

Self-Limiting Behavior in Women

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-EFFICACY AS PREDICTORS

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Research suggests that some women may be reluctant to pursue certain tasks because they lack confidence in their ability to succeed. This study was an exploration of the basis of this type of self-limiting behavior. Global self-esteem and task-specific self-efficacy were used as predictors of task choice and task preference. Results suggested that task-specific self-efficacy was a stronger predictor of whether a woman would choose a leadership task rather than a group-member task. In addition, task-specific self-efficacy predicted the strength of the woman's preference for the group-member task. The implications of this finding and recommendations for shifting task-specific self-efficacy for leadership roles are discussed.

Although evidence suggests a slight shift away from traditional sex-role stereotypes (Dambrot, Papp, & Whitmore, 1984; Helmreich, Spence, & Gibson, 1982; Kravetz, 1976), it appears that some negative beliefs about a female's ability to perform certain tasks are deeply rooted and resistant to change (Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Reskin, 1993; Schein, 1973; White, Kruczek, Brown, & White, 1989). Although women have made gains in the managerial and professional occupations in the 1970s and 1980s, this rise was from a very small base (Kanter, 1993). Research demonstrates that women are still often viewed as less effective leaders, and men are viewed as better suited for decision-making tasks (Rizzo & Mendez, 1990).

Beliefs that women lack leadership abilities may lead to resistance to women in managerial positions. Although certain managerial jobs may incorporate idiosyncratic skills that do not require leadership (Yukl & Van

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Fleet, 1992), the requirements of leadership and management overlap (Lawson & Shen, 1998). When one examines the perceived requirements of the two roles, the overlap is substantial. For example, characteristics of effective managers and effective leadership include assertiveness, strong organizational skills, and emotional stability (Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982; Schein, 1975). Yet, women are often viewed negatively when adopting these typically masculine styles of behavior (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995).

Data suggest that discrimination is more pronounced in managerial positions that require leadership skills. For example, as the power and knowledge associated with managerial positions increase, representation of females decreases (Kemp, 1994). Women who are viewed as incompetent and doubt their own leadership abilities may be passed over for emerging leadership positions.

Although some progress has been made in the integration of women into nontraditional careers, inequities persist. As one author noted, females made important gains in professional careers in the 1970s and 1980s, but the gain was from a small base (Kanter, 1993). Most inequalities exist in upper-level managerial and executive positions where pay is highest (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Kemp, 1994). Disparities exist in the pay rates of male and female employees even when tenure, education, and skills are equated (Branum, Liden, & Dilomaso, 1995).

One barrier facing women who seek nontraditional roles is the existence of sex-based stereotypes consisting of undesirable traits. These are problematic because they are overgeneralizations that are often inaccurate, leading those in powerful organizational positions to limit the opportunities of females (Heilman, 1983; Rizzo & Mendez, 1990). A recent study of women in a variety of occupations reported that 40% of the women in the study had been denied a raise or promotion because of being a woman (Klonoff & Landrine, 1995). This finding generalizes to women in upper-echelon positions. A study of women who were able to make partner in accounting positions reported that success was in part dependent on overcoming stereotypes (Maupin, 1993). Similarly, 81% of 200 CEOs identified stereotypes and preconceptions regarding female managers as a primary factor impeding females' progress (Adler & Izraeli, 1994).

A related concern is that women could internalize these negative beliefs, leading them to lack confidence in their ability to perform challenging tasks. Research suggests that women may lack confidence in their ability to successfully complete nontraditional tasks (Betz & Hackett, 1981; McMahan, 1982). This lack of confidence may have far reaching consequences because individuals who believe they lack the skills to master certain tasks may avoid these and turn to less challenging tasks (Bandura, 1977).

