

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF NEGATIVE IN-GROUP STEREOTYPING

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The present work examined the negative consequences that result when stigmatized individuals endorse negative in-group stereotypes after failure. Study 1 found that women given the opportunity to blame their math failure on the stereotype “women are bad at math” showed higher stereotype endorsement, exerted less effort on a subsequent math test, and displayed less identification with the math domain. Study 2 found that observers’ felt more negative emotions toward a woman who blamed her poor performance on the math stereotype. Furthermore, this effect was fully mediated by changes in perceptions of the woman’s confidence. Together, these findings suggest that people who use negative stereotypes to excuse their failures incur both personal and interpersonal costs.

People often use excuses to minimize the negative repercussions of failure. Although a wealth of research has examined the advantages and disadvantages of excuses, researchers have largely neglected the use of one particular excuse: negative in-group stereotypes. Negative stereotypes can serve as excuses for a range of failures. For example, such stereotypes allow White men to excuse a poor athletic performance (“White men can’t jump”), women to excuse a poor math performance (“women are bad at math”), professors to excuse a missed meeting (“professors are absent minded”), and older adults to excuse a lapse in memory (“having a senior moment”). Ironically, this means that people may protect themselves against the threat of stereotypic shortcomings by endorsing the very stereotypes that would have predicted these outcomes.

Despite anecdotal evidence for the tendency to blame failure on stereotypes, it has received little empirical attention. To date, only one set of studies (Burkley & Blanton, 2008) has examined this type of excuse-making, demonstrating that it has self-esteem benefits. However, it remains to be seen if this strategy also incurs

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costs. The purpose of the present study is to examine if blaming failure on negative in-group stereotypes accrues both personal and interpersonal costs.

BLAMING FAILURE ON A NEGATIVE IN-GROUP STEREOTYPE

Although a great deal of research has been conducted on why people endorse negative stereotypes about out-groups, relatively little is known about why people endorse such stereotypes about their in-groups. This is likely because most theorists believe doing so runs contrary to our basic need for self-esteem (e.g., Sedikides & Strube, 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988). For instance, early explanations of negative in-group stereotyping suggested that such a response is driven by an “internalized self-hatred” whereby the stigmatized individual begins to internalize others’ negative perceptions regarding their own group (e.g., Allport, 1954; Jones et al., 1984; Lewin, 1948). Although contemporary theorists acknowledge there may be reasons other than self-hatred that drive such behavior, they still assert that doing so runs contrary to self-esteem needs (e.g., Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Crocker & Major, 1989; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002). For example, Crocker and Major (1989) argued that targets sometimes attribute their failures to their stigmatized identities in order to cope with social rejection. Yet these researchers maintained that endorsing negative stereotypes in this way was detrimental for one’s self-esteem, stating “those who have internalized society’s negative views of their group should be at particular risk for low self-esteem” (p. 619).

Instead, we argue that negative in-group stereotypes are often endorsed in an attempt to excuse failures and thereby protect self-esteem (Burkley & Blanton, 2008, 2009). Instead of running contrary to our need for self-esteem, such endorsement acts in service of it. Not only does this assertion run counter to common sense—in that admitting something bad about your group should make you feel worse, not better—but it also runs contrary to explicit predictions made by several of the most important theories in the stereotype literature (e.g., Allport, 1954; Crocker & Major, 1989; Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Although the excuse literature has not specifically discussed the idea that stereotypes can be used in this way, some have hinted at the possibility that group membership can serve as a type of excuse. Specifically, in their analysis of the excuse literature, Snyder and Higgins (1989) distinguished between excuses that were *retrospective* (making excuse after failure), *anticipatory* (making the excuse in anticipation of the failure; i.e., self-handicapping), and *incorporated*. Although a great deal of research has focused on retrospective and anticipatory excuses, less attention has been given to the concept of incorporated excuses. An incorporated excuse highlights an attribution that is an ongoing aspect of the person’s self. Examples include someone blaming their failure on alcohol addiction, chronic depression, or a physical disability. Thus, rather than “giving” an excuse, incorporated excuses reflect the individual “being” the excuse. According to Snyder and Higgins (1989), when people use this type of excuse, perceivers are likely to “automatically cut them some slack” (p. 249). Although Snyder and Higgins did not refer to stereotyped group membership as a form of incorporated excuse, it is easy to see how such a stigma would fit their definition (e.g., Crandall, Tsang, Harvey & Britt, 2000).

