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### The path of most resistance

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# 4

## Resisting implicit identity threat by sacrificing men: Women who do and women who don't



*Note:* This chapter is based on van Breen, J.A., Spears, R., Kuppens, T., & de Lemus, S. (2017). Resisting implicit identity threat by sacrificing men: Women who do and women who don't.

## **Abstract**

In this chapter, we examine responses to implicit gender stereotypes (i.e. stereotypes present outside conscious awareness) and argue that women can use the decision to sacrifice men in a Moral Choice Dilemma task (MCD; Thompson, 1986) as a way of resisting implicit stereotypes. We hypothesise that “distinctive feminists”, women who identify strongly with feminists but not women, are motivated to resist implicit stereotypes because they create implicit social identity threat, and can do so in two ways. Firstly, they could resist the *overvaluation* of men implied by stereotypes through out-group derogation that is, by more readily sacrificing men after implicit stereotype exposure. Secondly, they could resist the *undervaluation* of women through in-group favouritism, that is, by *less* readily sacrificing women. The data supported the first hypothesis: distinctive feminists sacrificed men more readily after exposure to implicit stereotypes compared to implicit counter-stereotypes, whereas other women did not. These findings show that distinctive feminists can resist implicit gender stereotypes through out-group derogation.

Stereotypes are harmful for low-status groups because they suggest that status differences result from “real” differences between groups, and thereby legitimise inequality. For example, men are stereotyped as competent (Fiske et al., 2002) and attributed more social value, status, and respect than women (Ridgeway, 2001). Cross-cultural research has shown that men are stereotypically associated with those traits that are socially valued. In societies that value communal traits, men are stereotyped as communal, while in societies that value agentic traits, men are stereotyped as agentic (Cuddy et al., 2015). Such findings confirm the notion that stereotypes are not so much about describing the traits of a group, but rather a way of conveying social value. Thus, stereotypes can threaten the identity of undervalued groups, and as a result members of these groups may be motivated to disconfirm stereotypes (Spears, Jetten & Doosje, 2001). Importantly, however, stereotypes can be present at the implicit level, that is, outside of the participant’s awareness. Such implicit stereotypes are more difficult to recognize and therefore more difficult to confront (e.g. Kray et al., 2001). In fact, implicit stereotypes often elicit stereotype-conformity (Barreto et al., 2009; Kray et al., 2001). For instance, implicit stereotypes can lead women to adopt more submissive bodily postures (de Lemus et al., 2012), and request more dependency-oriented help (Shnabel et al., 2015). In this study, we examine factors that may nevertheless allow women to *resist* implicit gender stereotypes.

We define “resistance” as a motivational process that leads to responses that *counteract* social identity threat. Resistance does not imply automatic contrast to just any stimulus, but targets specific stimuli that are threatening to social identity. Defined in this way, resistance is an identity management strategy (Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001): An individual is confronted with a certain status quo, and the implications of this status quo for social identity needs to be managed so that negative consequences are minimized, and positive identity can be maintained.

But who resists social identity threat? In the case of gender, feminist identification is particularly relevant. Feminist identification predicts perceptions of gender inequality (see Chapter 2), activism (Liss et al., 2004), and politicization (Becker et al., 2011; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). A second factor that affects gender attitudes and resistance behaviours is identification with women as a group. Chapter 2 showed that high women’s identifiers are more satisfied with group membership, and more likely to self-stereotype (see also Leach et al., 2008). Given that feminist identifi-

