Chapter 6
Implicit Processes and Emotions in Stereotype Threat about Women's Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Stereotype threat about leadership ability may trigger emotional and cognitive responses that reduce women's leadership aspirations. This chapter reviews literature and presents a study on the effects of implicit (covert) and explicit (overt) leadership stereotype threat on women's emotions, power-related cognitions, and behaviors as moderated by exposure to powerful female or male role models. Emotional responses were measured using self-report (direct) and narrative writing (indirect) tasks. Undergraduate women (n = 126) in the Northeastern U.S. were randomly divided into three stereotype threat groups: none, implicit, and explicit. Implicit stereotype threat resulted in higher indirectly expressed (but not self-reported) anxiety, behaviors that benefited others more than the self, and when preceded by exposure to powerful female role models, higher self-reported negative emotion but also higher indirect positive affect. Explicit stereotype threat resulted in higher indirect optimism, and when preceded by exposure to powerful female role models, lower self-reported sadness but also lower implicit power cognitions.

INTRODUCTION

Implicit (indirect and presumably at least partly unconscious) cognitions and emotions may be activated by stereotype threat about leadership in women and contribute to the leadership gender disparity in many domains, including government, business, and higher education in the United States (US). Traditional Western, white, middle class gender role stereotypes of women as communal and passive may influence attitudes and beliefs that women are not qualified to be leaders. Women themselves may internalize these attitudes, leading to lowered aspirations to attain powerful

positions. Given these conditions, it is important to understand the implicit and explicit emotions and cognitions that stereotype threat may activate.

Stereotype threat is a process that can be implicitly or explicitly initiated by situational cues that highlight negative stereotypes about members of social groups in various domains based on salient aspects of identity, e.g. gender, race, age, or ethnicity. Stereotype threat has been shown to negatively impact performance, emotions, and cognitions in the stereotyped domain (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Marx & Stapel, 2006; Schmader & Johns, 2003; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Implicit stereotype threat is activated with subtle environmental cues such as being told that a test is diagnostic of one's abilities in a stereotyped domain (e.g., an African American being told a test measures intellectual ability; Steele & Aronson, 1995) or being a numerical minority representing the group about which there is a stereotype, (e.g., being the only female in a room of males taking a math test; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000). Explicit stereotype threat involves exposure to overt and direct statements about the stereotype (e.g., being told that men are stronger negotiators than women; Kray, Thompson & Galinsky, 2001).

In this chapter, we (1) review the literature about, and (2) present a study examining (a) the effects of explicit and implicit leadership stereotype threat on women's emotions (assessed using both indirect and direct measures), power-related cognitions, and behaviors, and (b) the potential buffering effects of exposure to same-sex role models on women's reactions to stereotype threat.

BACKGROUND

Traditional Gender Role Stereotypes

Women in the US are under-represented in leadership roles despite women's increased workforce participation in recent decades (Eagly & Carli, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women's career aspirations develop in a sociocultural context in which traditional female roles are antithetical to the traits ascribed to effective leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In the context of the predominantly white, middle class culture in the US, traditional female gender roles describe and prescribe personality characteristics for women that include gentleness, passivity, communalism, emotionality, and the idea that women "rarely act as leaders" (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Rudman & Glick, 2008). In contrast, traditional male gender roles describe men as being assertive, dominant, independent and rational (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011); thus men are expected to be able to lead by virtue of the personality qualities and traits ascribed to the definition of masculinity. Men and women alike endorse these cultural and stereotypical gender roles (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Ridgeway, 2001). Leaders are perceived to be stereotypically masculine; that is, leaders are seen as similar to men but not to women and as being more agentic (a characteristic ascribed more to men) than communal (a characteristic ascribed more to women; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Further, studies have largely found that women, when depicted in male-dominated domains such as sports coaching, business, and politics, were evaluated more negatively than men (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). A study using an observational method of measuring attitudes found that male and female German undergraduate students displayed more negative emotional responses to female leaders compared to male leaders in a variety of contexts (Koch, 2005).

Given the predominantly negative attitudes toward women in power, women tend to be more conflicted than men about possessing it (Lips, 2000; Fong & Tiedens, 2002). Lips (2000) found that young women rated themselves less likely to hold certain powerful positions (e.g., political leader) and to be less positive about holding these positions than did young men. Women who

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