To date, only one set of studies has tested the idea that negative stereotypes can excuse stereotypic failures and thereby protect self-esteem. Specifically, Burkley and Blanton (2008) tested the idea that endorsing a negative in-group stereotype after a stereotypic failure allows the target to shift blame away from the self and toward the group. In their first study, women failed a math test and completed a stereotype endorsement task that included the stereotype "women are bad at math." To increase the likelihood that women would blame their math failure on this stereotype, half of the women completed the stereotype task *after* the math failure. Conversely, women in the control group completed the stereotype task *before* taking the math test, thereby denying them the opportunity to use the stereotype task to excuse their failure. Consistent with expectations, women showed higher endorsement of the "women are bad at math" stereotype after they failed the math test. Importantly though, these women also had higher self-esteem than women who were denied this opportunity. The fact that self-esteem was higher in this condition supports the assertion that women were not just confirming the stereotype ("I failed, so women must be bad at math"). Rather, they appear to be using the stereotype as an excuse for their failure in order to protect their self-esteem.

In their second study, Burkley and Blanton (2008) showed that women, but not men, blamed their math failure on the math stereotype. Because this stereotype does not serve as a viable explanation for men's math failure, men were unlikely to use it as an excuse. Thus, stereotype targets are only likely to blame their failure on a stereotype and receive self-esteem benefits when the stereotype serves as a viable excuse for one's failure. This effect is consistent with the assertion that excuses must be perceived as credible to be effective (Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002).

Finally, Burkley and Blanton (2008) found that the tendency to blame a failure on the stereotype was most pronounced among women likely to engage in self-protective strategies (i.e., women high in trait self-esteem). This provides strong evidence that the women in these studies were endorsing the math stereotype as a way to protect their self-esteem from failure, rather than as a result of priming or behavioral confirmation.

In sum, prior research has demonstrated that endorsing a negative in-group stereotype after failure affords the individual self-esteem benefits. One interpretation of this research is that such endorsement is a beneficial and effective way for stigmatized targets to protect their self-esteem after failure. However, what remains to be seen is whether this strategy is a double-edged sword that also incurs costs. To date, no research has examined the potentially negative consequences of such endorsement, but a wealth of research has examined such consequences in regards to non-stereotype excuses.

CONSEQUENCES OF EXCUSES

Excuse-making reflects an attempt to shift causal attributions for a negative outcome from sources that are central to the person's self to sources that are less central (Snyder & Higgins, 1989). For example, a student may blame his poor test performance on lack of sleep or distracting construction noise. By shifting blame away from the self and onto a more external reason, the student is able to buffer his self-esteem from the failure. Consistent with this expectation, a wealth of research

supports the notion that excuse-making has advantages (e.g., Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002; Snyder & Higgins, 1989; Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987). Using excuses has been shown to protect self-esteem, reduce anxiety and depression, and even boost health and immune functioning (see Snyder & Higgins, 1989, for review). Unfortunately though, like most self-protective strategies these short-term benefits appear to come with long-term costs (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Shepperd & Kwavnick, 1999).

In terms of personal costs, excuses may encourage the individual to disengage from the task domain. The more personally responsible people feel toward an outcome, the more committed, engaged, and persistent they will be (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, & Doherty, 1994). Because excuses reduce personal responsibility, they are likely to cause the excuse maker to be less motivated and engaged in the failure domain (Tyler & Feldman, 2007). Consistent with this assertion, people who make external excuses for their failures put less effort, time, and practice into preparing for an upcoming task in that particular domain (e.g., Rhodewalt & Fairchild, 1991; Tice & Baumesiter, 1990). For instance, students high in self-handicapping—a form of excuse-making that occurs in anticipation of failure (Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005)—report spending less hours studying for an upcoming exam (McCrae & Hirt, 2001). Similarly, swimmers high in this type of excuse-making are more likely to miss practice sessions and are rated by their coaches as putting in less practice effort when anticipating a difficult swim meet (Rhodewalt, Saltzman, & Wittmer, 1984).

