

## Self-Enhancement in Stereotyped Individuals: Ingroup Stereotyping versus Ingroup Favoritism

A perceived threat to one's sense of personal competence or self-worth incites a powerful motivation to restore one's positive self-concept, often by any means available—at least in individualistic cultures (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Steele, 1988). While some methods—such as reacting to a personal slight by volunteering for a co-op (Steele, 1988)—are relatively innocuous and even socially helpful, others may have a higher interpersonal cost. One could argue that the derogation of stereotyped others as a way to raise one's threatened self-esteem falls into the latter category (Fein & Spencer, 1997). As socially undesirable as this method of self-affirmation may be, the negative judgment of outgroup members follows logically from the tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which holds that we understand and negotiate our self-concepts through our group memberships, and thus may enhance our self-regard by favoring the groups to which we belong and devaluing those to which we do not.

This particular path to self-affirmation seems quite clear when the threatened individual and the stereotyped target occupy opposite sides of an intergroup boundary; the story becomes muddled, however, when that boundary is erased. What happens when one's self-integrity is challenged, but the only available target of self-enhancing derogation is a member of one's own group? In other words, how do members of stigmatized groups negotiate competing methods of self-enhancement in the face of a personal threat?

*Paths to Self-Affirmation.* Following from social identity theory, group-enhancement can serve as an avenue to the all-important goal of self-enhancement. As a result, individuals often display a strong ingroup bias, in attitudes both implicit and explicit (Dasgupta, 2004) and in behaviors, such as the preferential granting of rewards to ingroup members or the positive

evaluation of their ambiguous behaviors (Brewer, 1999; Otten & Moskowitz, 2000).

Nevertheless, enhancing group status is just one of many paths to retaining a positive self-concept, and the decision to counter personal threat with group-level identity maintenance strategies is far from the default (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997). Rather, factors such as the relative size and status of our ingroup and our pre-existing level of group identification interact to determine whether we engage in group-affirming processes—such as comparing our groups to outgroups only in domains at which we are likely to prove superior—or turn to more individuating strategies (Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997). Understanding the relative benefits of both types of strategies, as well as when they are most likely to be used, will help us to predict the ways that members of stigmatized groups cope with self-threats.

*Stereotypes as Defensive Projections.* Although one might not expect the target of a stereotype to wield that same stereotype against another individual, this mechanism of self-enhancement has been proven effective among general subject populations. Specifically, individuals whose self-image was threatened with bogus feedback on an intelligence test were able to raise their state self-esteem scores by derogating a stigmatized other—in this case, by giving a Jewish job candidate a more negative personality rating than an Italian-American applicant (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Govorun, Fuegen, & Payne (2006) further clarified the role of stereotypes in self-affirmation, reporting that individuals whose intelligence was threatened defensively projected only this flaw onto others, and only onto the targets who belonged to a group stereotypically lacking in intelligence. In other words, pre-existing stereotypes provided participants with the justification they needed to belittle others to build themselves up. This was evidenced by threatened participants' tendency to malign the intelligence of sorority women,

athletes, and African Americans—quite in keeping with cultural stereotypes—but not of White individuals.

*Ingroup Stereotyping.* While these studies illuminated a self-affirming function of stereotypes, neither broached the topic of ingroup stereotyping, a phenomenon that exists despite the human proclivity for ingroup bias. A number theories attempt to explain why individuals may internalize the stigmas that target their groups, such as chronic disengagement with one's identity group (Cowan, Neighbors, DeLaMoreaux, & Behnke, 1998) or an inherent need to justify the status quo (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Whatever the underlying cause, studies have shown that attitudes towards a stigmatized ingroup are likely to be less consistent than those held towards a socially valued ingroup (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002), and that members of stereotyped groups may harbor negative or stereotypical attitudes towards their ingroup at both the implicit (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, & Monteith, 2003; Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007) and explicit levels (Cowan et al., 1998; Dasgupta, 2004). Furthermore, Govorun and colleagues provided some evidence for defensive ingroup stereotyping, reporting that sorority members responded to threats to their intelligence by describing the typical sorority woman as unintelligent. It is feasible, then, that an individual may derogate an ingroup member in order to raise his or her own self-esteem.