In organizational settings, such negative beliefs about abilities or low self-efficacy could damage a female's career advancement. The assignments that are instrumental in gaining recognition in a firm are typically challenging ones, often in highly visible leadership positions (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). However, a woman who fears that she lacks the ability to perform such roles may avoid these assignments or turn them down. This is supported by research that shows self-perceived ability to perform tasks is a determinant of task choice (Betz & Hackett, 1981, 1983). Avoiding leadership roles is one form of self-limiting behavior that may negatively influence career opportunities.

How far reaching are the effects of low self-efficacy? Research suggests that it has a significant impact on performance. Theoretically, self-efficacy can serve as a guiding force for behavior intended to overcome performance obstacles (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Some researchers believe that self-efficacy and performance have a cyclical relationship. High self-efficacy facilitates performance, and successful performance nurtures self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Mathieu, Martineau, & Tannenbaum, 1993).

Research on the efficacy-performance relationship spans a number of performance domains. In the academic arena, Bandura (1997) reviews research that shows beliefs about academic skills predict performance in courses ranging from computer science to mathematics. Self-efficacy predicts performance of students enrolled in classes as diverse as bowling (Mathieu et al., 1993) and hands-on computer training (Gist, Schwoerer, & Rosen, 1989).

Self-efficacy also predicts performance in more applied settings. Bandura (1997) noted that efficacy beliefs predict the range of career options people consider viable for themselves even when vocational interests and ability are controlled. Raising self-efficacy has been shown to enhance job search behavior of unemployed participants (Eden & Avraim, 1993). In sum, self-efficacy does predict actual performance in a broad range of settings. Thus, raising self-efficacy has practical consequences for the productivity of individuals in organizations.

This research on self-efficacy provides a useful means for examining why some females may lack confidence in their ability to master difficult tasks. Research suggests that negative beliefs about their abilities may underlie females' lower aspirations in careers that are typified as superior, involving authority, and commanding higher pay (Epstein & Bronzaft, 1974; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). In general, women are more likely to evaluate their own performance less favorably than men and are more prone to use good luck as an explanation for superior performance (Deaux & Farris, 1977; Vancouver & Ilgen, 1988).

Once in a job, negative beliefs about one's abilities may result in reduced willingness to take risks, reduced desire to be visible, and negative self-presentation, which hinders career progress (Heilman 1983; Heilman, & Kram 1978). This lowered self-efficacy may lead one to avoid activities that could further one's career (Bandura, 1997). Thus, self-limiting career activity may occur prior to and after job entry. Both task-specific self-efficacy, or beliefs about one's abilities to perform a specific task, and more global feelings of self-esteem or self-worth may predict self-selection out of demanding tasks.

SELF-LIMITING BEHAVIOR: GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM AND TASK-SPECIFIC SELF-EFFICACY

Various personality variables have been used to predict females' self-limiting behavior, or self-selection, out of tasks and occupations. One of the predictors most frequently used is global self-esteem (GSE), which captures self-assessed overall worth. This work originated with Rosenberg's definition of the construct (M. Rosenberg, 1965, 1979). M. Rosenberg has defined self-esteem as feelings of general worth and self-confidence. This measure is still widely used in research and has been used for the types of jobs pursued by female students (Ellis & Taylor, 1983) and attainment of executive positions by females (Morrison & Sebold, 1974). Although global self-esteem provides a useful starting point for understanding females' occupational behavior, a more promising predictor of self-limiting behavior that has emerged in more recent research is self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997).

Task-specific self-efficacy (TSSE) captures one's self-assessed ability to perform a certain task. In the words of one of the originators of the construct, "Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements" (Bandura, 1982, p. 23).

Although these two constructs appear similar, global self-esteem and task-specific self-efficacy may make somewhat unique contributions to our understanding of self-limiting behavior. Whereas some researchers believe that beliefs about the self comprise one general factor, others suggest that self-evaluations are domain-specific (Byrne & Shavelson, 1986; Marsh, 1986, 1987; Marsh, Parker, & Barnes, 1985). One may have positive general feelings of worth or high global self-esteem and still have specific negative beliefs about one's abilities in a given area or low task-specific self-efficacy. Thus, studying TSSE and the relationship between TSSE and GSE may lead

to a greater understanding of why women choose not to perform specific tasks. This was the first goal of our study.