In terms of interpersonal costs, excuses may incur negative evaluations from others. People who make excuses for their poor performance are often judged more negatively and incur greater repercussions by others than those who do not make excuses (Tyler & Feldman, 2007). Similarly, people who self-handicap are consistently evaluated more negatively by others than those who do not self-handicap (e.g., Levesque, Lowe, & Mendenhall, 2001; Rhodewalt, Sanbonmatsu, Tschanz, Feick, & Waller, 1995).

In sum, people who use excuses protect their self-esteem in the face of failure but often pay for this protection through a variety of personal and interpersonal costs. If negative stereotypes are used as excuses in the way we have described, then not only should they protect self-esteem against failure (Burkley & Blanton, 2008) but they should also produce the same personal and interpersonal costs seen in the excuse literature.

PRESENT THEORY

The present studies sought to examine the negative consequences that occur when people use stereotypic excuses. Similar to previous research on this topic, we focused on women's endorsement of the stereotype that "women are bad at math" following a math failure (Burkley & Blanton, 2008). Based on prior excuse research, we anticipated that individuals given an opportunity to blame their poor performance on a negative stereotype would exhibit less effort and motivation toward a future task in the same performance domain. If a woman comes to believe that women are bad at math as a way of excusing her failure, then it is unlikely she would continue to exert effort in preparation for a future math task.

We also anticipated that individuals given an opportunity to blame their poor performance on a negative stereotype would exhibit greater disidentification from the stereotyped domain. Disidentification occurs when people detach their identity from a domain and it is most likely to occur when a negative in-group stereotype is salient (e.g., Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Osborne, 1995, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). When a woman blames her failure on a stereotype, she makes the stereotype more salient, and in doing so, may increase the likelihood that she will disidentify from the domain.

In addition to these personal costs, we expected that endorsing negative stereotypes after failure would incur interpersonal costs. Prior research indicates that people who engage in excuse-making are perceived more negatively by others and are likely to invoke negative perceiver emotions (e.g., Allen & Leary, 2010, Levesque et al., 2001; Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Rhodewalt et al., 1995). Similarly, people who make stereotypic remarks are perceived negatively by others, and this is the case even when the observers themselves endorse the stereotypes used (Mae & Carlston, 2005). Therefore, we predicted that observers would respond more negatively to a woman who blames her math failure on a stereotype.

In sum, we predicted that people who endorse negative stereotypes after failure would suffer from personal consequences in the form of decreased effort and domain disidentification (Study 1) and interpersonal consequences in the form of observers' negative evaluations (Study 2). Taken together, these studies offer the first empirical demonstration of the tradeoffs inherent in blaming failure on a stereotype.

STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to investigate if women given the opportunity to blame their math failure on a stereotype would evidence decreased effort and disidentification from the math domain. We focused solely on women's responses because prior research has shown that women, but not men, strategically use the math stereotype to protect their self-esteem against math failures (Burkley & Blanton, 2008).

METHOD

Participants and Design. One hundred and sixty-eight undergraduate female students from a large Southeastern university participated for partial course fulfillment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions.

Procedure and Materials. All participants completed a math test, received failure feedback, and completed a stereotype endorsement task, but the order of these tasks varied depending on condition. Following the procedure used by Burkley and Blanton (2008), women assigned to the *after condition* completed the stereotype endorsement task after failing the math test. Thus, these women were given an opportunity to endorse the negative stereotype as a way of excusing their failure. Conversely, women in the *before condition* completed the stereotype endorsement task prior to taking the math test. Importantly, women in this condition did not know they would be taking a math test when they completed the stereotype task.

To measure stereotype endorsement, participants were asked to rate the truth of two gender stereotypes regarding math ability ("Women typically have poorer math skills than men"; "Men typically have better math abilities than women"; Burkley & Blanton, 2008). Responses were made on a 1 (*not at all true*) to 11 (*completely true*) rating scale and were averaged to form a composite index of stereotype endorsement ($r = .88, p < .001$). We did not measure self-esteem in this study because prior work has already established that women who endorse a negative stereotype after failure do so out of a desire to protect their self-esteem (Burkley & Blanton, 2008).

The math test consisted of 30 multiple choice items (e.g., If a number is equal to 5 minus 3 what is double its value?) and was described as a measure of "natural math ability" so that the failure feedback would be believable (see Burkley & Blanton, 2008, for details). After completing the test, all participants were given failure feedback (e.g., scored 67%).