*An Integrated View.* The work of Ellemers and her colleagues identifies key individual differences and context-specific characteristics that may help predict when an individual is likely to forego group-level affirmations in favor of more individuating strategies, such as the derogation of another ingroup member. For instance, in a minimal group paradigm, members of low-status groups were more likely to emphasize ingroup heterogeneity in a negatively stereotyped skill domain than members of high-status groups (Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997).

Furthermore, individuals who did not identify strongly with their group were more likely to emphasize their personal identities by perceiving greater within-group differences and to express lower group commitment (Ellemers et al., 1997; Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997). Based on these findings, ingroup disidentification seems more likely in contexts where an individual's group is viewed as low status, and especially among low-identifying members.

Combined with the findings of Govorun and colleagues about stereotypes' guiding function in defensive projection, these findings about the impact of group-identification and status suggest that ingroup derogation may be a plausible self-enhancement strategy among women in the domain of mathematics—a field where women are stereotypically inferior to men—particularly for women low in gender identity. Work in the field of stereotype threat further supports the possibility that women may use of a self-affirmation strategy that overlooks or even weakens ingroup ties in this field. Specifically, studies have shown that women whose math skills are threatened subsequently disidentified with feminine characteristics (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004), and that women who perceived a female confederate about to take a math test physically distanced themselves from the potentially stereotype-confirming ingroup member (Cohen & Garcia, 2005).

Self-affirmation theory tells us that we will take any route available to enhance our self-image or to protect it from threat (Steele, 1988). The present research asks how far a member of a stigmatized group will go to protect her self-concept, and whether she will forego the affirming benefits of ingroup membership when given the chance to project a threatened trait onto a member of her own group. The first study tests the hypothesis that women who are asked to reflect on a time when they failed at a math task will attempt to repair the resultant damage to their self-esteem by projecting that trait onto another woman, whose stereotyped group

membership should provide justification for this self-enhancing derogation (Govorun et al., 2006). The second study examines the relative affirming benefits of interpersonal derogation versus ingroup favoritism by introducing intergroup competition: namely, will women still seek self-enhancement through the derogation of another stereotyped woman when their ingroup member is in direct competition with a man?

The present research will also look at gender identity as a moderating variable of post-threat self-affirmation strategies, as studies suggest that one's level of group-identification may predict how one maintains one's positive self-image. Namely, I predict an interaction between the threat manipulation and gender identity such that self-threat may make ingroup derogation a more attractive and effective self-affirming strategy for low gender-identifiers than for high identifiers. This prediction is supported by evidence that participants reporting low identification with low-status groups are more likely to emphasize ingroup heterogeneity in the domain of relative inferiority and to pursue individuating self-maintenance strategies (Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997).

My second prediction that high gender-identifiers may be more likely to forego ingroup derogation in favor of group-level affirmation strategies is also supported by several lines of research. For example, highly-identified group members tend to express greater ingroup commitment, to perceive more similarity among ingroup members, and to display greater ingroup bias in the domain of their stereotypic inferiority (Ellemers et al., 1997; Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997). Select evidence from stereotype threat research also supports this possibility. First, women with strong gender identities seem to be most susceptible to stereotype threat (Schmader, 2002). Second, stereotype threat has been shown to automatically activate women's collective female identities, which in turn makes witnessing another woman's success in the

stereotyped domain of math a successful way to alleviate threat (Marx et al., 2005). Although the latter finding contradicts other work suggesting individuation in response to threat (e.g. Pronin et al., 2004), I believe that by looking at chronic gender identification as a moderating variable, I may reconcile such discrepant findings (see Keller & Sekaquaptewa, in press, for a review). Taken together, this past work supports my prediction that highly-gender identified women may react to an attack on their math skills by activating their collective female identity, and thus may raise their damaged self-esteem by engaging in the group-level self-protective strategies favored by high-identifiers, such as ingroup favoritism (Ellemers et al., 1997).

### Study 1

#### *Methods*

Female undergraduate psychology students will be prescreened on a version of the importance subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) that has been revised to capture gender identification (Schmader, 2002). Gender identity scores will be analyzed to assess their moderating role in the pursuit of different self-affirmation strategies.