The interactive and selectivity hypotheses, first proposed by M. Rosenberg (1965), suggest that these two constructs are only related under certain circumstances. According to the interactive hypothesis, the importance of the abilities assessed in a task-specific self-efficacy measure is a moderator of the relationship between task specific self-efficacy and global self-esteem. If females find the abilities relevant to a task unimportant, their global self-esteem may not be influenced even when TSSE is low. However, if they believe the abilities required for a task are important, self-perceived abilities should be more strongly related to global self-esteem. Based on this assumption, we tested the hypothesis that the perceived importance of task-relevant abilities would moderate the relationship between global self-esteem and task-specific self-efficacy. If it is the case that these two variables are separate constructs, they should have unique contributions to the prediction of target variables.

A second major goal of the study was to compare the strength of TSSE and GSE as predictors of interest in performing a particular task and willingness to engage in the task. This represents an extension of past research, which often uses global measures of self-esteem to predict interest or expected proficiency in different tasks. We are not the first researchers to use specific TSSE measures as a predictor (cf. Martocchio & Webster, 1992). However, research that relates females' leadership TSSE to selection of leadership or nonleadership tasks is quite limited. In this study, we adopt the paradigm that specific measures of efficacy may prove stronger predictors of behavior than generalized measures of control, such as global self-esteem (Bandura, 1997).

Because self-limiting behavior may be related to one's confidence in one's ability to complete a specific task, reliance on a global measure of self-esteem may not always be appropriate (Stake & Orlofsky, 1981; Tharenou, 1979). Using task-specific self-efficacy measures may enhance the prediction typical of more global measures (Ellis & Taylor, 1983). Although we hypothesized that GSE would predict females' task choice and task preference, we also believed that TSSE would add incremental prediction to GSE.

SUMMARY

The inclusion of a measure of both global self-esteem and task-specific self-efficacy seems critical in understanding self-selection of females out of certain professions and tasks (E. Lopez, 1982; Simpson & Boyle, 1975;

Stake & Orlofsky, 1981). In view of this, both GSE and TSSE were included as predictors of females' task choice. We chose to study females' preference for a group leader task over the less central task of group member.

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Because task-specific self-efficacy may vary as a function of the performance arena under investigation, the choice of the task or occupation used in a study is an important consideration. Given the emergence of women in leadership roles and the importance of understanding self-selection out of these roles, a managerial-type leadership task was chosen for this study. Such positions are often masculinely sex typed or believed to require abilities that females lack (Heilman et al., 1989; Powell & Butterfield, 1989; Schein, 1973, 1975). Research suggests that women often face negative evaluations when they assume leadership positions (Eagley, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992) or in roles that involve authority (Maupin, 1993; Kemp, 1994). The presence of such barriers demonstrates the importance of understanding how to raise females' self-efficacy for leadership tasks.

A methodological concern in this area of research is the way in which self-limiting behavior, in the form of task choice, is assessed. Many researchers who wish to understand females' career and task choices do not allow women free choice in selecting a career or task in experimental settings. Most of the literature in this area consists of assessments of college students' preferences for certain occupations (Nieva & Gutek, 1981) rather than the choice a woman would make if she thought she actually had to perform a task after stating a task preference. For instance, past research has involved assigning masculine or feminine tasks and then assessing participants' self-esteem and self-confidence (e.g., Deaux & Farris, 1977; Heilman, Lucas, & Kaplow, 1990). In the current setting, participants were led to believe that they would actually perform the chosen task after completing the initial survey. Women were allowed to choose between a task that did not require leadership traits and one that drew on these abilities.