After the feedback, all participants were told they would be taking a second math test, but before doing so, would be given an optional math tutorial. They were told this tutorial included a review of basic math concepts that could be helpful in preparing for the next exam. Participants were instructed to "spend as much or as little time on it" as they wanted. The tutorial was presented on the computer and contained 40 slides of math review information and practice examples. At the bottom of each slide, participants had the option to continue or to exit the tutorial. The amount of time spent on the tutorial was recorded and served as a measure of effort exerted to improve one's math skills.

After quitting the tutorial, participants completed several disidentification measures. Participants first responded to a five-item measure of math identification (e.g., "How much is math to the sense of who you are?" Smith & White, 2001). Responses were made on a 1 (*not at all true*) to 11 (*very true*) rating scale and were averaged to form a composite index of domain identification ($\alpha = .88$). Participants then reported their enjoyment of math tasks and the likelihood that they would pursue a math major and math career using the same rating scale (Smith & White, 2001). Lastly, participants were informed there was not enough time to start the next math test, suspicions were assessed, and participants were fully debriefed.

RESULTS

Stereotype Endorsement. Consistent with prior research (Burkley & Blanton, 2008), women who rated the stereotypes after the math failure showed greater endorsement ($M = 3.58, SD = 2.27$) than those who rated the stereotypes before ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.84$), $t(166) = -2.37, p < .02, d = .36$. This suggests that women in the after condition were using the math stereotype as an excuse for their math failure in the way that we have described.

Persistence on Math Tutorial. As predicted, women who rated the negative stereotypes after failure quit the tutorial earlier ($M = 147$ seconds, $SD = 125.36$) than those who rated the stereotypes before failure ($M = 192$ seconds, $SD = 200.88$), however this effect was only marginally significant, $t(166) = 1.78, p = .07, d = .27$. Although this effect fell short of statistical significance, it is suggestive that blaming a failure on a negative stereotype reduces people's effort to improve their skills. Such behavioral evidence is encouraging, especially considering the lack of be-

TABLE 1. Differences in Disidentification with Math Domain (Study 1)

Measure	After condition	Before condition	$t(166)$	p	d
	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$			
Domain identification	5.56 (1.97)	6.55 (2.23)	3.05	.01	.47
Math Enjoyment	3.65 (2.55)	4.92 (3.08)	2.91	.01	.45
Pursue Math Major	2.17 (2.02)	3.09 (2.84)	2.42	.02	.37
Pursue Math Career	2.11 (1.63)	3.20 (2.57)	3.26	.001	.51

Note. Responses for all measures were made on a 1–11 rating scale.

havioral indicators typically seen in most psychology studies (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007).

Math Disidentification. As shown in Table 1, women who rated the negative stereotypes after failure reported less math identification, less enjoyment of math-related subjects, and were less interested in pursuing a math major or math career compared to women who rated them before. Overall, these results show a consistent pattern of disidentification from the math domain when given the opportunity to endorse negative stereotypes following failure.

Mediational Analyses. Following the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), we tested if the effect of condition on our measures was mediated by math stereotype endorsement. These results revealed evidence for mediation in regards to math identification. First, condition predicted math identification such that identification was lower in the after condition, $B = -.92$, $t(166) = -3.05$, $p = .003$. Second, condition predicted stereotype endorsement such that endorsement was higher in the after condition, $B = .75$, $t(166) = 2.37$, $p = .02$. Third, when controlling for condition, the mediator (stereotype endorsement) predicted identification, $B = -.21$, $t(165) = -2.72$, $p = .007$.¹ Thus, the three criteria of mediation outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) were met. Furthermore, the direct effect of condition on identification was reduced when controlling for the mediator, although it still remained statistically significant which suggests partial rather than full mediation, $B = -.83$, $t(165) = -2.56$, $p = .01$. A Sobel (1982) test of the difference between the direct and indirect paths revealed that the two paths were marginally different from each other ($z = -1.79$, $p = .07$). In sum, these results indicate that the effect of condition on math identification was partially mediated by changes in stereotype endorsement. Analyses on the other measures in this study did not reveal evidence of mediation.