The experimental session will utilize a revised version of the self-threat manipulation used by Govorun and colleagues (2006), altered to address the stereotype-relevant domain of mathematics. Namely, participants in the self-threat condition will be asked to recount in writing a past incident where they failed at a task requiring mathematical skills, whereas participants in the no-threat condition will be asked to describe their typical day. Borrowing methodology from Fein and Spencer (1997, Expt. 3), participants will then complete a state self-esteem measure (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Next, in another adaptation of Fein and Spencer's (1997) work, participants will be asked to participate in an ostensibly unrelated study, requiring that they read a resume and evaluate the applicant who submitted it. In keeping with the stereotype of interest

in the present work, participants will be told that the candidate is applying for a position as a store manager, a job that will require—among other skills—the ability to work well with numbers. This job is math-relevant without requiring expertise in the subject, which should provide participants with enough leeway to justifiably evaluate the candidates' math skills. The candidate's gender will be manipulated with gendered names like "John" and "Jennifer," but both resumes will otherwise be identical, presenting the applicant as an adequate yet not outstanding fit for the job. This will yield a 2 (threat) x 2 (target gender) design.

Participants will then rate the applicant on three separate scales, yielding three dependent measures of applicant competence. Using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from one (not at all/disagree strongly) to seven (very much/agree strongly), participants will rate the candidate's personality, including words connected to mathematical competence like "analytical" and "logical;" his or her multiple intelligences, including "logical-mathematical intelligence (the ability to reason logically, solve number problems)" (Swami, Furnham, & Kannan, 2006); and his or her overall qualifications for the job, captured with a 3-item scale assessing participants' degree of agreement with statements like "I feel this person would make an excellent candidate for the position in question" (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Finally, participants will retake the state self-esteem measure (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

### *Expected Results*

Because of pre-existing gender stereotypes, the male applicant may be rated as higher in math-competence-related traits and as a better fit for the math-related job compared with the female applicant; however, self-threat is predicted to yield interesting variations in the way that threatened versus non-threatened participants rate the female job candidate. Namely, in keeping with past findings on the guiding and justifying functions of stereotypes in defensive projection,

women whose math skills were threatened should be more likely to rate the female applicant as having less mathematical intelligence, as being weaker in traits associated with success in math, and as being less well-equipped for the job overall, compared to women whose math skills were not threatened. Because men are not stereotyped as mathematically inept, threatened participants judging the male applicant should not feel justified in derogating him in this domain; therefore, I expect no difference in the male applicant's ratings across threat conditions. (See Figure 1 for a sample chart displaying this expected pattern).

Furthermore, gender identity scores are expected to interact with threat condition to influence applicant ratings. Specifically, the effects of threat should be magnified among women low in gender identity, yielding even more negative ratings of the female applicant compared with women higher in this construct. For highly-gender identified women, on the other hand, self-threat in a stereotyped domain should highlight their collective female identity, leading these participants—in keeping with reported tendencies among individuals with strong group identities (Ellemers et al., 1997)—to display ingroup favoritism by rating the female applicant as somewhat more mathematically skilled when their self-concepts have been threatened, compared to when they were not exposed to threat. (See Figure 2 for a sample chart).

Finally, analyses of the self-esteem measure should act as a manipulation check for the threat induction, in that threatened participants should report lower self-esteem at time one than non-threatened participants. This measure should also reveal the affirming benefits of rating the stereotyped ingroup member; that is, threatened participants should report higher self-esteem scores after rating the female candidate but not after rating the male applicant. Furthermore, threatened participants are expected to receive a self-esteem boost from rating the female applicant regardless of the valence of their evaluations; in other words, simply being able to rate



the female applicant should be provided an opportunity for participants to self-affirm, whether by maligning the woman's math skills (providing evidence of defensive projection, as expected among low-identifiers) or praising them (suggesting ingroup favoritism, expected for high-identifiers). Finally, non-threatened participants' scores are not expected to change between time one and two, regardless of the gender of the applicant they rated (See Figure 3 for a sample chart).

### *Conclusions*

The proposed results would be the first to demonstrate that stereotypes are able to facilitate defensive projection and promote self-affirmation—evident in changes in state self-esteem—even when wielded against ingroup members. In order to counter the alternative suggestion that stereotypic ratings could be evidence of mere priming rather than defensive motivations, I make mention of Govorun and colleagues' (2006) argument against this point. In preliminary studies, the authors found that being asked to recount a past instance where one had failed in a given domain—such as intelligence—effectively activated that trait, which should have made it more likely to come to mind in any subsequent judgment. However, the activated trait only influenced evaluations of stereotyped others—athletes and African Americans in the Govorun (2006) work, or women in the present—which supports a motivational interpretation. That is, participants' selective application of the activated trait in subsequent judgments suggests that they only felt justified in gaining self-affirmation through derogation when their targets were members of groups that were already negatively stereotyped in that domain. Neither their results nor those reported in the present work, then, should be interpreted as evidence of simple priming.