We also chose to focus on differences in self-assessed ability among women rather than on the differences between males' and females' assessments. As noted by Bandura (1997), research on sex differences in self-efficacy has often ignored the fact that within-sex variation often exceeds between-sex variation. We agree with Freedman and Philips (1988) who state that research should focus on "the substantial proportion of within-sex variance that has frequently been viewed as 'error variance' in many existing studies. This focus may assist us in understanding the way individual women (rather than women in the aggregate) respond to organizational settings" (p. 244).

Women generally judge themselves less suited for many nontraditional occupations than men, even when performance on masculine or scientific tasks does not differ (Bandura, 1997). This suggests that the subjective belief that one lacks leadership skills may predict self-selection out of this type of task. The increase of women in the workforce has not been matched by an increase in the research conducted on the role self-efficacy plays in females' occupational behavior (Bandura, 1997). The current study sought to add one piece of knowledge to this field.

Using past research as a foundation, the following hypotheses were formed:

Hypothesis 1: The number of women with low GSE who choose the group leader task will be lower than the number of women with high GSE who choose the group leader task.

Hypothesis 2: The number of women with low TSSE who choose the group leader task will be lower than the number of women with high TSSE who choose the group leader task.

Hypothesis 3: Task-specific self-esteem will predict interest in the group leader task over and above the prediction offered by the global self-esteem measure.

Hypothesis 4: The perceived importance of the task-relevant abilities will moderate the relationship between the managerial TSSE scale and the global self-esteem scale. There will be a stronger relationship between TSSE and GSE for those participants who believe the abilities on the TSSE scale are important than for those participants who believe the abilities are not important.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants consisted of 42 female students for the pilot study and 81 female students for the main study. All were students in the psychology and business departments of a university. Participants were given extra credit points in return for their participation in the study.

MEASURES

GLOBAL SELF-ESTEEM

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (1965, 1979) was used to assess global self-esteem. This scale is designed to measure respondents' general worth and self-confidence and has been used in a variety of settings (cf.

Cook, 1981; Ellis & Taylor, 1983). The convergent and discriminant validity of the scale has been supported by Silber and Tippett (1965). Additional data suggest that the scale is unidimensional (Crandall, 1973; O'Brien, 1985). The internal consistency of the scale typically ranges from .72 to .87 (M. Rosenberg, 1965) and was .82 in the current study. Scores on the 10-item measure also show acceptable levels of stability, with test-retest coefficients above the .8 standard (Silber & Tippett, 1965).

TASK-SPECIFIC SELF-ESTEEM

Given the importance of accurately measuring task-specific self-esteem, we first identified the specific abilities women believed one needed to perform the leadership task designed for use in this study. The threshold traits analysis (TTA), an instrument that allows one to assess the traits needed for successful job performance, was selected as a means to identify traits related to the leadership and group member tasks. The TTA was chosen because its emphasis on traits needed for performance is consistent with our trait-oriented view of perceived leadership requirements (cf. Foti & Lord, 1987; Lord et al., 1982). This instrument contains traits relevant to a large range of occupations, including those requiring leadership skills (Lopez, Kesselman, & Lopez, 1981). Interrater agreement in the traits selected as relevant to performance meet professional standards (F. Lopez et al., 1981).

The content of the TTA consists of 33 traits classified into five groups: physical, mental, learned, motivational, and social. Although we could have culled the initial list of traits down to those that were logically most related to leadership, this would have increased the demand characteristics of the study. Therefore, participants in the pilot study rated a leader and group member task on all of the traits in the TTA. To supplement this list of traits, the research on perceived requirements for successful leadership positions was examined. Twenty-three traits identified as relevant to successful management were also used in the development of the TSSE scale (Schein, 1975). As noted earlier, although the actual content of specific leadership and managerial roles may differ, there is substantial overlap in the perceived demands of the two roles. The goal of this phase of the study was to obtain a final list of traits that were viewed as relevant to group leader performance or a leadership-specific TSSE scale.

A pilot study was conducted with the primary goal of gathering evaluations on the set of traits in to develop the TSSE scale. Twenty-four participants read descriptions of a group leader task and the group member task and then rated the relevance of each of the traits and abilities to each task using the TTA and Schein's list of tasks.

The descriptions for the tasks were drawn from Lord, Foti, and DeVader's (1984) work on leader and follower behaviors. The leadership task involved leading a small group of people on a group project. The follower task involved carrying out the goals on a task assigned by a group leader.

Ratings of the relevance of each trait to the leader or follower task were made on a scale that ranged from 1, *extremely irrelevant*, to 5, *extremely relevant*. The midpoint of the scale, 3, was labeled *neutral*. Those traits and abilities rated as most relevant (means greater than 4.5) to the leadership task were selected from the 56 traits and abilities. Traits and abilities were chosen that were rated highly relevant to the managerial task and less relevant to the group member task. The traits chosen were planning, decision making, initiative, influence, leadership ability, self-confidence, objectivity, and emotional stability. Traits with averages of approximately 3.0 on a 5-point scale for both tasks were included as neutral filler items to decrease demand effects. The internal consistency of our leadership TSSE scale was .78.

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF THE ABILITIES

As noted earlier, the relationship between TSSE and GSE for women may be stronger when the TSSE abilities are viewed as important. Thus, participants were asked to rate the importance of each ability from the TSSE, using a scale that ranged from 1, *very unimportant*, to 5, *very important*. That is, they were required to indicate how much they valued having each ability. For each subject, importance ratings of all of the traits were averaged to yield a summary rating for use in further analyses.

PROCEDURE

In the main study, participants were told they would participate in two short experiments. Two different experimenters were used for the two different parts of the study. In the first part, participants completed the GSE, TSSE, and importance measures. At this point, the first experimenter gathered these materials and left the room. A second experimenter entered the room and told the participants that they would be asked to perform certain tasks in an experiment and that they could choose three tasks from a set of six tasks that they would like to perform. They were shown three pairs of tasks, along with task descriptions, and asked to choose one from each pair. Two of the task pairs were used to reduce demand characteristics. These were a divergent thinking task/analogy task pair and a second crossword puzzle/simulated pilot task pair. These were described as fully as the leader/follower task pair. The choice of interest was the participant's preference for one of the third pairs of tasks: either the follower position or the leader position described earlier.

TABLE 1
Number of Women Choosing Each Task as a Function of Self-Esteem

	<i>Group Leader</i>	<i>Group Member</i>
High GSE	26	20
Low GSE	18	17

NOTE: GSE = global self-esteem.

Participants chose one of the two tasks and then indicated their preference for the chosen over the nonchosen task using a 4-point scale, where 1 indicated a very weak preference for the chosen task and 4 indicated a very strong preference for the chosen task. Next, they rated their interest in performing each task in each pair on a 5-point scale ranging from 1, *extremely disinterested in the task*, and 5, *extremely interested in the task*. These two ratings provided an indication of their interest in the task. They also rated on a scale of 1 to 5 how well they thought they would perform both tasks. The scale anchors, progressing from 1 to 5, were *poor, fair, average, good, and excellent*. After handing in their task preferences, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

ANALYSES

First, frequency distributions were examined for the GSE and TSSE scales. Responses to both scales were found to be normally distributed, with no apparent range restriction in the predictors or the dependent variables.

The first hypothesis stated that the number of high GSE women who chose the managerial task would exceed the number of low GSE women who chose the task. To analyze the first hypothesis, GSE scores were split at the median score, 3.0, to provide high GSE and low GSE participants. A chi-square analysis revealed results that failed to support the first hypothesis ($p = .65$). There was no significant difference between the number of high self-esteem and low self-esteem women who chose the managerial task (see Table 1).

A similar analysis was performed with TSSE as the predictor and tested the hypothesis stating that the number of high TSSE women who chose the managerial task would exceed the number of low TSSE women who chose the task. Two groups high and low on TSSE were formed using a median split of 3.38. The chi-square value of 7.33 was significant ($p < .01$). As predicted, participants with high TSSE were more likely to choose the leadership task than those with low TSSE (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Number of Women Choosing Each Task as a Function of Self-Efficacy

	<i>Group Leader</i>	<i>Group Member</i>
High TSSE	31	15
Low TSSE	13	22

NOTE: TSSE = task-specific self-efficacy.

Prior to investigating the third and fourth hypotheses, we examined the correlation between the two items that indicated interest in the task and the one item measure of self-rated ability to perform the group leader task. Because the correlation was strong (.84, $p < .01$), ratings of interest and ability to perform the leadership task were combined to produce the variable called task preference in the remaining analyses.

The third hypothesis stated that TSSE would account for a significant portion of variance in task preference over and above that accounted for by GSE. The statistical analysis used to assess Hypotheses 3 was hierarchical multiple regression. GSE was entered first in the regression, followed by TSSE. GSE was a significant predictor of preference for the leadership task ($R^2 = .07$, $p < .05$). Those with more favorable levels of GSE expressed greater interest in the leadership task. TSSE accounted for an additional 13% of the variance in task preference when entered after GSE ($p < .01$). Those women with higher TSSE also expressed more interest in assuming the leader position. Thus, the third hypothesis was supported in that TSSE explained additional variance to GSE in the prediction of task preference, and both GSE and TSSE were related to interest in performing the managerial task (see Table 3).

Hierarchical multiple regression was also used to assess the fourth hypothesis stating that importance ratings of the characteristics required to perform the leader task would moderate the relationship between GSE and TSSE. A stronger relationship between GSE and TSSE was anticipated for those who believed the abilities that comprised the TSSE scale were important. Thus, the dependent variable was GSE. The main effects, TSSE and the importance ratings, were entered first. As shown in Table 4, this produced an R^2 of .38 ($p < .01$). To determine if importance ratings acted as a moderator, the interaction of TSSE and average importance ratings was entered next. The R^2 increased to .41. The increase was small, .03, but significant ($p < .05$). The small amount of variance accounted for by the interaction may have resulted because the main effects of TSSE and importance ratings already explained a large amount of variance in global self-esteem.

TABLE 3
Regression Analysis of GSE and TSSE as a Predictor of Task Choice

	<i>GSE</i>		<i>TSSE</i>		
	B	SE B	<i>Beta</i>	T	<i>Sig</i> T
R^2	.068**		.202**		
R^2 Change			.134**		
Step 1					
GSE	.785	.327	.261	2.399	.019
Constant	1.196	1.00		1.194	.2361
Step 2					
GSE	-.070	.386	-.023	-0.181	.857
TSSE	.980	.271	.463	3.614	.001
Constant	.441	.956		0.461	.646

NOTE: GSE = global self-esteem; TSSE = task-specific self-efficacy.

DISCUSSION

One goal of the study was to examine the utility of GSE and TSSE as predictors of task choice. As anticipated, those women who believed they had the abilities needed to perform the leadership task (high TSSE) were more likely to choose this task and expressed more interest in performing it, whereas those who were less confident in their abilities were more likely to self-select out of the leader task and choose the subordinate task. Global self-esteem ratings were not useful in predicting actual task choice.

TSSE may be a better predictor than GSE because TSSE deals specifically with abilities relevant to the task at hand, providing a more tailored prediction of task choice. As suggested by other researchers, using a task-specific measure of self-efficacy may enhance prediction of task choice and other behaviors and attitudes related to a given task (Bandura, 1982, 1997). In contrast to this task-specific measure, GSE includes the assessment of one's overall self-worth and not just how one feels about one's ability to perform a particular task. This global measure may be less useful in predicting specific behaviors.

The findings of this study suggest that low TSSE may lead to self-limiting behavior or self-selection out of leadership positions. Raising leadership TSSE may encourage these women to attempt intimidating managerial tasks women believe incorporate central leadership characteristics, such as

TABLE 4
Regression Analysis of TSSE and Importance as Predictors of GSE

Variable	Main Effects (importance and TSSE)		Interaction (Importance TSSE)		Sig T
	B	SE B	Beta	T	
R^2	.378**		.41**		
R^2 Change			.033*		
Step 1					
Importance	-.046	.083	-.053	-0.549	.585
TSSE	.445	.068	.633	6.553	.000
Constant	1.70	.338		5.038	.000
Step 2					
Importance	-.860	.401	-.997	-2.142	.035
TSSE	-.620	.519	-.883	-1.196	.235
Importance × TSSE	.248	.120	2.079	2.072	.042
Constant	5.178	1.709		3.030	.0033

NOTE: GSE = global self-esteem; TSSE = task-specific self-efficacy.

directing others, coordinating group activities, and focusing group efforts (Lord et al., 1984.) Beliefs regarding personal efficacy may underlie human agency (Bandura, 1977; 1997). If women do not believe they can effectively lead others, they will not attempt to do so. Building self-efficacy may prevent self-selection out of leadership roles.

Modeling and verbal persuasion can be helpful supplements in enhancing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Bandura (1997) provides an overview of how a company may use modeling to enhance employee self-efficacy. First, appropriate skills are modeled to convey basic effective task strategies to the learner. Next, learners receive guided practice and feedback. Last, the person is encouraged and assisted in applying these skills by giving them an actual job assignment. Researchers have generally concluded that modeling, guided practice on a task, and corrective feedback can raise self-efficacy, even when participants are initially unsure about their ability to succeed on tasks (Bandura, 1977; Gist, Schworer, & Rosen, 1989).

Translated into the current situation, this suggests that women should have the opportunity to observe effective leaders and the chance to talk to them about the strategies they use when taking charge of projects. This could take place through participation in developmental leadership workshops or more informally by allowing the women a chance to simply interact with

those in leadership positions at work, perhaps by being assigned to work with the leader on a project.

In addition, women should be encouraged to accept leadership positions. They should be given the opportunity to work with a more experienced person early in the process who could provide feedback on the leader strategies used by the female in her new role. Such timely, accurate, and specific feedback may help women plan strategies to improve their performance (Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995). An additional benefit of this feedback is that it may focus the person's attention on information from the task rather than on thoughts of failure.

These simple modeling interventions would allow the female employee to become more familiar with the nature of the leadership task. Ideally, the model would be a mentor because informal mentors may allow women in nontraditional occupations to become more comfortable with such tasks, and they may provide valuable information about how to succeed in jobs (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Noe, 1988). Furthermore, the use of someone who is a mentor or a familiar, respected person rather than an unfamiliar person may enhance the effectiveness of modeling (Bandura, 1997). The purpose of such mentoring relationships is not to encourage women to simply mimic the mentor's behavior but to familiarize her with the demands of the task and to provide her with information and support as needed (Fine, 1995).

A second goal of the study was to examine the relationship between TSSE and GSE. One reason that we were interested in this issue is because the two constructs are often treated as if they measure the same psychological belief system. The finding that TSSE and GSE were not equally effective in predicting task preference suggests that these constructs are not interchangeable. Although the two measures were significantly correlated ($r = .61, p < .01$), they were differentially related to self-limiting behavior.

The tailored TSSE scales may offer greater prediction of behavior in specific task settings, whereas global self-esteem may be more useful in predicting broad criteria (e.g., as self-selection) out of any challenging task. As Simpson and Boyle (1975) posited,

It is imperative that researchers clearly define more specific kinds of self-esteem and then, making use of the methodological expertise available, develop instruments to measure them. Researchers using self-esteem measures would be well-advised to select the measure most nearly appropriate for their study; global measures may be desirable in some cases, but specific or task-specific measures may be of greater value in others. (p. 904)

A related goal of the study was to explore whether importance ratings of the abilities on the TSSE scale moderated the relationship between GSE and

TSSE. This set of analyses provided additional information on the relationship between GSE and TSSE. Past research suggested that TSSE would be more strongly related to GSE for those who viewed the task-relevant abilities important because those abilities viewed as important should have a larger impact on overall feelings of self-worth. Although the interaction was in the expected direction, it predicted only 3% of the variance in global self-esteem when entered after the main effects. Thus, the interactive hypothesis, stating that the relationship between self-esteem and beliefs about abilities depends on the importance of a particular ability, received only weak support.

In a second set of analyses designed to provide further information on the nature of TSSE, we explored the relationship between the self-rated importance of the abilities listed on the TSSE and overall TSSE scores. The positive correlation between TSSE and the importance rating supported Rosenberg's (1983) selectivity hypothesis which suggests that "participants selectively assign the greatest importance to those areas of self-concept in which their self-perceptions are most positive and assign the least importance to areas in which their self-perceptions are poorest" (Marsh, 1986, p. 1235). As perceptions of one's abilities increased, so did importance ratings of the abilities.

Although the results of this study suggested that task-specific, self-esteem, and global self-esteem may be effective predictors of certain forms of self-limiting behaviors, it is important to acknowledge other sources of career limitations experienced by females. Research on occupational and social barriers to the entry of females into nontraditional occupations suggests that females may be viewed by others as lacking abilities needed for successful performance (Heilman, 1983). Thus, unfavorable stereotypes of others can have a negative impact on women, regardless of their self-esteem. In addition, occupational barriers to females' success exist (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). For example, research suggests that women may be excluded from informal information exchanges that facilitate successful performance in organizations (Cianni & Romberger, 1995). These social and occupational forces may serve as additional obstacles to the career achievement of women employed in nontraditional occupations.

In addition, some individual-level variables may moderate the relationship between interventions designed to raise self-efficacy and success of interventions. Those who feel they have control over situational factors may have more favorable reactions to training designed to improve self-efficacy (Mathieu et al., 1993; Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997). For example, if a woman believes her manager will not allow her to assume leadership of a project, raising self-efficacy may actually produce stress. A supportive environment that allows the individual to develop feelings of control over outcomes is important.

Certain limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. The findings suggest that self-esteem and self-rated measures of abilities may predict interest in performing a task. However, we did not determine whether task specific self-esteem was based on a realistic assessment of one's abilities. Past research that women often self-select out of masculinely sex-typed tasks because of false perceptions that they do not possess the necessary abilities (F. Rosenberg & Simmons, 1982). In this study, we chose to focus on females' perceived competency, rather than their actual competence, because the former may drive task choices. Beliefs about one's ability to perform a task is not always derived from an objective analysis of past performance on similar or identical tasks but from more subjective feelings of self-confidence. A second criticism of the current study is that we examined females' preferences for a specific task, and one might argue that the choice of one task is not likely to have a significant effect on career progression. However, it is the continual process of making decisions and choices that leads to career choice and to advancement within a career. More longitudinal research that examines continuous effects of self-efficacy on more than one task choice could help us understand these long-term effects.

For women who doubt their competence, low task-specific self-esteem becomes self-limiting. Self-confidence may be a critical ingredient in women's pursuit of leadership roles (Denmark, 1993). Because the self-limiting woman avoids tasks that require abilities she believes she lacks, she does not provide herself with the opportunity to experience the successful completion of the very tasks that could raise her confidence in her abilities. Without a self- or other-initiated intervention, self-limiting behavior can be self-perpetuating. However, Bandura's work on self-efficacy suggests that negative beliefs about competence are malleable. Supportive environments may significantly alter a woman's leadership performance (Eagly et al., 1995), and enhancing self-efficacy is one important means. In a supportive organizational environment, women with low TSSE may have the opportunity to change damaging beliefs that may restrict their career progress. Fostering more favorable levels of TSSE may encourage these women to take on the challenging tasks that are so important in career progression.

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