azzi, 2001), which would also have a negative impact on processes aimed at changing their situation (Vázquez et al., 2017).

The high level of uniformity, loaded with negative contents, in the meta-stereotypes of women living homeless could lead to their high accessibility in social interactions (Klein & Azzin, 2001). Unfortunately, the activation of negative meta-stereotypes may be associated with the emergence of negative feelings towards intergroup interaction (Gordijn, Finchilescu, Brix, Wijnants, & Koomen, 2008; Vorauer et al., 1998), with negative attitudes and less positive assessments of the members of the out-group (Owuamalam et al., 2013), and an increase in inter-group anxiety (Finchilescu, 2010). Vázquez et al. (2017) reported that the meta-stereotypes of people living homeless have more negative and less indulgent content than the stereotypes of domiciled population about the people living homeless, which may have negative consequences for their processes of social inclusion. According to Shelton and Richeson (2005), there may be a tendency among women living homeless to avoid contact with those who they believe do not wish to come into contact with them, and when these contacts take place, they may lead to situations of hostility. Fear and anxiety about how they can expect to be treated may make people living homeless avoid contact, which would hinder their processes of inclusion (Vázquez et al., 2017). The particularly negative and uniform meta-stereotypes of the female interviewees could therefore have a negative impact on their contacts with the domiciled population, in terms of both the number and the quality of the contacts. It would therefore be useful to design intervention strategies aimed at working on meta-stereotypes of women living homeless, addressing the usual biases in meta-stereotypes, negative consequences in processes of social inclusion, negative effects on self-esteem, thought-stopping training, etc.

The main limitations of this study include the fact that this is a cross-sectional study design, and as such caution must be exercised when trying to establish causal relationships. It should also be noted that this study is limited to Madrid, which means that generalisation of the results to other contexts is difficult, given the relevance of cultural aspects in the content and valence of stereotypes and meta-stereotypes, especially when these refer to groups in situations of social exclusion (Vázquez, Suarez, & Berrios, in press). Furthermore, bearing in mind that homeless people who spent the night in the street or in shelters are mostly men, that there is no precise information available among the women interviewed about a possible discrepancy between the meta-stereotype of "a person living homeless" and the meta-stereotype of "a woman living homeless". It would therefore be important to study this possible discrepancy and examine the characteristics of these cognitive processes in different cultural contexts in more depth.

Ultimately, the objective of this study was to obtain useful information to provide support for women living homeless in the processes aimed at improving their situation. The meta-stereotypes with a high degree of uniformity and negative contents observed among women living homeless can have negative implications both in their personal well-being (e.g. increase intergroup anxiety,

appearance of negative feelings towards intergroup interaction, negative attitudes towards the members of the out-group, fear about how they can expect to be treated...) and their social inclusion processes (e.g. encouragement of avoidance of contact with domiciled population, inducing stigma magnification effect, avoidance of applying for certain jobs and accessing resources and social services oriented to the general population...). Therefore, it is important to include intervention strategies aimed at working on negative meta-stereotypes in intervention programs with women living homeless, both in programs aimed at improving their personal well-being and those aimed at improving their social inclusion processes. Also, it would very interesting to design strategies aimed at promoting positive changes in the stereotypes of people living homeless which lead to changes in this group's meta-stereotype.

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