DISCUSSION

Study 1 provides important information regarding the consequences of negative in-group stereotyping. First, this study replicated previous findings by demonstrating that women given the opportunity to use the math stereotype to excuse their math failure have higher levels of endorsement than women denied this op-

1. We also tested the reverse model, with math identification mediating the relationship between condition and stereotype endorsement. The third step of this alternative model was nearly identical to the original, $B = -.20$, $t(165) = -2.72$, $p = .007$. We chose to report the original mediation test because it was more consistent with the chronological order of measures presentation.

portunity. Second, this study revealed that such an opportunity also results in decreased motivation to improve on the stereotype task in the future, as evidenced by less persistence on the tutorial. However, the fact that stereotype endorsement was not found to mediate the effect of condition on persistence suggests the relationship between negative in-group stereotyping and motivation is not a simple one. On average, women who completed the stereotype measure after failure had higher stereotype endorsement and persisted less, but the lack of mediation indicates that a woman with high endorsement did not necessarily persist less than a woman with moderate endorsement. Although this lack of correlation between the supposed excuse and the relevant outcome is consistent with other studies on group-based excuses (e.g., Crandall et al., 2000), it remains to be seen why this pattern occurred. It could be that there is a low threshold for our effect, such that even a moderate level of endorsement can make one's stigma salient, thereby causing a decrease in motivation, but that no additional motivation is lost by a high level of endorsement (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984). It could also be that other lower-level mechanisms not measured by our study are at play. Women given the opportunity to blame their math failure on a stereotype may feel a reduced sense of responsibility or control over their own outcomes or they may attribute their failure differently than women denied this opportunity (Pontari et al., 2002). These women may also be more likely to engage in in-group social comparisons (Biernat & Manis, 1994), resulting in greater satisfaction with their poor performance (i.e., "I performed well, for a woman") and a perception that the tutorial was unnecessary. Such lower-level mechanisms were not assessed, but even if such mechanisms were at play, they would not contradict our explanation that stereotypes can serve as excuses for failure.

Whereas the impact of negative in-group stereotyping on motivation appears to be complex, its impact on math identification appears to be more straightforward. Results demonstrated that women given the opportunity to use the stereotype as an excuse for their failure had lower identification and engagement with the math domain. Importantly, this decrease in identification was found to be partially mediated by stereotype endorsement, such that women who endorsed the stereotype more after failure were also more likely to disidentify with the math domain. Taken together, these results suggest that women who blame their math failure on a stereotype suffer a number of negative personal consequences.

STUDY 2

Study 2 examined if endorsing a stereotype after failure also results in interpersonal costs in the form of negative observer evaluations. Exploring this potential cost is important because another's evaluation can often serve as the basis for grade and salary decisions. For example, imagine a female student who performed poorly on her first calculus exam and exclaimed that it must have been because "women just aren't good at math." How would this statement influence her math teacher's perception of her? The teacher may "cut the student some slack" as Snyder and Higgins (1989) described, resulting in a neutral evaluation. Conversely, the teacher may become upset at the student for refusing to take personal responsibility for her performance. Study 2 therefore examined observers' emotional reactions toward a woman who blamed her failure on a stereotype.

In addition to assessing observers' emotional responses, we also included items designed to assess the underlying explanation of such reactions. We reasoned there were two possible reasons why observers might react negatively toward the target who blames her failure on the math stereotype. It could be that observers perceive this target as less competent or skilled at math. Alternatively, it could be that observers perceive this target as being weak-willed or lacking confidence. To test these possible explanations, perceptions of the target's math skills and confidence were assessed in this study.

Finally, we sought to determine whether the in-group status of the target influences observer evaluations (e.g., Garcia, Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005). In the above example, would the teacher's reaction differ depending on whether the teacher was a man or a woman? If women are more likely than men to blame their math failure on a gender stereotype (Burkley & Blanton, 2008), then they may be less critical when observing another woman engaging in the same behavior (e.g., Hirt, McCrae, & Boris, 2003). As such, this study examined both women's and men's reactions toward a female target.

METHOD

Participants and Design. Eighty-one undergraduate students (41 women) from a large Midwestern university participated for partial course fulfillment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, creating a 2 (participant's gender: women vs. men) \times 2 (target performance: good vs. poor) \times 2 (reference: no stereotype vs. stereotype) factorial design.