The proposed findings are significant for a number of reasons. First, evidence that women may seek to repair their damaged self-concepts by denigrating another member of their

ingroup would further support the contention that ingroup bias is not as chronic nor as universal as was once expected, particularly among low-status groups (Dasgupta, 2004). My findings would also demonstrate the complicated routes to self-enhancement that may be utilized by stigmatized individuals: after all, women self-affirming by denigrating the math skills of a fellow female holds implications for their social identities and intergroup relations that do not come into play in majority members' defensive stereotypical evaluations of Jews or African Americans, for example. The present work would also provide evidence that participants' chronic levels of ingroup identification can moderate their decision to put their own individual self-concept above their group-level identity. This finding would further highlight the variability in stigmatized individuals' ingroup attitudes (Nosek et al., 2002), and would demonstrate for the first time that such variability plays a key role in one's tendency to respond to threat with stereotype-driven defensive projection rather than ingroup bias.

Although the previous study's findings would bring new insight to our understanding of reactions to self-threat among members of stigmatized groups, it is possible that these findings would apply only in a very specific context: that is, these ingroup stereotyping effects may have been so strong because participants were only provided with the opportunity to judge one individual, who happened to be female. Given that contextual cues play an important role in determining the types of identity-maintenance strategies individuals are apt to pursue (Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997), a second study will introduce the situational factor of intergroup competition. Specifically, this study questions whether the ingroup derogation witnessed among weakly gender-identified women in the first study will still occur when a member of one's ingroup is fighting for resources—here, a job—against a member of an outgroup.

## Study 2

### *Methods*

As in study one, participants will be female undergraduate psychology students who have been pre-tested on gender identity. The present study will largely replicate the design of study one, with one exception. After being assigned to the self-threat or no-threat condition and completing the state self-esteem measure, participants will be told that they are going to evaluate not one but two candidates for a math-related job. All participants will view two resumes, which will be pre-tested to ensure that they are matched for credentials and favorability. Participants in the same-gender condition will receive two resumes each featuring a female name, while those in the mixed-gender condition will read one bearing a female name and the other a male name, resulting in a 2 (threat) x 2 (applicant gender) design. Participants will then complete the previously described personality, multiple-intelligence, and job qualification rating scales for each candidate, as well as the final state self-esteem measure.

### *Expected Results*

Applicant gender is again expected to exert an overall main effect due to cultural gender stereotypes, such that the male applicant will receive higher ratings of math-competence and job recommendations than the female candidates overall.

The threat manipulation utilized in the present study is expected to exert different effects for participants in the same-gender condition compared with those in the mixed-gender condition, due to the presence or absence of intergroup competition. Specifically, certain interaction effects found in study one should be replicated here for participants in the same-gender condition, such that self-threat will yield higher competence ratings of both female candidates' math skills in participants with strong gender identities, and lower competence

ratings of the female targets for low gender-identified women. Again, as in study one, participants should gain self-affirmation from each of these methods, meaning that rating the female targets should raise state self-esteem relative to participants' immediate post-threat scores, regardless of the content of their evaluations; non-threatened participants in this condition should not show differences in state self-esteem over time.

The introduction of intergroup competition, however, is expected to yield different patterns in applicant ratings and self-esteem scores; that is, participants in the mixed-gender condition should respond to threat differently than those in the same-gender condition. Namely, the power to recommend a male or female candidate for a job should create conditions of intergroup competition, which in turn is expected to highlight women's common ingroup identity with the female applicant and increase ingroup favoritism towards her (Brewer, 1979). Under these conditions, women in need of self-affirmation should be more likely to seek out group-level strategies like ingroup bias rather than individuating methods such as ingroup stereotyping. Specifically, among women in the mixed gender condition, I expect that self-threat will yield more positive ratings of the female job applicant compared with the condition of no threat (See Figure 4 for sample chart).

