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Gender Bias in STEM

There is growing evidence for gender bias in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields that disfavors women. For example, women are disproportionately underrepresented as invited speakers at conferences, and their work is generally cited less often than comparably productive male scholars. Even more, Handley et al. (2015) discovered there was actually a gender bias in the way individuals evaluated the scientific evidence that demonstrates gender bias in STEM. In one experiment, for example, men evaluated research abstracts containing evidence for gender bias in STEM less favorably than did women, whereas the opposite evaluations occurred for abstracts containing evidence for no gender bias. Handley et al. offered 2 likely reasons for their effects. First, it is possible that men view evidence of a gender-bias that benefits men less favorably than women because admitting to this privilege would pose a risk of losing such privilege. This idea fits well with social identity theory, which suggests that group status contributes to self-esteem. Thus, strengthening a person's self-esteem prior to receiving such threatening information might reduce this defensiveness, and thus reduce the bias. Another possible explanation regards expectations; quite simply, people like information that fits with their expectations. Assuming women expect research to find a gender bias, whereas men might not, women might evaluate evidence showing this bias more favorably, and men might evaluate evidence that does not show a gender bias more favorably. The current research directly tests these possibilities, and the design, results, and conclusions from this research are detailed.