Procedure and Materials. Participants were presented with a survey supposedly completed by a female student who had just completed a math test. This survey included basic information (first name, gender, age) and indicated the target's grade for the math test (A for *good performance* condition, C for *poor performance* condition).

Next, the survey asked the target to reflect on her exam performance. Participants in the *no stereotype* condition read a response that did not reference the gender stereotype (e.g., "I did good/bad on the exam"), whereas those in the *stereotype* condition read a response that made reference to the math stereotype. Specifically, those in the *good performance/stereotype* condition read a response that augmented the exam performance (e.g., "my grade was good but that is because women are usually bad at math") and those in the *poor performance/stereotype* condition read a response that excused the exam performance (e.g., "my grade was bad but that is because women are usually bad at math").

After reading these materials, participants evaluated the target in terms of her math skills and confidence. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate "how good at math is the target" and "how confident is the target." Responses to both items were made on a 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*) rating scale.

Next, participants reported their emotional reactions by indicating the extent to which they felt six different emotions (*anger, annoyance, shame, embarrassment, happiness, pride*) toward the target. Responses were made on a 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*) rating scale. A subsequent factor analysis indicated that two factors accounted for 70% of the variance in emotional reactions. The first factor (eigenvalue = 2.42) included the negative emotion items (*anger, annoyance, shame, embarrassment*)

and the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.78) included the positive emotion items (*happiness, pride*). Responses for the negative items were averaged together to create a composite score, with higher values indicating a more negative emotional reaction ($\alpha = .75$). Responses for the two positive items were also averaged together to create a composite score, with higher values indicating a more positive emotional reaction ($r = .60, p < .001$). After completing all materials, suspicions regarding the purpose of the study were assessed and all participants were fully debriefed.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed with a 2 (gender: women vs. men) \times 2 (target performance: good vs. poor) \times 2 (stereotype condition: no stereotype vs. stereotype) factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Positive Emotions. For positive emotions, there was a main effect of target performance, $F(1, 73) = 14.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$, such that participants responded more positively toward a target that performed well ($M = 1.70, SD = 1.47$) than a target that performed poorly ($M = 0.69, SD = 0.87$). Second, there was a main effect of stereotype condition, $F(1, 73) = 6.06, p < .02, \eta^2 = .08$, such that participants responded more positively toward a target that did not reference the stereotype ($M = 1.55, SD = 1.39$) than a target that did ($M = 0.85, SD = 1.14$). The other effects were not significant.

Negative Emotions. For negative emotions, there was a main effect of stereotype condition, $F(1, 73) = 8.84, p = .004, \eta^2 = .11$, such that participants responded more negatively toward a target that referenced the stereotype ($M = 0.84, SD = 0.94$) than a target that did not ($M = 0.29, SD = 0.70$). However, this main effect was qualified by the predicted target performance \times stereotype condition interaction, $F(1, 73) = 4.43, p = .04, \eta^2 = .06$ (Figure 1).

As predicted, the target who blamed her poor performance on the stereotype evoked more negative emotions ($M = 1.16, SD = 0.99$) than the target who augmented her success with the stereotype ($M = 0.52, SD = 0.79$), $F(1, 77) = 14.15, p < .001, d = .71$. Thus, observers' negative emotions were not solely driven by the target's reference to a gender stereotype (cf. Mae & Carston, 2005). Instead, the negative emotions were specifically directed toward the target who *blamed her failure* on the gender stereotype. Conversely, when the target did not reference the stereotype, there was no significant difference in negative emotions across the two performance conditions, $F(1, 77) = 0.66, p = .59$.

In terms of observers' gender, there were no differences in positive or negative emotional responses based on whether the observer was a man or woman. Thus, the observer's evaluations did not differ depending on whether the target was an in-group or out-group member.