The interaction between threat and gender identity observed in the first study should weaken considerably in the presence of intergroup competition, such that even participants with low gender identities will be more likely to self-affirm through ingroup favoritism rather than interpersonal derogation. Nevertheless, the interaction should still exist such that highly gender-identified women will display a greater degree of ingroup bias by providing more positive ratings of the female applicant than low-identifiers, as well as by demonstrating a larger pro-female bias in their relative evaluations of the male and female candidates than low-identifiers will (See

Figure 5 for sample chart). Furthermore, ingroup-bias-driven positive evaluations of the female applicant should predict greater gains in time two state self-esteem for participants who strongly identify with their gender compared with weak identifiers.

Finally, the ingroup bias inspired by the presence of intergroup competition may also lead non-threatened participants in the mixed-gender condition to rate the female applicant more highly than non-threatened women in the same-gender condition (Brewer, 1999). Nevertheless the degree of this bias should be lower than that found among threatened participants, and self-esteem scores should be less impacted by favorable ratings of the female candidate among non-threatened participants compared with threatened participants (See Figure 6 for sample chart). After all, not having experienced a threat, they should not feel a pressing need to enhance their self-concepts.

### *Conclusions*

If the first study identified gender identity as a powerful individual-difference determinant of a stigmatized group member's choice between individual- or group-level affirmation strategies, this second study showcases a powerful contextual determinant: intergroup competition. Specifically, the knowledge that an outgroup member was vying with an ingroup member for a valued resource—here, a job—activated female participants' collective ingroup identities in such a way that defensive projection onto a stereotyped ingroup member no longer seemed an attractive self-affirmation method. Instead, participants were more inclined counter a personal threat by enhancing their ingroup, a strategy quite in keeping with the tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Furthermore, while individual differences in gender identity predicted the relative benefits of ingroup favoritism following a self-concept threat, it was the situational factor of

intergroup competition that proved more powerful. That is, regardless of pre-existing group identification, individuals more likely to choose the group-enhancing strategy of biased resource allocation to ingroup members than the individualizing affirmation method of stereotype-driven interpersonal derogation.

One potential concern with these proposed findings arises from evidence for behavioral outgroup favoritism among stigmatized individuals. For instance, Ashburn-Nardo and colleagues (2003) found that African American participants placed in a similar situation—that is, asked to rate their confidence in two students, one Black and one White, as potential partners in an intellectual task—tended to favor the White student to the extent that they harbored implicit pro-White biases. Nevertheless, I do not expect the present study to yield comparable pro-male results among female participants for two reasons. First, studies suggest that most women tend to show implicit pro-ingroup attitudes, and that they are more consistent in their implicit ingroup favorability than other stereotyped groups, such as African Americans (see Dasgupta, 2004, for a review). Second, Ashburn-Nardo's (2003) experiments did not include a threat manipulation. Therefore, participants in that study were not attempting to recuperate from a blow to their self-esteem, and thus may have been less likely to seek out either individual- or group-level self-enhancement strategies, relying instead on their implicit attitudes towards their group. Nevertheless, future research should collect measurements of implicit stereotyping prior to testing to see if this individual difference can predict a preference for ingroup derogation versus ingroup bias.

### General Discussion

The work proposed herein combines two lines of research that are highly relevant to understanding the daily negotiation of a stigmatized identity. First, it demonstrates evidence for

the previously unexplored concept of ingroup derogation as a method of pursuing the central goal maintaining positive self-regard. Second, in delineating the effects of gender identity and intergroup competition, it identifies key personal and situational factors that may help determine the type of self-affirming strategies that stigmatized individuals may choose to pursue in response to a threat to their self-concepts.

At first glance, the effectiveness of ingroup derogation as a self-enhancement strategy might seem to be at odds with select stereotype threat findings. For instance, learning about ingroup success stories in stereotype-relevant fields has been shown to alleviate threat (Marx et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it should be noted that individuation has also been shown to alleviate threat (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004). This seeming discrepancy is somewhat clarified by the present work's inclusion of gender identity as a moderating variable. Specifically, the present results do not suggest that ingroup derogation is a failsafe path to self-affirmation. Rather, in keeping with established self-affirmation and identity-maintenance literature, they support the idea that individuals may pursue a number of paths to restore positive self-regard, and suggest that one's gender identity may predict which of those paths may be most attractive and effective. After all, in light of the fact that stereotype threat concerns are also alleviated by general self-affirmation (Martens, Johns, Greenberg, & Schimel, 2006), it may be fruitful to consider ingroup derogation and ingroup bias not as opposite strategies, but merely as different paths to self-affirmation, which individuals may be more or less likely to pursue based on individual differences and situational constraints.