cation and women's identification showed only a small inter-correlation (Leicht, Gocłowska, van Breen, de Lemus, & Randsley de Moura, 2017; Roy et al., 2007), we can identify four theoretical "types" of gender identifiers (see Chapter 2, but also Condor, 1986; Becker & Wagner, 2009). Importantly, these are not discrete subgroups, but are instead intended to facilitate interpretation of how the different identification variables may be combined. The first group score low on women's and feminist identification, a group we call "non-identifiers". At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are those who identify highly with women, but are also strong feminist identifiers: the "dual identifiers" (see Leicht et al., 2017). The group who identify strongly with women, but not feminists are referred to as "traditional identifiers" (cf. Condor, 1986). Finally the group who score low on women's identification, but highly on feminist identification we refer to as distinctive feminist identifiers or "distinctive feminists" for short. Crucially for the current study, the interaction between feminist identification and women's identification predicts attitudes towards gender stereotypes: distinctive feminists find gender stereotypes more problematic than do other groups of women (see Chapter 2). This increased concern with gender stereotypes amongst distinctive feminists may facilitate resistance when stereotypes are implicit, as general concern with sexism is known to increase sensitivity to subliminal instances thereof (Kaiser et al., 2006).

Resistance to implicit gender stereotypes can take different forms. For instance, in terms of behavior, previous research has shown that implicit stereotype exposure leads women to persist in *counter*-stereotypical performance domains (see Chapter 3; also de Lemus et al., 2017). Moreover, implicit stereotypes may be resisted through evaluative responses. To the extent that implicit stereotypes imply that men are valued over women, this could be resisted by *boosting* women, or by *downgrading men*. Indeed, previous research, using the same procedure as the one used in the current study, has shown evidence for the former response: after exposure to implicit gender stereotypes, distinctive feminists were faster to associate positive targets with in-group rather than out-group primes. That is, distinctive feminists show implicit in-group favouritism following exposure to implicit stereotypes (see Chapter 3). In the current study, we examine whether implicit gender stereotypes can also be resisted through out-group derogation, that is, by downgrading men.

**The current research.** Across two studies, we use a Moral Choice Dilem-

ma (MCD) task (Thomson, 1986) to examine women's evaluations of men and women after exposure to implicit stereotypes versus counter-stereotypes. Female participants read scenarios in which sacrificing either a man or a woman could save a number of others (of unspecified gender), and were asked whether they would make this sacrifice. People tend to be reluctant to derogate others because it is difficult to justify (e.g. Mummendey et al., 1992; Hewstone, Fincham, & Jaspars, 1981). However, the MCD task assuages this concern by the fact that sacrificing saves a greater number of others. Thus, though this task is extreme, sacrificing is morally justifiable in utilitarian terms.

In each scenario, the gender of the person to be sacrificed is manipulated. Thus, in some scenarios, participants are asked to sacrifice a man, and in some scenarios they are asked to sacrifice a woman. As such, responses to the MCD task can show evidence for in-group favouritism and/or out-group derogation. For instance, increased tendencies to sacrifice men would be indicative of out-group derogation (Brewer, 1999). Previous research indeed shows that responses to the MCD task can provide information about the social value given to different groups: socially valued individuals are less likely to be sacrificed (e.g. Cikara et al., 2010; De Dreu, Greer, Van Kleef, Shalvi, & Handgraaf, 2011). As reviewed earlier, men are considered more socially valuable than women, especially when they are stereotypic compared to when they are counter-stereotypic (Ridgeway, 2001). Thus, participants should be reluctant to sacrifice men after exposure to implicit gender stereotypes (compared to counter-stereotypes). However, as distinctive feminists are known to object to gender stereotypes, we expect that they will *resist* implicit stereotypes, by sacrificing men more *easily* after exposure to implicit gender stereotypes than after exposure to implicit counter-stereotypes. Additionally, distinctive feminists might also resist the *undervaluation* of women by sacrificing women less readily after exposure to implicit stereotypes (in line with findings from Chapter 3). To distinguish these different resistance strategies, we examine evaluations of men and women separately. That is, while in the previous chapter the central comparison was differences in the evaluations of women as opposed to men, in this chapter the central comparison is differences between the effects of implicit stereotype vs counter-stereotypes exposure. This approach allows us to distinguish resistance through out-group derogation (evaluating the out-group more harshly) from resistance through in-group favouritism (evaluating the in-group more favourably).

## Method

The data described here was collected in two separate studies with the same design, and analysed using pooled analysis, also called integrative data analysis (IDA, Curran & Hussong, 2009). This strategy was chosen, firstly, because increased sample size provides better power to detect small effects. Secondly, pooled analysis provides a better understanding of the underlying patterns, as it minimizes the influence of idiosyncrasies in the individual studies. The methods described below apply to both studies, details of the individual studies can be found in the supplementary materials.

**Participants.** Female participants were recruited from amongst University of Groningen students. Study 4.1 included 121 participants, and Study 4.2 included 252 participants. In each study, the stopping rule used during data collection was a practical one: the number of participants that could be recruited within a 3-week period.

The data from these two studies was pooled because they used the same design, bringing the total sample to 373 female participants. Six participants were excluded due to equipment failure or failure to comply with instructions. The final pooled sample thus included 367 participants. Age ranged from 18 to 45 ( $M=21.07$ ) years old. With this sample we are able to detect small effect sizes ( $d=0.1$ ) at a power of  $1-\beta=0.85$  (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

### **Independent variables.**

**Implicit stereotype exposure.** We exposed participants to either implicit stereotypes or implicit counter-stereotypes by combining subliminal gender primes with gender stereotypical target pictures (adapted from de Lemus et al., 2013). Neither the prime nor the target picture were (counter-)stereotypical in isolation. Instead, (counter-)stereotypes were conveyed by the repeated combination of certain primes with certain target words, such as “woman” paired with “cooking” or “cleaning”.

Picture stimuli represented stereotypically masculine and feminine activities, such as shopping, or watching sports on television. The picture stimuli did not show actors of either gender. The pictures were pilot tested, and 20 pictures (5 female-typical leisure activities; 5 female-typical chores; 5 male-typical leisure activities; 5 male-typical chores) were chosen that were considered stereotypically masculine or feminine, but similar in valence. In the stereotype condition the prime “woman” was paired with female stereotypical pictures and the prime “man” with male stereotypical pictures, in 95%

of trials. In the counter-stereotype condition, female primes were paired with a male-stereotypical picture, and male primes with female stereotypical pictures in 95% of trials.

The manipulation consisted of 120 trials. Each trial was composed of a picture, preceded by the prime word “Woman” or “Man”. The prime was presented for 42 ms, with supraliminal forward and backward masks (a random letter string, 100ms). Participants answered a question about the target picture (“Is this a leisure activity or a chore?”) that was unrelated to gender stereotypes. To control for the effort of response-switching (e.g. Rogers & Monsell, 1995), the number of response-switches was kept constant between participants.

**Women’s and Feminist identification.** Women’s and feminist identification were measured with the same 4 items, adapted from Doosje, Ellemers, and Spears (1995; see also de Lemus et al., 2015), such as “Being a woman [feminist] is an important part of how I see myself”. Agreement with these items was rated on a 7-point Likert scale. These scales showed high reliability (women’s identification  $\alpha = 0.85$ ; feminist identification  $\alpha = 0.94$ ), and only a small inter-correlation ( $r = 0.28$ ). This is in line with previous research showing that women’s identity and feminist identity reflect different types of gender identity (Chapter 2, see also Roy et al., 2007). Identification was measured continuously here, and included as such in the analyses presented below. However, to facilitate the interpretation of possible interactions between the identification variables, the tables and graphs refer to the taxonomy described above (non-identifiers; traditional women; dual identifiers; distinctive feminists), plotting the identification effects at  $\pm 1$  standard deviation from the mean.

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable was the Moral Choice Dilemma (MCD) task, in which participants decide whether they will sacrifice a particular individual to save a group of others (Bauman, McGraw, Bartels, & Warren, 2014; Thomson, 1986). The person that could be sacrificed was either a man or a woman, allowing us to examine whether exposure to implicit stereotypes versus counter-stereotypes affects the tendency to sacrifice men and women.

Recently, Bauman et al. (2014) have noted that the MCD task has limited external validity when used to examine moral judgments. However, we use the MCD task not to examine moral judgments, but to examine the impact of implicit (counter-) stereotypes on the evaluation of men and women (see



also Cikara et al., 2010). We believe using the MCD task has several advantages. Firstly, sacrificing men in the MCD task allows women to counter-act the over-valuation of men implied by stereotypes. That is, the responses afforded by the task fit the motivation induced by the manipulation. Moreover, the MCD task is an indirect measure, in which participants are not made aware of the role played by gender. Therefore, participants' responses are less likely to be affected by conscious correction of gender bias.

Each participant saw 8 scenarios, 4 scenarios in which a man could be sacrificed and 4 in which a woman could be sacrificed, and for each scenario answered the yes/no question "Would you sacrifice this man [woman] to save the others?" The scores for sacrificing were computed by summing the number of scenarios in which participants sacrificed the target individual. There were 2 different versions of the MCD task that counter-balanced the scenarios in which men and women appeared. As the data presented here were collected in two studies, several other outcome measures were included. These measures are described in the supplementary materials.

**Procedure.** Upon arriving at the lab, participants were seated in individual cubicles. They read general information about the study and the tasks they would complete, and provided informed consent. They then provided demographic information (including gender), after which they saw either the implicit stereotype or counter-stereotype manipulation. After the implicit component of the study, participants completed the MCD task. Finally, participants completed a funnelled debriefing. None of the participants reported awareness of the gender element of either the manipulation or the MCD task.

**Analysis.** The hypotheses are evaluated with a repeated measures ANOVA. The tendency to sacrifice is the outcome measure, predicted by the gender of the person to be sacrificed as a within-participants variable, and (counter-)stereotype exposure, women's identification and feminist identification as between-subjects variables. The simple effects of interest are 1) the effect of (counter-)stereotype exposure on distinctive feminists' tendency to sacrifice men and 2) the effect of (counter-)stereotype exposure on distinctive feminists' tendency to sacrifice women. The factor Study reflects the different samples that were taken together in the pooled analysis, and is used to control for differences between the samples. We also considered an alternative model with a multilevel structure, in which sacrificing was a binary variable (sacrificed vs. not sacrificed). Results for this model are very similar to results of the repeated measures ANOVA, and can be found in the supplementary materials.

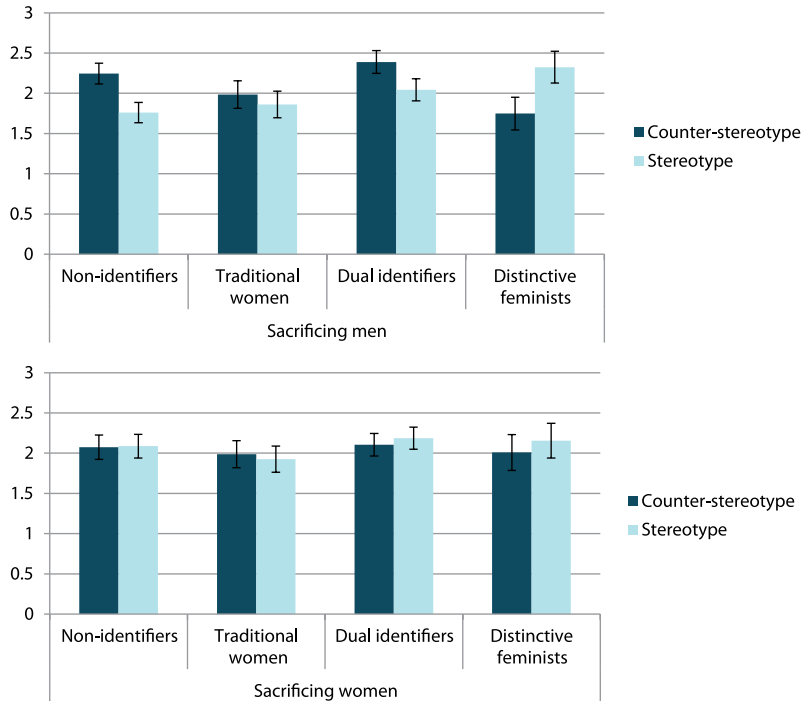
As women's and feminist identification were measured at the end of the study, we examined whether women's and feminist identification were statistically affected by (counter-)stereotype exposure. This was not the case for either feminist ( $F < 2.42$ ,  $p > 0.16$ ) or women's identification ( $F < 1$ ). Counterbalancing in the MCD task did not produce differences in sacrificing behavior ( $F < 1.34$ ,  $p > 0.25$ ), and neither did different samples ( $F < 1$ ).

## Results

There was no main effect of the gender of the person to be sacrificed ( $F < 1$ ), that is, participants did not differentiate between women and men when deciding whom to sacrifice overall. The 4-way interaction between gender of the person to be sacrificed, (counter-) stereotype exposure, women's identification and feminist identification did reach significance ( $F(1,363) = 8.10$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). Breakdown of the interaction showed that the interaction between feminist identification, women's identification and (counter-)stereotype exposure affected the sacrificing of men ( $F(1,363) = 9.88$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), but not women ( $F < 1$ ). Further breakdown showed an overall tendency to sacrifice men less readily after implicit stereotype exposure than after implicit counter-stereotype exposure, a finding that is significant amongst non-identifiers ( $F(1,363) = 6.69$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ,  $d = 0.14$ ) and marginally significant amongst dual identifiers ( $F(1,363) = 2.95$ ,  $p = 0.087$ ). However, distinctive feminists showed the *opposite* response: they sacrificed men *more* readily after implicit stereotype exposure compared to counter-stereotype exposure ( $F(1,363) = 4.42$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ,  $d = 0.11$ ), as shown in Figure 4. No other simple effects reached significance (see Table 4). There was no further interaction with the term Study ( $F < 1.28$ ,  $p > 0.25$ ), indicating that the effects described above were similar in both studies.

In conclusion, analysing our data with this cumulative (IDA) approach confirmed our central hypothesis regarding sacrificing of men: compared to implicit counter-stereotype exposure, implicit stereotype exposure led distinctive feminists to sacrifice men more often. The hypothesis regarding the sacrificing of women was not supported.

**Figure 4.** Women's tendency to sacrifice men (top panel) and women (bottom panel) in the MCD task.



NB: Error bars represent 1 standard error. High and low feminist and women's identification are plotted at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean.

**Table 4.** Simple effects in the MCD task.

	Person to be sacrificed	Exposure condition			Std. Error	p-value	95% CI	
		Stereotype	Counter-stereotype	M <sub>diff</sub>			Lower	Upper
Non-identifiers	Men	<b>1.76</b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>-0.47*</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.010</b>	-0.83	-0.11
	Women	2.15	2.15	-0.004	0.19	0.982	-0.37	0.36
Traditional identifiers	Men	1.90	1.96	-0.06	0.23	0.792	-0.51	0.39
	Women	1.89	2.04	-0.15	0.23	0.520	-0.61	0.31
Dual identifiers	Men	<b>2.04</b>	<b>2.37</b>	<b>-0.33</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>0.087</b>	-0.71	0.05
	Women	2.18	2.14	0.04	0.19	0.837	-0.34	0.42
Distinctive feminists	Men	<b>2.37</b>	<b>1.77</b>	<b>0.60*</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.036</b>	0.04	1.16
	Women	2.12	2.04	0.085	0.29	0.767	-0.48	0.65

NB: High and low feminist and women's identification are plotted at  $\pm 1$  standard deviation above and below the mean.

## Discussion

This research shows that distinctive feminists resist implicit stereotypes by more readily sacrificing men in the Moral Choice Dilemma task. In general, and in line with previous findings (Cikara et al., 2010), men are less likely to be sacrificed when they are presented as high in social value. That is, men are *less* likely to be sacrificed after exposure to implicit gender stereotypes than after counter-stereotype exposure. Distinctive feminists, on the other hand, reverse this pattern, and are *more* likely to sacrifice men when they are presented as high in social value. That is, distinctive feminists are *more* likely to sacrifice men after implicit stereotype exposure than after counter-stereotype exposure. This reversal is indicative of motivated resistance to implicit gender stereotypes. The data presented in the current chapter extend the findings of Chapter 3, by showing that resistance can occur through out-group focused responses. More specifically, the current study shows that distinctive feminists can resist implicit gender stereotypes by *downgrading* men.

Many previous studies have documented resistance to *explicit* stereotypes, for instance in the form of anger (Barreto et al., 2010), or improved performance in a counter-stereotypical performance domain (de Lemus et al., 2017). Implicit stereotypes, on the other hand, often lead to stereotype conformity (Kray et al., 2001). For instance, it has been shown that, compared to explicit stereotypes, implicit stereotypes lead women to describe them-

selves in more stereotypical terms (Barreto et al., 2009), as well as adopt more submissive bodily postures (de Lemus et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the current Chapter shows that there are circumstances under which women are able to resist implicit gender stereotypes.

Given these findings, it might seem that distinctive feminists “hate” men and are just waiting for a chance to sacrifice them. However, this is not what the data show: distinctive feminists and other groups of women show similar overall tendencies to sacrifice men. The crucial point is that the groups respond differently to implicit stereotype versus counter-stereotype exposure. Implicit stereotypes trigger resistance amongst distinctive feminists, while reinforcing the value of men for other women. Moreover, we suggest that the tendency to sacrifice men, observed here, arises as a result of the motivation to resist implicit gender stereotypes. Sacrificing men is not the underlying goal of the distinctive feminists, but rather a way of counteracting implicit gender stereotypes. What the distinctive feminists object to are not men as a group, but the social value implications of stereotypes that privilege men above women.

This study showed no evidence for resistance through in-group favouritism, that is, reduced tendencies to sacrifice women. The specific circumstances that lead to either in-group favouritism or out-group derogation require further research, but the MCD paradigm might play a role in this asymmetry. While expressing devaluation through sacrificing is relatively simple and congruent with the task, favouritism would be expressed through “not-sacrificing”, which involves negations that can pose a challenge to implicit cognition (Gilbert, 1991).

One further question is whether, like the response of distinctive feminists, the overall trend of sacrificing men more readily after *counter*-stereotype exposure, should also be considered resistance. The crucial aspect of resistance is that it *counteracts* a certain problem, as is the case for the distinctive feminists. For the overall trend, however, it is less clear that this is the case. Counter-stereotypes associate men with low status roles, and if participants consider this problematic, then a resistance response would be aimed at *restoring* the social value of men. That is, they would value men *more* (or at least equally) after counter-stereotype compared to stereotype exposure. In fact, however, they valued men *less* after counter-stereotype exposure, suggesting that this response cannot be classified as resistance.

**Conclusions.** These findings show that distinctive feminists resist gen-

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der stereotypes, even when they occur at the implicit level. Importantly, this study is the first to show that resistance to implicit gender stereotypes can occur through out-group derogation. More specifically, exposure to implicit stereotypes increases distinctive feminists' willingness to sacrifice men.

“ Llegaré a dónde quieres  
llegar antes que tú estés allí  
-dijo el que iba detrás de él. Me sé de  
memoria tus intenciones, quién eres y  
de dónde eres y adónde vas. Llegaré  
antes que tú llegues.”

--Juan Rulfo, El Llano en Llamas