Mediated Moderation Analyses. To determine if the effect of the interaction on negative emotions was mediated by either the skill or confidence ratings, we followed the procedure recommended by Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005) for testing mediated moderation. First, negative emotions were regressed onto target performance (x), stereotype condition (moderator), and the target performance \times stereotype condition interaction. Consistent with the previously reported ANOVA results, the interaction significantly predicted negative emotions, $B = .83, t(77) = 2.30, p =$

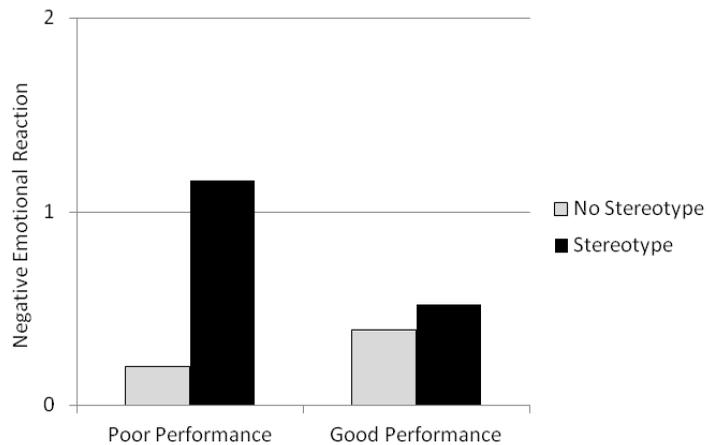


FIGURE 1. Negative Emotional Reaction toward Target (Study 2)

.02. Next, using two separate equations, we regressed the potential mediator (skill or confidence) onto target performance, stereotype condition, and the interaction. For skill, this step revealed there was no significant effect of the interaction, $B = .19$, $t(77) = .54$, $p = .59$. Thus, perceived skill does not mediate the impact of the interaction on negative emotions. However, for confidence, this step revealed there was a significant effect of the interaction, $B = -1.21$, $t(77) = -2.27$, $p = .03$. As can be seen in Figure 2, participants rated the target who blamed her poor performance on the stereotype as lowest in confidence. Finally, negative emotions were regressed onto target performance (x), stereotype condition (moderator), the performance \times stereotype interaction, the mediator (confidence) and the mediator \times moderator interaction. Results showed that when controlling for these other factors, the mediator (confidence) significantly predicted negative emotions, $B = -.68$, $t(75) = -3.03$, $p = .003$. Thus, the criteria of mediated moderation outlined by Muller et al. (1986) were met. Furthermore, as evidence of full mediation, the performance \times stereotype interaction became nonsignificant when controlling for these other factors, $B = .17$, $t(75) = .43$, $p = .67$.

DISCUSSION

Study 2 is the first to demonstrate the negative interpersonal consequences that incur when stigmatized targets blame their failure on a negative stereotype. First, this study demonstrated that observers had the strongest negative reaction toward a woman who blamed her math failure on the relevant gender stereotype. Second, the results revealed that this effect was fully mediated by perceptions of confidence. That is, observers felt the strongest negative reaction toward the target who blamed her failure on the stereotype and this reaction was driven by their

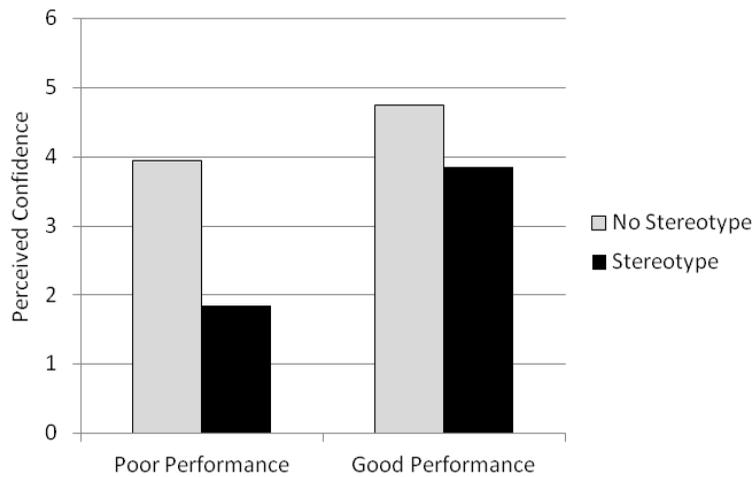


FIGURE 2. Perceived Confidence of the Target (Study 2).

perception that this target lacked confidence. This study therefore establishes that women who blame their math failure on a stereotype incur negative interpersonal consequences.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present studies indicate that using a negative stereotype as an excuse for failure can have personal and interpersonal costs. People who use negative in-groups stereotypes as an excuse for their failures may protect their self-esteem, but they pay for this protection through decreased effort in the stereotyped domain, disidentification from the domain, and negative emotional reactions by others. Importantly, these studies offer the first empirical demonstration of the tradeoffs inherent in using negative stereotypes to excuse failures.

The present work provides an important theoretical contribution to the understanding of negative in-group stereotyping. Prior work on this unique form of stereotyping has largely assumed it is driven by internalized self-hatred. However, a small but growing body of work supports the alternative account that such endorsement reflects an attempt to excuse failures. Previous work by Burkley and Blanton (2008) found that women who endorsed the math stereotype after a math failure had higher self-esteem than those denied this opportunity. Although this provided a good initial test of the idea that such stereotypes serve as excuses, it was not definitive. If negative stereotypes truly serve as excuses, then they should result in both positive and negative consequences indicative of excuse-making. The present results therefore add an important piece of the puzzle by demonstrating that such endorsement incurs costs similar to that of non-stereotypic excuses. Furthermore, the meditational analysis in Study 1 demonstrates that the more women blame their failure on the stereotype, the more they suffer the negative

consequence of disidentification. Such meditation provides strong evidence that women are in fact using the stereotypes as excuses in the way we have described.

The present results also speak to the usefulness of negative in-group stereotyping as a protective strategy, especially in the long term. One implication from the Burkley and Blanton (2008) studies is that negative in-group stereotyping may be a viable and effective way for stigmatized targets to momentarily protect their self-esteem against failures. However, the present results call into question the effectiveness of this strategy. Although such endorsement may provide the individual with self-esteem protection, it comes at the cost of numerous negative consequences. As such, these studies suggest that targets who are tempted to blame their failures on a stereotype should stop to consider the negative consequences that may result.

Although the present studies represent an important extension to the research on stereotypic excuses, several questions remain. First, although Study 1 suggested endorsement decreases motivation, the exact nature of this relationship remains unclear. It is likely that one or more lower-level mechanisms were at play but were not tested by our methods (e.g., reduced control, increased performance satisfaction). Future research should explore such possibilities, but it is important to note that even if such mechanisms were at play, they would not contradict our explanation that stereotypes can serve as excuses for failure. Such a demonstration would simply provide greater specificity than our initial tests would allow. Second, although our work here and elsewhere demonstrates women engage in in-group stereotyping after failure, it is unclear exactly what their intentions are when doing so. Are women intending to use the stereotype as a temporary excuse or are they seeking a legitimate explanation for their failure? Although it may be difficult to ascertain the exact reason for women's endorsement (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), future research should consider this issue. For example, researchers could ask participants to indicate whether the stereotype was a "true explanation" for their failure (Fraser, 2000). However, regardless of whether the stereotype is used as an illegitimate excuse or a true explanation, such behavior is consistent with our assertion that negative stereotypes can be endorsed to protect against failures. Third, when participants face real or anticipated failures, they have a variety of defensive strategies available to them (e.g., self-affirmation, self-handicapping, downward social comparisons; Rhodewalt & Vohs, 2005; Tesser, 2001). Future research should identify when stereotype targets will choose stereotypic excuses over other strategies available. Fourth, the research on stereotypic excuses has so far focused on one particular stereotype: gender differences in math ability. However, it is likely that some stereotypes are so negative that endorsing them in the manner we have described would produce more harm than good (e.g., racial stereotypes about intelligence). In such situations, it is likely that the stigmatized individual will choose a different strategy to protect self-esteem in the face of failure. Future research should therefore extend the concept of stereotypic excuses to other stigmatized groups and other stereotypes in an attempt to identify the theoretical boundaries of this strategy. Finally, as Snyder and Higgins (1989) pointed out, excuses are often invoked in anticipation of an upcoming failure. Therefore it is possible that stigmatized individuals may endorse stereotypes as an excuse when anticipating failure in a stereotypic domain. In Study 1, women who completed the stereotype endorsement task prior to the math test were unaware of the upcoming exam, so their endorsement did not reflect an attempt to protect their self-esteem against

an anticipated threat. However, future research could examine if women who are aware of an upcoming difficult math test would be more likely to endorse the stereotype in a preventative manner.

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