Nevertheless, there is something troubling in the knowledge that for certain individuals, under certain circumstances, the clearest pathway to positive self-regard may involve the splintering of ingroup ties. After all, we often depend on our ingroup memberships to derive

feelings of self-worth or to cope with stressful situations (Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, in press). Future research should address the consequences of ingroup stereotyping as a self-affirmation method, perhaps by measuring changes in state collective self-esteem or by assessing behavioral interactions with ingroup members. Whatever the potential consequences of this particular affirmation method, however, the present work echoes Steele's (1988) contention that our facilities for self-affirmation are exceedingly adaptable, ready to help us restore our positive self-images regardless of our group memberships or situational constraints.



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Figure 1:

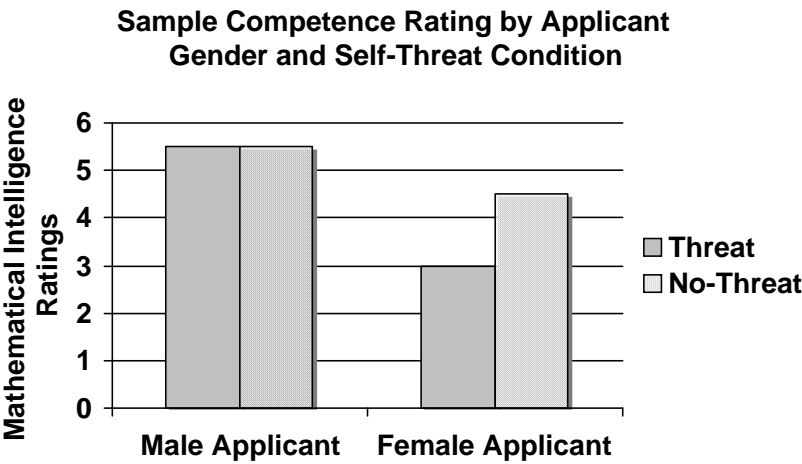


Figure 2:

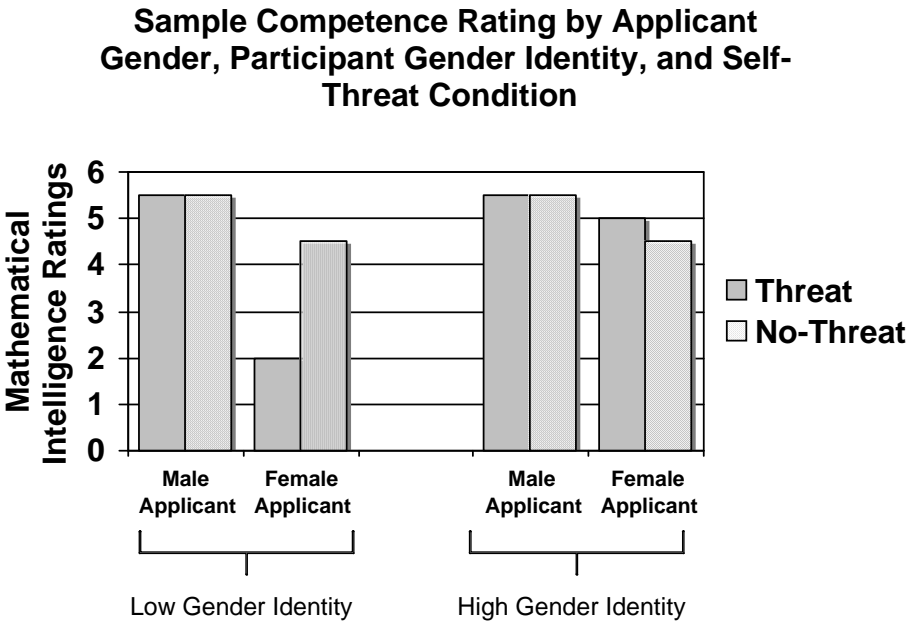


Figure 3:

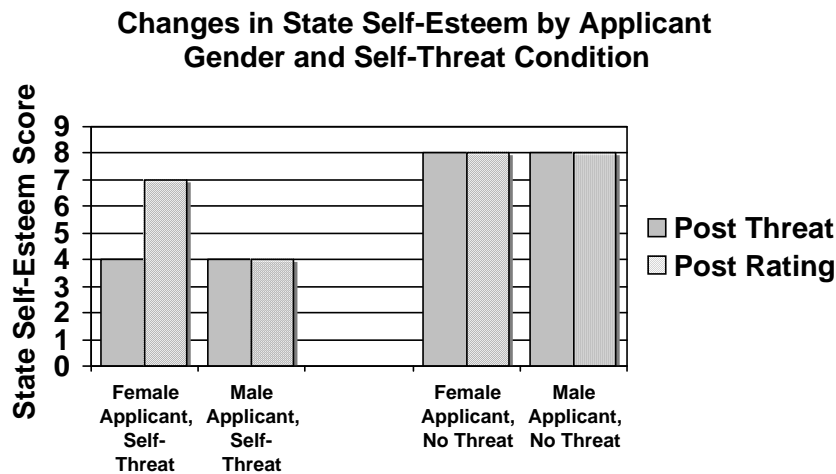


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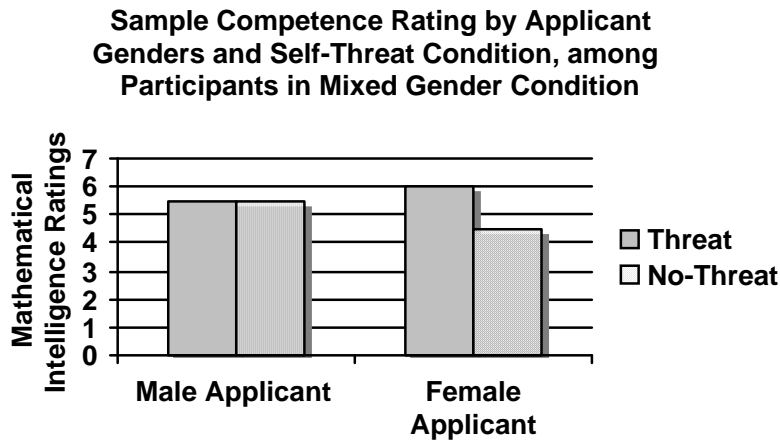


Figure 5:

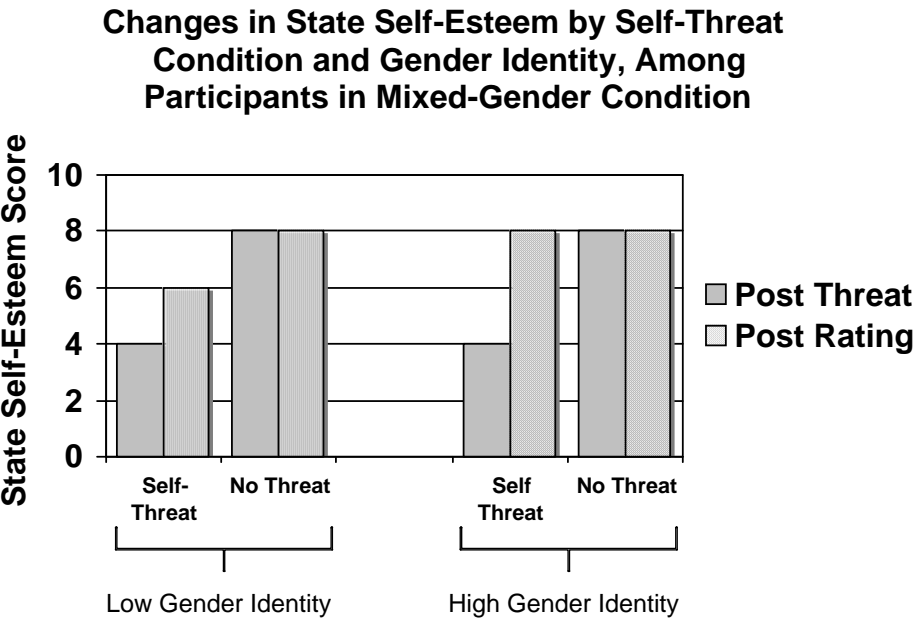


Figure 6:

