Gender-Based Rejection Sensitivity and Academic Self-Silencing in Women

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Building on prior work on rejection sensitivity, we propose a social-cognitive model of gender-based rejection sensitivity (Gender RS) to account for individual differences in how women perceive and cope with gender-based evaluative threats in competitive, historically male institutions. Study 1 develops a measure of Gender RS, defined as anxious expectations of gender-based rejection. Studies 2–5 support the central predictions of the model: Gender RS is associated with increased perceptions of gender-based threats and increased coping by self-silencing—responses that reinforce feelings of alienation and diminished motivation. Study 2 shows that Gender RS is distinct from overall sensitivity to rejection or perceiving the world through the lens of gender. Study 3 shows that Gender RS becomes activated specifically when gender-based rejection is a plausible explanation for negative outcomes. Study 4 provides experimental evidence that Gender RS predicts lower academic self-confidence, greater expectations of bias, and avoidance of opportunities for further help from a weakness-focused expert evaluator. Study 5 tests the Gender RS model in situ, using daily diaries to track women’s experiences during the first weeks in a highly competitive law school. Implications for women’s coping with the subtle nature of contemporary sexism are discussed as well as the importance of institution-level checks to prevent the costs of gender-based rejection.

Keywords: rejection sensitivity, women, discrimination, self-silencing

When people believe that others have the power to help or hinder them in achieving important life goals, it is natural for them to be concerned with how they are perceived: Are they accepted, valued, and likely to be evaluated and rewarded fairly? Are they considered likely to succeed? Will they get the benefit of the doubt when they err? These concerns can be preoccupying in competitive educational and occupational settings, given the pivotal influence of these organizations on people’s professional and economic trajectories (e.g., Zirkel, 2008). A keen sensitivity to the critical responses of powerful others can be beneficial, provided recipients can trust the feedback conveyed and use it to help achieve their goals. However, the same critical feedback can communicate a more pernicious message—that of rejection—to individuals with reason to doubt their acceptance and value in the institution, such as women and members of other historically excluded and devalued groups (e.g., Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). This article examines how expectations and concerns about rejection based on one’s gender affect how women experience and manage the possibility of sexism in the judgments of influential members of competitive institutions where they aspire to succeed.

This focus has precedents in classical theories in psychology and sociology. Informed by an analysis of women relative to men in a competitive hierarchical culture, the psychologist Karen Horney (1937) described how the preferential treatment of others relative to the self by those with the power to convey approval can sensititize individuals to rejection. She further observed that people may respond to this rejection threat by suppressing their beliefs and opinions to meet the perceived requirements of the source of approval, that is, by what Jack and Dill (1992) have termed silencing the self. She noted that these self-silencing responses risk reinforcing a sense of helpless dependency. A complementary

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argument was made by Horney’s contemporary, the sociologist Robert Merton, who focused on the structural conditions in competitive institutions that motivate a conformity that is intended to gain approval. Merton (1938) identified these responses as occurring to an especially high degree when there is a gap between the goal of merit-based success and the means available to individuals to develop and show merit. In these circumstances, individuals may initially try hard to conform in the hope of being successful, but they ultimately give up when they perceive that their efforts are futile.

In this article, we integrate the theories of Horney and Merton with insights from contemporary research on sexism to provide a social-cognitive account of individual differences in sensitivity to gender-based rejection (London & Rosenthal, in press; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Romero-Canayas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk, & Kang, 2010). We propose that, to the extent that normatively stressful situations in institutions that have historically limited women’s participation activate concerns about gender-based rejection, women will more readily detect gender-rejection threat and, to protect against rejection, will cope by self-silencing. We further propose that the presence of threat coupled with self-silencing responses can ultimately compromise women’s success by heightening feelings of alienation and reducing motivation.

Women’s Experiences in Competitive Institutions

The theories of Horney and Merton remain relevant today because women entering competitive institutions face structural conditions that provide a basis for questioning support for their efforts to succeed. Despite explicit statements of institutional commitment to equality, few women advance to the highest levels of eminent educational and occupational institutions, and gender differentials in pay remain widespread (e.g., Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008; Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001). Attempts to understand the persistence of such aggregate indicators of inequality in success have identified subtle gender disadvantages inherent in the processes or means of advancement for women.

One disadvantage to women is that the processes of institutional socialization in operation today evolved when the typical student or employee was a White man (Stewart & Dottolo, 2005). Thus, women are likely to enter institutions with identities that fit less comfortably with existing prototypes for success and socialization practices. Consequently, the pressure to show that one has the potential to succeed and the sense that the task is harder for women can be a chronic concern.

A second disadvantage for women is the discrepancy between stereotypes of women’s qualities and stereotypes of the normal competencies necessary for success, which can potentially bias judgments of women’s competence (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly & Chrvala, 1986; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Indeed, these biases are evident in women receiving more praise but less resources than comparable men (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005), being lauded in terms less fitting with presumed harbingers of extraordinary accomplishment (e.g., as hardworking rather than brilliant; Madera, Hebl, & Martin, 2009), having less access to discretionary career-enhancing opportunities (e.g., mentoring; Valian, 2007), and facing backlash for behavior that is career-appropriate but counter to gender stereotypes (e.g., expressing self-confidence, assertive negotiation; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Together, women’s limited advancement, their experience of a poorer fit with institutional processes and goals, and the subtle communication of preference toward men imply that women in competitive institutions have reason for concern about gender disadvantage.

Such concern, even without any actual or anticipated discriminatory behavior by persons in power, can disrupt performance in evaluative situations. As research on stereotype threat has compellingly shown, when awareness of a relevant negative gender stereotype is activated experimentally, math-identified college women underperform in math (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). The process underlying this performance decrement, termed stereotype threat, or more broadly, identity threat (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davis, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008), is presumed to be a disruptive apprehension about verifying or being judged as verifying the stereotype.

The Rejection-Sensitivity (RS) Model

Whereas stereotype-threat research has shown that structural cues of stereotypes operate like stressors to undercut performance in stigmatized relative to nonstigmatized groups, members of stigmatized groups also vary in their responses to stereotype-threat cues (Brown & Pinel, 2003; Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002; Keller & Molix, 2008; Schmader, 2002). This observation led Major and O’Brien (2005) to call for a view of individuals with stigmatized identities, including women in prestigious competitive institutions, as actively drawing on their experiences to understand and cope with identity-related threat cues. Given the subtlety of contemporary gender discrimination and its emergence in biased judgment of women in evaluative situations, a view of women as interpreting normatively stressful evaluative situations in light of their history and goals is critical.

To provide such an account, we drew on the RS model, which was developed to explain why people who are most concerned about rejection from significant others often respond to rejection cues in ways that may compromise their well-being and relationships (Downey & Feldman, 1996; London, Downey, Bonica, & Paltin, 2007; Romero-Canayas, Downey, Reddy, et al., 2010). The RS model proposes that, to the extent that people come to expect rejection as possible and costly, they prioritize protecting the self from rejection. Subsequent interactions with those in a position to convey rejection through marginalization, devaluation, inequitable treatment, and covert or overt rejection trigger a state of threat that increases vigilance toward rejection-relevant cues. This vigilance in turn increases the likelihood of detecting rejection and fuels immediate efforts to protect the self in ways that may be ultimately counterproductive.

Self-Silencing as Protection Against Rejection Threat in Women

Several strands of evidence support the idea that, when dependent on powerful others whose acceptance and support is both valued and doubted, a common way in which people try to prevent rejection is through silencing aspects of the self and inhibiting behavior that might jeopardize their acceptance (Dittes & Kelley,
1956; Eagly & Chrvala, 1986; Saltzstein, 1975; Schachter, 1951, 1959). Women may be particularly likely to develop self-silencing coping strategies given that within any social or ethnic/racial category, men have traditionally received more preferential treatment than women in familial, academic, and occupational settings (Heilman & Eagly, 2008; Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999; Trier & Psenka, 2003; Wennekers & Wold, 1997). It has been argued that women adapt to this power imbalance by developing coping strategies that involve being accommodating and supportive toward others, that is, by self-silencing, rather than by acquiring and asserting power (cf. Horney, 1937; Jack & Dill, 1992).

Integrating existing literature, Jack and Dill (1992) conceptualized self-silencing as a four-component cognitive schema that directs the person to suppress his/her thoughts and feelings for the sake of forming and sustaining relationships with valued others. The components are judging oneself by the presumed standards of those in power, taking responsibility for fitting in, hiding aspects of one’s real self that conflict with what is valued by powerful others, and behaving in self-censoring/silencing ways intended to prevent rejection. Prior research on RS in close relationships has shown that RS predicts use of self-silencing, as conceptualized by Jack and Dill, in women exposed to rejection cues, potentially putting such women at risk for outcomes that may harm them (Ayduk, May, Downey, & Higgins, 2003; Romero-Canay, Reddy, Rodriguez, & Downey, 2011).

**RS Applied to Status-Based Rejection**

In addition to establishing the basic links in the RS model as applied to personal relationships, prior research has usefully applied the RS model to understanding the costs of sensitivity to rejection based on membership in a devalued status group (RS-status; Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pachankis, Goldfried, & Ramrattan, 2008). The model has been used most extensively to investigate how Black students’ doubts about belonging affect their experience in colleges that historically marginalized African Americans. Consistent with the idea that sensitivity to rejection would heighten vigilance to rejection cues, Black students who expressed higher anxious expectations of race-based rejection were more likely to attribute negative experiences in such a university to their race and to feel alienated. Over the course of college, anxious expectations of race-based rejection assessed on entry predicted lower grades and led students to avoid exposure to possible race-based rejection even at the cost of accessing resources that everyone needs to succeed (e.g., attending a professor’s office hours). Whether such rejection expectations predicted coping aimed at preventing rejection was not tested directly, and the implications of such coping were not assessed.

**Extending the RS-Status Model to Gender**

The present research extends the RS-status model to gender and directly tests whether anxious expectations of gender-based rejection predict rejection-prevention coping strategies that may immediately protect the self but ultimately compromise institutional advancement. The situation of women in elite U.S. institutions differ from that of African Americans in at least two important respects. First, whereas the numeric minority status of Blacks in such institutions may serve as a chronic indicator of the potential for race-based rejection threat, women are not in the numeric minority in many contexts. Yet, although it may appear that gender is no longer a disadvantage (Crosby, 1984), subtle forms of sexism persist. Second, whereas there is evidence of a negative implicit bias toward African Americans in U.S. society, women elicit a positive bias except when they seek advancement in domains that were historically masculine and from which women had been barred or limited to subordinate supporting roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

For these reasons, the threat of gender-based rejection is likely to be conveyed in more subtle ways in a more limited set of situations than is the case for African Americans. In particular there is reason to expect subtle sexism to emerge in evaluative judgments that, in the aggregate, disadvantage women in circumstances where being female may be considered either incongruent with, or a liability in relation to, the preferred attributes for advancement (Fiske et al., 2002). Thus, we would expect women’s concerns about gender rejection to be activated especially in situations involving displaying assertiveness and charisma, performance in traditionally male domains, and interactions with men in evaluative positions. When rejection concerns are activated, women’s knowledge of how they are stereotyped may trigger doubts whether they can perform, or be judged as performing in ways that are valued, and to self-silence to prevent rejection. The cost of self-silencing includes lost opportunities for demonstrating competence to important others, addressing and resolving conflicts, and dispelling feelings of injustice, marginalization, and disconnection. Ultimately, gender-based doubts and concern and ensuing self-silencing in these conditions may cause alienation and loss of motivation.

Research suggests that women tend to use self-silencing in evaluative situations where they have reason to perceive rejection threats (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). For example, Amanatullah and Morris (2010) found self-silencing effects, involving substantial monetary concessions, among women when they were negotiating on their own behalf, a situation in which they had reason to fear backlash, but not when they were negotiating on another’s behalf. Consistent with the model of gender-based rejection sensitivity (Gender RS), women’s level of monetary concession reflected how much they expected backlash. The gender differences in the effects of rejection threat on self-silencing and its alienating consequences that are predicted by the RS model were also suggested by Vescio et al. (2005). They found that, following patronizing feedback from powerful men, women who were low in power, and, thus, likely to perceive themselves as vulnerable to rejection, felt angry but availed less of opportunities to fix the situation than equally angry, patronized, low-power men, who acted to correct the evaluators’ presumably mistaken opinion. Thus, there is a basis for predicting use of self-silencing, and for examining its costs, among women with concerns about gender disadvantage.

**Overview**

We report five studies undertaken to test three predictions regarding Gender RS for women in competitive institutions. First, activation of the threat of gender-based rejection should prepare women to detect gender-disadvantage. Second, gender-threat activation should trigger rejection-prevention efforts that include self-
silencing and avoiding opportunities for advancement that entail a risk of rejection. Third, the perception of gender-based rejection and the ensuing self-silencing will increase alienation and reduce motivation. By testing these predictions, the proposed research will extend understanding of the processes through which a history of gender disadvantage, captured in the Gender RS system, influence women’s efforts to cope in normatively stressful evaluative situations. Thus, Gender RS may be immediately self-protective but ultimately compromise institutional advancement.

Study 1 describes the Gender Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Gender-RSQ), which operationalizes the situationally activated anxious expectations of gender-based rejection that are viewed as the core of Gender RS. Studies 2 and 3 provide correlational tests of the predictions and of the convergent and discriminant validity and the distinctive predictive utility of the Gender-RSQ. Study 4 tests the predictions experimentally by assessing women’s reaction to an academic evaluation likely to elicit gender bias concerns: receiving feedback from a prestigious senior male professor. Study 5 tests the predictions in a daily diary study of women during the transition to law school, a historically male domain characterized by pervasive evaluation, scrutiny, and competition.

**Study 1: Gender-RSQ Construct Development**

Through focus groups and a survey of the gender discrimination literature, we selected evaluative situations in competitive institutions that appeared equally stressful for men and women but that were likely to activate variable levels of concern about gender-based rejection among women but little concern about gender-based rejection among men. We then developed scenarios depicting these gender-relevant situations and asked participants to imagine themselves in each scenario. For example, one scenario reads as follows: “Imagine that you have worked at your job for nearly a year. A position is open for a manager and you approach your boss to ask for the promotion.” Subsequently, a focus group of women, diverse in age and backgrounds, discussed each scenario and indicated its relevance and importance to their gender. These pilot tests yielded the 11 scenarios in the Gender-RSQ.

For each scenario, participants are asked to indicate on a 6-point scale (a) how anxious/concerned would you be “that you would be treated differently or experience a negative outcome because of your gender?” and (b) “to what extent would you expect to be treated fairly?” The wording of each question reflects the content of the specific scenario. Responses to the expectations question are reverse coded, with higher numbers reflecting expectations of gender-based rejection among women but little concern about gender-based rejection in those situations. We then developed scenarios depicting these gender-relevant situations and asked participants to imagine themselves in each scenario. For example, one scenario reads as follows: “Imagine that you have worked at your job for nearly a year. A position is open for a manager and you approach your boss to ask for the promotion.” Subsequently, a focus group of women, diverse in age and backgrounds, discussed each scenario and indicated its relevance and importance to their gender. These pilot tests yielded the 11 scenarios in the Gender-RSQ.

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We assessed the structure and psychometric properties of the Gender-RSQ in 207 female students who completed the measure in a larger unrelated questionnaire battery in mixed gender groups. A subgroup (N = 39) was readministered the measure 3–5 weeks later. A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation of the anxious expectation product score for each of the 11 scenarios was conducted. The scree plot showed a single factor on which all items loaded at .45 or higher. The factor explained 41.75% of the variance. Table 1 gives the scenarios and descriptive statistics. Although the possible range of scores is from 1 (low) to 36 (high), the range of scores in this sample was from 1 to 23. The measure showed high reliability (internal: α = .83; test-retest: r = .81, p ≤ .001).

**Study 2: Testing the Distinctive Predictive Utility of the Gender RS Model**

We began by testing the hypothesis that exposure to situations depicted in the Gender-RSQ would not differ by sex, but that women would score higher than men on anxious expectations of gender rejection in those situations. We next tested the predictions from the Gender RS model and established whether the predicted associations remained robust when controlling for conceptually and empirically related constructs. Data were from a cross-sectional study of students at an elite, competitive university that had historically excluded women.

**Testing Predictions From the Gender RS Model**

We tested the predictions that in this sample women’s anxious expectations of gender-based rejection (Gender RS) would be associated with (a) perception of a sexist climate, inequitable treatment, and invisibility, or lack of recognition for one’s competencies and contributions; (b) use of self-silencing to prevent rejection; and (c) lower feelings of belonging at the college and reduced academic engagement. We further tested whether the link between Gender RS and reduced academic engagement was mediated by academic self-silencing, as implied by the model.

**Establishing the Distinctive Predictive Utility of the Gender-RSQ**

To establish that the predicted associations are not attributable to generalized rejection concerns and expectations, we estimated them when controlling for sensitivity to rejection for personal reasons (Personal RS). Any general sensitivity to rejection that relates to the outcome variables should be captured in the overlap between Gender RS and Personal RS. To establish that the predicted associations are not attributable to general awareness of the possibility of being the target of sexism, we also estimated them when controlling for gender stigma consciousness (Pinel, 1999). Whereas Gender RS and stigma consciousness share an awareness of the potential for disadvantage due to being female, the Gender-RSQ is intended to uniquely capture the degree of threat (i.e., both the anxiety and anticipation of disadvantage) that a woman feels about her gender being a disadvantage in particular situations. Because psychological distress might explain both Gender RS and its predicted correlates, we estimated the predicted associations when controlling for several established correlates of Personal RS (Downey & Feldman, 1996), namely low self-esteem, depression, social anxiety, and neuroticism. Finally, because viewing oneself as having more feminine (or less masculine) traits or endorsing traditional gender roles might account for Gender RS and its predicted correlates, we assessed the predicted associations when controlling for measures of gender role beliefs.
Method
Participants. Participants (N = 175; age: M = 21.57 years, SD = 6.34; 95 women, 80 men; 47.7% Caucasian, 10.8% Black, 18.2% Asian, 6.8% South East Asian, 4% Latino, 12.5% multiracial or other) completed questionnaires in small mixed-sex groups, and participants received $7 or course credit. With the exception of data on the Gender-RSQ, the reported data are limited to women. Table 2 gives means and standard deviations for all measures.

Measures.
Gender-RSQ. In addition to the anxiety/concern and expectations questions, participants also indicated how likely they were to encounter situations like those in the scenarios (1 = very unlikely, 6 = very likely). This question was included to assess frequency of exposure to the Gender-RSQ situations.

Campus Environment Survey (Leonard & Ossana, 1987). Factor analyses on the women's data yielded three factors: Perceptions of a Sexist Climate (10 items; e.g., “I have not heard my classmates use humor at the expense of women” [reversed]), Inequitable Treatment (seven items; e.g., “My papers are evaluated by the same standards as other students” [reversed]), and Invisibility (12 items; e.g., “Faculty listen to me when I speak up in class” [reversed]). Participants indicated agreement with each statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Academic Silencing of the Self Questionnaire. Jack and Dill’s (1992) 31-item questionnaire assesses the tendency to silence the self to prevent conflict and thus potential rejection in personal relationships. We modified the scale to capture self-silencing in academic contexts (e.g., “I don’t speak my feelings in a classroom setting when I know they will cause disagreement”; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Institutional Belonging Scale (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). Participants indicated, on a 1–10 scale, how much they (a) fit in and feel welcome, comfortable, and thrilled to be at the university and (b) like and feel comfortable with their professors and peers.

Table 2
Factor Loadings of Gender RS Questionnaire Items and Psychometric Properties for Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender RS items</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you are starting a new job in a corporate office. On the first day,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the manager arranges an office meeting to introduce you as a new employee.</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you are at an important business meeting at work and your boss asks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for comments or suggestions to improve the productivity of your department.</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you are working in a brokerage firm and your boss and a few of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other men in the firm are going out for drinks to a local bar after work.</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you received a low grade on your math test, and then you realize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that there may be an error in the grading of one problem. You approach your</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professor to ask him to review the questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you have to give an oral presentation in a very important course.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After everyone gives their presentations, the professor announces that he will</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post the grades outside of the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you have worked at your job for nearly a year. A position is open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for a manager and you approach your boss to ask for the promotion.</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you are in your science class, and the professor asks a particularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult question. A few people, including yourself, raise their hands to</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answer the question.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that your science professor assigns you and your classmates to work on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a group project. A team leader is chosen, and he begins to assign tasks to each</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>member.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you have just completed the first round of interviews for a high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paying corporate job. Your interviewer informs you that they will let you know</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about their decision after they have interviewed a few more applicants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that it is the first day of your science class, and all the students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must create teams to work on projects throughout the semester. Most of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups are already full except for a few groups of all men.</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagine that you were just accepted into a graduate program. Your advisor/mentor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the program is a senior male professor. You meet your advisor for the first</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time on the first day of classes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Gender RS = gender-based rejection sensitivity.
Table 2

Unstandardized Hierarchical Regression Coefficients and Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients for Study 2 (N = 93 Women)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Invisibility</th>
<th>Inequality</th>
<th>Perceived sexist climate</th>
<th>Self-silencing</th>
<th>Sense of belonging</th>
<th>Disengagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 (dfs = 1, 91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender RS</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>.05***</td>
<td>.06***</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>-17***</td>
<td>.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 (dfs = 3, 89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender RS</td>
<td>.10***</td>
<td>.07***</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.07***</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.11**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal RS</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma consciousness</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3 (dfs = 11, 81)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender RS</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>.06***</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.52***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal RS</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma consciousness</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social anxiety</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.53***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorses traditional gender roles</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorses traditional sex roles</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine attributes</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.32***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine attributes</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.37***</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| M (SD) | 2.13 (0.58) | 2.38 (0.42) | 2.72 (0.58) | 2.63 (0.55) | 7.19 (1.75) | 2.33 (1.06) |

Note. Gender RS = gender-based rejection sensitivity; Personal RS = sensitivity to rejection for personal reasons.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
Perceived disengagement. Perceived disengagement was assessed with the Campus Environment Survey item, “Since I have been in college, my aspirations have been dampened” (Leonard & Ossana, 1987).

Personal Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Personal-RSQ: Downey & Feldman, 1996). This measure assesses concerns about and expectations of rejection from important others that are not readily attributable to a specific social identity, such as gender (parents, peers, romantic partners; e.g., “You ask your friend to do you a big favor”). The measure is constructed similarly to the Gender-RSQ. Downey and Feldman (1996) describe the measure’s psychometric properties and evidence of its validity.

Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ; Pinel, 1999) for women. The SCQ assessed awareness of one’s gender and its potential impact on one’s treatment—for example, “My being female influences how men act with me” (10 items; 0 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree).

Psychological distress.

Low versus high self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979). Participants indicated agreement with 10 statements describing attitudes about the self—for example, “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” (1 = extremely uncharacteristic, 6 = extremely characteristic). Relevant item responses are reversed so that high scores indicate low self-esteem.

Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961). For each of 23 symptoms, participants select the statement that best applies to their feelings in the past week—for example, 0 (I do not feel sad), 1 (I feel sad), 2 (I am sad all the time and I can’t snap out of it), or 3 (I am so sad or unhappy that I can’t stand it).

Social Avoidance and Distress Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969). Participants check whether 28 descriptions of distress or avoidance of social situations were true of them (e.g., distress: “I am usually nervous with people unless I know them well”; avoidance: “I try to avoid situations that force me to be sociable”).

Neuroticism (John & Srivastava, 1999). Participants indicated agreement with eight items from the Big Five Trait Inventory (e.g., “I see myself as someone who is relaxed and handles stress well” [reversed]; 1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly).

Male–Female Relations Questionnaire (Sherman & Spence, 1997; Spence, Helnreicher, & Sawin, 1980). Participants indicated their endorsement of (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree) items from the Preference for Male Leadership subscale, which assesses endorsement of traditional gender roles (e.g., “When there is an important job to be done, I'd prefer to have a man as leader than a woman”), and the Femininity in Presence of Men subscale, which assesses preference for enacting feminine behavior when around men (e.g., “When I’m around men, I'm likely to act more helpless than I really feel”).

Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence, Helnreicher, & Stapp, 1974). Each of 24 pairs of terms comprises oppositely gendered ends of a continuum—for example, aggressive (masculine) versus passive (feminine). Participants check where they fall along the continuum (e.g., 1 = very aggressive, 5 = very passive). Subscales were computed for typically feminine (e.g., emotional) and typically masculine (e.g., competitive) traits.

Results

Sex differences in Gender-RSQ. Men and women were equally likely to report encountering the Gender-RSQ situations (women: M = 3.77, SD = 0.85; men: M = 3.73, SD = 0.78), t(173) = 0.33, p = .74. However, women were more likely than men to anxiously expect gender-based rejection in such situations (women: M = 7.34, SD = 3.55; men: M = 5.52, SD = 3.79), t(173) = 3.75, p ≤ .001, Cohen’s d = 0.50.

Testing predictions from the Gender RS model among women. Table 2 gives the results of hierarchical regression analyses. In Step 1, Gender RS is the only predictor. Step 2 adds Personal RS and stigma consciousness. Step 3 adds measures of psychological distress, traditional gender role endorsements, and self-attributions. Table 2 also gives zero-order correlations between each predictor and outcome variable.

Table 2 results show that women who were higher in Gender RS experienced more invisibility and inequitable treatment, perceived a more sexist climate, reported more academic self-silencing, felt a lower sense of belonging, and perceived a reduction in their academic engagement. Step 2 results show that these associations remained significant when Personal RS and stigma consciousness were included as controls. This is true despite the high correlation between Gender RS and both Personal RS (r = .51, p ≤ .001) and stigma consciousness (r = .43, p ≤ .001), which were not themselves significantly related (r = .14, p ≤ .17). With Gender RS and Personal RS controlled, stigma consciousness was not significantly positively associated with any of the outcomes except for perceived sexist climate.

Step 3 results show that when measures of psychological distress, endorsement of traditional gender roles, and feminine self-attributes were controlled, in addition to Personal RS and stigma consciousness, the coefficients for Gender RS remained significant or, in the case of institutional belonging, marginally significant. Although Gender RS showed significant zero-order correlations with each distress measure, the correlations became nonsignificant when Personal RS was partialled out (low self-esteem: r = .38, partial r = .17; depression: r = .27, partial r = .02; social anxiety: r = .35, partial r = .15; neuroticism: r = .22, partial r = .001). Thus, Gender RS is associated with psychological distress to the extent that Gender RS captures a generalized sensitivity to rejection.

Gender RS was not significantly correlated with either endorsement of traditional gender (r = .007), sex roles (r = .01), or viewing the self as having feminine attributes (r = -.14). A significant negative association with masculine attributes (r = -.24) became nonsignificant when Personal RS was partialled out (partial r = -.07). This finding, together with the high negative correlation between masculinity and low self-esteem, r(95) = -.60, p ≤ .001, indicates a confound between measures of masculinity and of psychological health.

Self-silencing as a mediator of the relation between Gender RS and academic disengagement. To test whether the link between Gender RS and reduced academic engagement was explained by self-silencing, we estimated a regression model in which perceived academic engagement was predicted by academic self-silencing as well as Gender RS, with Personal RS and stigma consciousness controlled. Academic self-silencing significantly mediated the relationship between Gender RS and lower academic engagement.
With self-silencing controlled, the association between Gender RS and lower academic engagement became nonsignificant, \( b = .04, t(91) = 1.12, p \leq .27 \); Sobel test = 2.71, \( p \leq .01 \), whereas the association between self-silencing and lower academic engagement remained significant, \( b = .82, t(91) = 3.65, p \leq .001 \).

Discussion

Study 2 shows that the Gender-RSQ captures situations that are normative encounters for all students but that activate the threat of gender-based disadvantage significantly more in women than in men. The data also provide reliable, robust, and distinct correlational support for the three central predictions of the Gender RS model. Anxious expectations of gender-based rejection predict perceptions of a sexist environment, inequitable treatment, invisibility, academic self-silencing, alienation and loss of motivation, independently of general rejection concerns, gender stigma consciousness, psychological distress, and gender role beliefs.

Although both stigma consciousness and Personal RS showed significant zero-order correlations with anxious expectations of gender-based rejection and outcomes of interest, the relations predicted by the Gender RS model remained significant when both of these variables were controlled. Moreover, the associations between stigma consciousness and the outcomes were either nonsignificant or became nonsignificant when Gender RS was controlled, confirming a distinction between awareness of the possibility of gender-disadvantage and feeling personally threatened by this possibility.

Study 3: Contextual Specificity of the Activation of Gender RS

Given the support for the predictions of the Gender RS model found in Study 2, the goals of Study 3 were twofold: (1) to test whether, as predicted, anxious expectations of gender-based rejection are activated specifically, and in the absence of explicit mention of gender, in the type of situations depicted in the Gender-RSQ; (2) to establish whether anxious expectations of rejection in the Gender-RSQ situations prepare women to perceive rejection in those situations as being based on their gender and to cope in self-silencing ways with sexism.

To test the specificity of the activation of Gender RS, participants were asked to indicate how much they would anxiously expect rejection in a variety of ambiguously rejecting/negative situations. The situations reflected latent gender relevance (drawn from the Gender-RSQ) or nongender relevance (drawn from situations relevant to one’s race, i.e., from the Race Reaction Sensitivity Questionnaire [Race-RSQ; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002], or to one’s personal relationships, i.e., from the Personal-RSQ). To test the assumption that activation of Gender RS is not an artifact of the explicit mention of gender in the questions following scenarios in the Gender-RSQ, no cause for the rejection was included in questions for any of the scenarios.

We predicted that women would be more likely than men to anxiously expect rejection in the situations from the Gender-RSQ, but that men and women would be equally likely to anxiously expect rejection in the situations from the Personal-RSQ and the Race-RSQ. We also predicted that women, especially those high in anxious expectations of rejection in the Gender RS situations, would tend to attribute rejection to gender in the Gender RS situations but not in the Personal RS or Race RS situations. We did not expect men to attribute rejection to gender to any significant extent in any of the situations.

Finally, we tested the specificity of the association between Gender RS and self-silencing in relation to women’s reports of coping with gender-related stressors. Whereas we expected Gender RS to predict self-silencing, we did not expect it to predict confronting, which entails the risk of rejection, or with general support-seeking, which should not be differentially used as a function of Gender RS.
“trying to change the subject”: $\alpha = .80$, $M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.83$,
confronting (“working harder to prove them wrong,” “confront the
problem/person,” “trying to change things,” “speaking up,” “rally
others to help me confront it,” “get angry about it”; $\alpha = .82$, $M =
3.04$, $SD = 0.94$), and support seeking (“talk to friends about it,”
“talk to relatives about it”; $\alpha = .72$, $M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.21$).

Results

Sex differences in attributions for rejection. Compared to
men, women made significantly more attributions to their gender
for negative outcomes in the Gender-RSQ scenarios (see Table 3).
Women did not differ from men in making attributions to gender
in either the Race- or Personal-RSQ scenarios. Women also made
more attributions to gender in the gender scenarios than they made
in the race, $t(76) = 8.47$, $p \leq .001$, Cohen’s $d = 0.98$, and personal
scenarios, $t(76) = 16.06$, $p \leq .001$, Cohen’s $d = 2.22$, and in the
race scenarios than in the personal scenarios, $t(76) = -8.44$, $p \leq
.001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.15$. Men’s attributions to gender did not differ
significantly by type of scenario.

Men were significantly more likely than women to make attribu-
tions to personality in the Gender-RSQ scenarios (women: $M =
2.43$, $SD = 1.75$; men: $M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.51$), $t(119) = 2.17$, $p \leq
.05$, Cohen’s $d = 0.41$. However, there were no significant sex
differences in attributions to other reasons for rejection in the
gender scenarios: religion, $t(119) = 0.93$, $p \leq .93$; sexual orienta-
tion, $t(119) = -0.06$, $p \leq .96$; race, $t(119) = -1.70$, $p \leq .09$;
others’ actions, $t(119) = 0.08$, $p \leq .94$; or in self-generated
reasons, $t(73) = 0.95$, $p \leq .34$.

Anxious expectations of rejection and attributions for rejec-
tion. With reference to gender removed, there was no significant
sex difference in the level of anxious rejection expectations in the
REQ-gender scenarios (REQ-gender), $t(119) = -0.81$, $p \leq .42$.
However, among women, regression analyses showed that anxious
expectations of rejection in the REQ-gender scenarios significantly
predicted gender attributions for negative outcomes in the gender
scenarios, $b = .14$, $\beta = .29$, $t(72) = 2.12$, $p \leq .05$, when
controlling for stigma consciousness and Personal RS. Anxious
rejection expectations in the REQ-gender scenarios did not predict
gender attributions for women in the personal, $b = -0.001$, $\beta =
.001$, $t(72) = 0.0001$, $p \leq 1.0$, or race scenarios, $b = -.02$, $\beta =
-0.04$, $t(72) = -0.29$, $p \leq .77$, or in any of the scenarios for men:
gender, $b = .08$, $\beta = .18$, $t(41) = 1.06$, $p \leq .3$; personal, $b = .03$,
$\beta = .10$, $t(41) = 1.01$, $p \leq .32$; race, $b = -.03$, $\beta = .10$, $t(41) =
-.28$, $p \leq .78$.

Coping with a gender stressor. When asked how they typ-
ically coped when they encountered a negative gender-relevant
experience, women higher in anxious rejection expectations in the
REQ-gender reported significantly greater likelihood of self-
silencing, $b = .07$, $\beta = .30$, $t(72) = 2.29$, $p \leq .03$, controlling for
Personal RS, and stigma consciousness. Anxious rejection expec-
tations in the REQ-gender were not significant predictors of con-
fronting, $b = -0.02$, $\beta = -0.01$, $t(72) = -0.07$, $p \leq .94$, or support
seeking, $b = -.03$, $\beta = -.10$, $t(72) = -.68$, $p \leq .50$.

Discussion

First, the Gender-RSQ scenarios reflect normatively stressful
situations in competitive settings to which men and women are
equally exposed but which hold cues of gender disadvantage for
women but not for men. Second, women’s use of gender to explain
negative outcomes is specific to the Gender-RSQ situations rather
than to any negative situation. Third, although no sex differences
were found in anxious expectations of rejection in the gender
situations, such expectations predicted a greater number of attribu-
tions to gender in the gender scenarios for women but not in
those scenarios irrelevant to gender (i.e., personal and race-based)
and not in men. Importantly, these relationships existed when
explicit reference to an explanatory role for gender had been
removed from the Gender-RSQ and when Personal RS and stigma
consciousness were controlled. Fourth, Study 3 extended the Study
2 finding linking anxious expectations of gender-based rejection
with general use of self-silencing in academic settings. The Study
3 findings show that anxious expectations of rejection in the
gender scenarios significantly predicted use of a self-silencing
coping style following sexist experiences but not use of two other
forms of coping: confrontation and support seeking.

Study 4: Microdynamics of Gender RS During an
Academic Evaluation

In Study 4, we shift from hypothetical to actual social-evaluative
situations, and we ask whether Gender RS becomes activated and
operates in predicted ways in a common situation likely to activate
rejection threat among women. The situation involved the evalu-
ation of one’s work by a distinguished male professor, followed by

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable description</th>
<th>Women (N = 77)</th>
<th>Men (N = 44)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection Expectations Questionnaire</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious expectations: Gender scenarios</td>
<td>9.09 (3.47)</td>
<td>8.59 (2.85)</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxious expectations: Personal scenarios</td>
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<td>9.21 (3.35)</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious expectations: Race scenarios</td>
<td>10.57 (4.34)</td>
<td>9.73 (3.62)</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection Attributions Questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attributions in gender scenarios</td>
<td>3.16 (1.68)</td>
<td>0.61 (1.24)</td>
<td>-9.49***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attributions in interpersonal scenarios</td>
<td>0.19 (0.54)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.48)</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender attributions in race situations</td>
<td>1.48 (1.42)</td>
<td>1.30 (1.77)</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ .001.
the opportunity to obtain further academic assistance from that professor. Though normatively stressful, this linchpin of educational socialization may be experienced as especially threatening by members of historically excluded groups, such as women. Members of such groups are likely to see the evaluator as someone who holds standards that reflect and reinforce the exclusionary norms, standards, and culture of the historically included group (Cohen et al., 1999; Crocker et al., 1991).

Thus, women face a challenge when making attributions about the evaluation process, particularly when the feedback emphasizes weaknesses. Although an emphasis on deficits may be intended to guard against complacency, women who expect and are concerned about gender disadvantage may interpret weakness-focused feedback as biased or indicative of their lack of fit to what is valued. Not surprisingly, critical evaluation from a high-status, male professor is known to activate bias concerns in historically devalued groups, such as African Americans (e.g., Cohen et al., 1999; Mendoza-Denton, Shaw-Taylor, Chen, & Chang, 2009). It is likely, therefore, that members of these groups would choose to avoid further help from the evaluation source even when this may curtail opportunities for advancement.

Based on the Gender RS model and findings from Studies 2 and 3, we tested the following hypotheses: First, to the extent that women are high in Gender RS, they will doubt their ability to perform, and be judged as performing, an academic task in a way the male professor valued. Such findings would be consistent with apprehension about whether one can meet the expectations of a high-status male professor—the type who holds standards that reflect and reinforce the exclusionary norms, standards, and culture of the historically included group. Second, high Gender RS women will be more likely to attribute the feedback to gender bias. Third, high Gender RS women will avoid exposure to the rejection source, even at the cost of obtaining an academic distinction.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participation was limited to female students (N = 80; 37.5% Caucasian, 21.3% African American/Black, 21.3% Asian, 10% Latino, 6.3% South East Asian, 3.6% multiracial or other).

**Procedure.** Participants were told that the study was about professor–student interactions. After completing background questionnaires (including the Gender-RSQ and Personal-RSQ), they got 20 min to write an essay to be evaluated by a professor. To increase task investment, they were told that the best essays would be published in a university journal and would win a prize, an incentive pre-established to enhance students’ motivation. After hearing the cover story, but before writing the essay, participants read the profile of the professor randomly assigned to review their essay. The profile of a fictitious professor depicted a stereotypic, highly accomplished, senior, male, Ivy League professor—the type of professor likely to activate the threat of gender disadvantage in women (Cohen et al., 1999; see the Appendix for the profile).

In a separate pilot study, 83 students rated the profiled professor as intelligent (95%) and accomplished (96.4%) but also arrogant (80.7%), pretentious (71.1%), intimidating (68.7%), unapproachable (65.1%), and unwelcoming (66.3%). Thus, this professor was viewed as possessing great intelligence and stellar accomplishments, that is, as having important resources for students’ academic development. Yet, he was also viewed as threatening and unwelcoming.

After reading the profile, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, in which their gender was or was not explicitly requested on a demographics form to be given to the professor. The purpose was to clarify whether any effect of Gender RS depended on whether participants were explicitly aware that their gender was known to the professor. Participants were then instructed to write a persuasive essay describing the qualities associated with a teacher they admired (adapted from Cohen et al., 1999). They next submitted the essay online for grading by the professor. While awaiting feedback, they completed measures of task engagement and evaluation expectations. After 10 min, they got an e-mail with the professor’s comments. Everyone received the same critical, weakness-focused evaluation (adapted from Cohen et al., 1999; unbuffered feedback condition):

> Your essay needs work in several areas. In addition to needing some routine editorial and grammatical changes, most of my evaluation centers on how you could breathe life into your essay and make the descriptions more vivid, and persuasive. As it stands, your statements are vague and rambling—long on adjectives and short on specific illustrations. In particular, it would be helpful to be more specific when you argue points, and to pay closer attention to details. You fail to build on some of the points you attempted to touch on.

Pilot testing revealed that the feedback was perceived as negative (63%) but also as informative (76%) and useful (66%). After receiving the feedback, participants reported their perceptions of and attributions for the feedback. Finally, to assess their willingness to approach the professor for help, participants were told that he would hold office hours to discuss the evaluations and provide additional guidance on how to improve their essay. Competing for the essay prize was pitted against a face-to-face meeting with the professor by telling participants that they could only revise their essay for submission to the contest if they met with the professor. All participants were debriefed and compensated $15 or were given course credit.

**Measures: Background.**

**Gender- and Personal-RSQs.** Gender: M = 8.79, SD = 6.24, α = .92; Personal: M = 9.00, SD = 3.63, α = .90.

**Negative affect.** Participants indicated how much each of eight adjectives from the Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969) reflected their current mood: angry, irritable, annoyed, resentful, rejected, tense, anxious, nervous (0 = not at all, 6 = very much; M = 1.23, SD = 0.86, α = .91).

**Measures: Pre-feedback (post-essay).**

**Ability self-doubt.** Four items indexed doubts about one’s ability to succeed on the task (e.g., “I felt insecure about my ability to do the assignment”; M = 2.73, SD = 1.01, α = .80).

**Expected and deserved grade.** Prior to receiving the evaluation, participants estimated (1 = F, 5 = A) the grade they expected (M = 3.53, SD = 0.80) and the grade they believed they deserved (M = 3.55, SD = 0.19).

**Essay quality.** Scores provided by two independent raters on persuasiveness, sophistication, organization, and originality were combined to yield overall quality (1 = low, 5 = high; M = 3.59, SD = 0.55, α = .82). Raters also gave the essay a grade (1 = poor quality, 10 = good quality; M = 7.12, SD = 0.98, α = .57).

**Post-feedback measures.**

**Attributions for evaluation.** Participants indicated whether they thought the feedback was Positive (0) or Negative (1) and the contribution of each of the following factors to their evaluation.
(1 = no, 5 = yes): my race/ethnicity, my gender, work quality, professor’s personal bias, professor disagreeing with my opinion, professor disliking me.

**Willingness to meet the professor.** Participants indicated their willingness to meet with the professor for further assistance (0 = no, 1 = yes).

**Results**

**Data considerations.** Regression models were used to test the effect of Gender RS on outcome variables. Because preliminary analyses indicated that the effects of Gender RS did not depend on whether participants made their gender explicitly known to the evaluator or not, the results reported below include demographic condition only as a control. The following variables were also included as controls: baseline negative affect, Personal RS, ethnicity (1 = Caucasian, 2 = other), and grade they believe they deserved. All variables were mean centered.

**Pre-feedback (post-essay).**

**Ability self-doubt.** Gender RS was significantly associated with greater self-doubt, \( b = .05, \beta = .31, t(73) = 3.07, p \leq .003 \). Expected and desired grade and essay quality. Gender RS was not a significant predictor of the grade that students believed they deserved, \( b = .004, \beta = .03, t(74) = 0.26, p \leq .80 \), or of rated essay quality, \( b = -.001, \beta = -.02, t(66) = -0.12, p \leq .91 \), or grade, \( b = -.001, \beta = -.01, t(66) = -0.04, p \leq .97 \). However, Gender RS significantly predicted expecting a lower grade from the evaluator, \( b = -.04, \beta = -.34, t(73) = -3.71, p \leq .001 \), when controlling for grade deserved and essay quality and grade.

**Post-feedback.**

**Attributions.** Logistic regression analyses indicated that most women viewed the feedback as negative (\( N = 69; 86.3\% \) regardless of Gender RS (\( B = .06, \text{Wald} = 0.80, \text{odds ratio [OR]} = 1.06, p < .37 \)). Among the women viewing the feedback as negative, Gender RS significantly predicted attributions to gender bias, \( b = .04, \beta = .45, t(62) = 3.78, p \leq .001 \). Gender RS also predicted attributions to race, \( b = .04, \beta = .39, t(62) = 3.51, p \leq .001 \), and to the professor disagreeing with the participant’s opinions, \( b = .06, \beta = .39, t(62) = 3.22, p \leq .01 \). Gender RS did not significantly predict attributions to quality of the work: Gender RS, \( b = -.01, \beta = -.08, t(62) = -0.64, p \leq .53 \).

**Willingness to meet the professor.** Most participants did not want to meet the professor (\( N = 63; 80.8\% \)). However, logistic regression showed that Gender RS significantly predicted less willingness to meet him (\( B = -.17, \text{Wald} = 4.13, \text{OR} = 0.84, p \leq .05 \)).

**Discussion**

When women were being evaluated by a powerful representative of the norms and values of the institution that had historically excluded them, anxious expectations of gender-based rejection heightened anticipatory ability self-doubt, expectations of unfairness, perceptions of gender bias in weakness-focused feedback, and potentially self-disadvantage avoidance of opportunities for assistance from the source of threat. These findings held when controlling for a general tendency to anxiously expect rejection and initial negative affect.

To rule out the possibility that high Gender RS women are simply hypersensitive to evaluation rather than specifically to evaluation by a powerful male professor, we conducted a study in which the professor, with the exact same profile, was described as female. Gender RS did not predict ability self-doubts, lower evaluation expectations, gender attributions, or unwillingness to meet with the female professor (London & Downey, 2006).

Because of prior findings, we were surprised that women higher in Gender RS felt equally threatened regardless of whether or not their gender was revealed to the professor (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1991). Perhaps the exclusion of gender from the list of demographic categories as the gender-unknown manipulation was not overt enough to produce feelings of gender anonymity for some participants, creating variation in the experience of this condition. Alternatively, some participants may have assumed that the evaluator inferred their gender from their essay (cf. Crocker et al., 1991).

**Study 5: Daily Experiences During Transition to Law School**

To examine Gender RS in women in a real-world, evaluative academic context likely to activate the threat of gender disadvantage, we studied students during the transition to law school. In this historically male domain, women continue to report being exposed to, perceiving, and being harmed by discrimination to a greater degree than men (Foley & Kidder, 2002; Krakauer & Chen, 2003). Top law schools are characterized by competition for high ranks on the grade curve and for the limited leadership positions of law student organizations (e.g., Guinier, Fine, & Baláž, 1997). Legal socialization at top law schools involves classes that use the Socratic method, which entails public competition for professor and peer attention and accolades through volunteering to answer questions and having one’s logic and reasoning critically evaluated in front of a large class. This method is experienced as highly stressful (Guinier et al., 1997; London, Downey, & Mace, 2007; Sturm, 1999).

Thus, early in law school, students may begin to feel pressure to prove themselves in circumstances where success is based on characteristics associated with masculine qualities of assertiveness, ability to command attention, and persistence in the face of harsh criticism. This pressure is particularly evident in large introductory classes, where professors are likely to know nothing about individual students beyond visible identity-relevant cues (e.g., cues of gender). In these circumstances, everyone is likely to show heightened sensitivity to cues of acceptance and validation as well as to cues of marginalization and devaluation. This sensitivity may be more pronounced in women, given that they now enter law school on a numerical parity with men, yet face evidence of the emergence of a gender gap in advancement that increases at each subsequent stage in the legal profession (e.g., American Bar Association, 2011). This academic culture may be most threatening to those women who enter law school with the expectation and concern that their gender will be a disadvantage. During transitions, people are particularly reliant on existing belief systems to make sense of their experience (Eccles et al., 1993; Ruble & Seidman, 1996). Thus, the impact of Gender RS on how women navigate entry to legal training may help shape their career trajectory.

To examine the effects of Gender RS model during the transition, we used a daily diary during a 3-week mandatory course prior
to the first day of classes in a top law school. The course introduces new students to the language, skills, and culture of law school via the Socratic method. Given that the women in our study had been admitted to a highly selective law school, we did not expect preexisting differences in achievement, goals, and well-being based on Gender RS scores. However, the evaluative context of the introductory course combined with the high investment of the students make this course the kind of situation that activates Gender RS.

The first goal of Study 5 was to assess support for the three main predictions from the Gender RS model with the diary data. The second goal was to assess how Gender RS affected women’s enactment of discretionary assertive behaviors that are needed to succeed but which risk harsh judgment from the professor and peers (e.g., volunteering to answer the professor’s questions in class). We addressed two questions: (1) Do anxious expectations of gender-based rejection reduce the likelihood of women volunteering for public performance and a public, critique of their performance? (2) When high Gender RS women do volunteer and experience a public evaluation, how do they feel afterward?

Method

Participants. Participants were 149 students from two successive cohorts entering a top law school (51.7% female; 51% Caucasian, 14.1% Asian, 9.4% Black/African American, 10.1% Latino, 15.4% multiracial or other).

Procedure. A week prior to the first day of class, students were invited to participate in a daily diary study via e-mail invitations and fliers placed around campus. Approximately one third of each incoming class participated. Students first completed a web-based background questionnaire that included measures of Gender RS and Personal RS, undergraduate academic engagement and achievement, expectations of belonging in law school, and demographics. Participants received $15 for completing the background survey.

For the diary survey, each participant used a unique, private access code to log onto the diary questionnaire website. They were instructed to complete the diary at the end of each day, beginning on the first day of their course and ending on the last day (18 or 19 days later). The diary included mood ratings, perceptions of performance, and an account of the most significant experience of the day. They received $50 for completing the diary.

Measures: Background questionnaire. Sex differences are reported below only when significant.

Gender-RSQ. Women scored significantly higher than men (women: M = 6.76, SD = 4.09; men: M = 3.17, SD = 1.70), t(148) = 7.08, p ≤ .001, Cohen’s d = 0.73.

Personal-RSQ. Overall M = 6.96, SD = 4.10.

Institutional Belonging Scale (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). The scale used in Study 2 was reworded to apply to law school (overall M = 7.87, SD = 1.23). A high score reflects higher sense of belonging.

Prior and anticipated academic achievement. Participants reported their undergraduate grade point average (GPA), Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score on their first attempt (range = 155–180 from possible 120–180 range; national average = 150), and expected first year class rank (1 = top 1%, 7 = bottom 50%; GPA: M = 90.56, SD = 5.53; rank: M = 4.20, SD = 1.43). Women reported slightly lower LSAT scores than men (LSAT: women, M = 168.61, SD = 4.36; men, M = 170.28, SD = 5.80), t(148) = −1.98, p ≤ .05, Cohen’s d = 0.33.

Undergraduate engagement. We averaged reports about how often students (1) approached professors outside of class to talk about work, (2) voluntarily contributed to class discussions, (3) attended professor office hours, (4) attended TA office hours, and (5) participated in study groups (1 = not at all, 6 = very frequently; α = .72, M = 3.17, SD = 0.91).

Measures: Daily diary questionnaire.

Daily engagement and self-doubt. Participants reviewed 24 adjectives and indicated “how much of each of the following you are experiencing right now” (1 = not at all, 10 = extremely). Principal components analysis yielded two relevant factors: (1) Engagement (feeling competent, accepted, happy, confident, assertive, trueful, successful, supported, respected, motivated; α = .87, M = 6.27, SD = 1.54) and (2) Self-Doubt (self-critical, anxious/worried, intimidated, insecure; α = .76, M = 4.06, SD = 2.11).

Daily gender-related experiences. Participants wrote about the most significant event that they experienced each day and classified it as negative or positive. They then checked which of several social and personal identities they believed had caused the event (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, personality, physical looks, disability, intellectual ability, language, accent, age, unlisted identity). Our focus was on gender-related experiences.

Coping with and reactions to gender-related experiences. Participants checked whether they used each of a set of coping behaviors following a negative experience. Two types of coping were examined: self-silencing (six items; e.g., “kept it to yourself”; α = .51, M = 0.51, SD = 0.93) and confrontation (five items; e.g., “confront the person”; α = .67, M = 0.21, SD = 0.66; men: M = 0.18, SD = 0.60), r(136) = 0.05, p ≤ .40. We summed the number of items checked on each scale. Our focus was on coping after gender-related negative experiences.

Participants then rated (0 = not at all, 3 = a lot) their feelings of motivation (“motivated”; M = 1.36, SD = 0.95) and of alienation, which was estimated by averaging feelings of rejection, alienation, and anger (α = .75, M = 0.80, SD = 0.79).

Academic involvement and perceived performance. Participants reported whether they voluntarily answered a question or spoke in class (0 = no, 1 = yes), and, if so, how well they performed (1 = very poorly, 10 = very well; M = 7.36, SD = 1.85). Volunteering occurred on 26.08% of days.

Results

For the diary data, we used a hierarchical linear modeling approach, which allows for an analysis of both within-person and

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1 Cross-cohort comparisons revealed no significant differences in Gender-RSQ scores (Cohort 1: M = 5.22, SD = 3.76; Cohort 2: M = 4.81, SD = 3.50), t(147) = 0.68, p ≤ .50; Personal RS (Cohort 1: M = 6.91, SD = 4.48; Cohort 2: M = 6.95, SD = 3.64), r(147) = −0.07, p ≤ .94; reported Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score (Cohort 1: M = 169.25, SD = 4.97; Cohort 2: M = 169.60, SD = 5.61), t(142) = −0.40, p < .69; or institutional belonging (Cohort 1: M = 3.06, SD = 1.20; Cohort 2: M = 3.22, SD = 1.04), t(146) = −0.89, p ≤ .38. Thus, the two cohorts were combined for all analyses.
between-person variation in the outcome variable of interest (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). The analyses were conducted with SAS PROC MIXED or PROC GLIMMIX software for continuous and dichotomous outcome variables, respectively (Singer, 1998). The following controls were included, centered on their means: Personal RS (to account for general rejection concerns not specifically attributed to gender), race/ethnicity (0 = Caucasian, 1 = non-Caucasian; centered so estimates would average across groups), and expectations about belonging assessed before law school began (to account for expectations of alienation that predated exposure to the school environment). We controlled for LSAT scores because, even with Personal RS and Gender RS in a regression model, there was a marginal sex difference in scores, women $b = -1.59, t(144) = -1.91, \beta = -.16, p \leq .06$, and a trend for Gender RS to predict lower LSAT scores for women, Gender RS $b = -2.26, t(144) = -1.70, \beta = -.15, p \leq .08$.

In the mixed models, the key predictors were sex ($0 = men, 1 = women$) and Gender RS, which was centered on the mean for women. Given that men’s Gender RS scores are not considered valid, we set men’s scores at zero, which effectively set the Gender RS scores of all men at the mean Gender RS score for women. We did this by entering the interaction of Gender RS and sex as the predictor, rather than Gender RS scores. The estimated effect of Gender RS only takes into account the scores of women. However, this model still tests for a main effect of sex separate from the effect within women of Gender RS. In all models, the intercept was treated as random, as was a categorical variable for day in the study intended to account for the fact that each day entailed different experiences. A second, continuous variable (Day, 1–19, centered at Day 10) was entered in the model to obtain an estimate of how amount of time spent in legal methods training impacted different experiences. A second, continuous variable (Day, 1–19, centered at Day 10) was entered in the model to obtain an estimate of how amount of time spent in legal methods training impacted different experiences. A second, continuous variable (Day, 1–19, centered at Day 10) was entered in the model to obtain an estimate of how amount of time spent in legal methods training impacted different experiences.

**Daily measures: Engagement, self-doubt, and experience of negative events.** To establish whether results we report below were due to differential engagement, self-doubt, or perceived negativity of the most significant daily event, we tested the effect of sex and Gender RS on these daily variables. Across the diary period, participants reported a high level of engagement regardless of sex, or, within women, of Gender RS. For the average person, on an average day, the adjusted mean of engagement was 6.3 (SE = 0.10). We found no significant effect on daily engagement of sex, male: $\gamma = 0.29, t(142) = 1.61, p \leq .11$, or Gender RS, $\gamma = 0.004, t(142) = 0.13, p \leq .84$. The effect of Day and of Sex $\times$ Day were not significant ($p \leq .59$ and $p \leq .24$, respectively).

Self-doubt declined across the diary period for everyone, Day in Study $\gamma = -0.08, t(142) = -1.55, p \leq .0001$. There was no significant sex difference, male: $\gamma = -0.40, t(142) = -1.60, p \leq .11$. However, women higher in Gender RS reported higher self-doubt than women lower in Gender RS, $\gamma = 0.09, t(142) = 1.95, p \leq .05$. Regardless of time in the study, Gender RS $\times$ Day interaction, $\gamma = 0.0002, t(142) = 0.11, p \leq .91$. Adding daily self-doubt to the models presented below did not alter the results.

High Gender RS women were not more likely than low RS women to classify the most significant daily event as negative, Gender RS $\gamma = -0.013, t(142) = -0.57, OR = 0.99, p \leq .60$. However, men were marginally more likely than women to categorize the most significant daily event as negative, $\gamma = 0.25, t(142) = 1.78, OR = 1.28, p \leq .08$.

**Daily measures: Gender attributions for significant negative daily events.** About 26% of the most significant daily events were negative.2 Women were significantly more likely than men to make gender attributions for the most significant event: Negative Events: women = 12.9%, men = 3.1%; $\gamma = 1.50, t(131) = 3.29, OR = 4.49, p \leq .001$; Positive Events: women = 12.42%, men = 5.22%; $\gamma = 1.22, t(142) = 0.46, OR = 3.37, p \leq .001$. Among women, the likelihood of attributing a negative event to gender varied over time by Gender RS, Day $\times$ Gender RS: $\gamma = -0.02, t(131) = -2.47, p \leq .05$. At the start of the study, women higher in Gender RS were significantly more likely to make gender attributions than women lower in Gender RS. However, the probability of gender attributions declined slightly over time among higher Gender RS women and increased significantly among women lower in Gender RS (see Figure 1). Gender RS was not significantly associated with gender attributions for positive events, $\gamma = 0.06, t(142) = 1.07, OR = 1.06, p \leq .45$.

**Women coping with negative gender-relevant events.** We assessed whether women’s coping responses to negative events depended on whether they attributed the event to their gender. Men are not included in this analysis. To account for between-subjects variability in making a gender attribution, we indexed this variability by averaging each woman’s daily gender attributions. We then centered the daily rating on each woman’s mean rating to indicate deviation from her mean. The mean index was entered into the model as a between-subjects effect.

Women reported greater use of self-silencing following negative events when they attributed the event to gender, Gender Attribution $\gamma = 0.78, t(69) = 5.57, p \leq .0005$. This effect was significantly more pronounced among women high in Gender RS. Gender Attribution $\times$ Gender RS: $\gamma = 0.07, t(69) = 2.12, p \leq .05$ (see Figure 2A). Women were also more likely to use confrontational coping on days when the most significant event was attributed to gender, Gender Attribution $\gamma = 0.62, t(69) = 5.42, p \leq .0001$. This tendency was driven by women lower in Gender RS, Gender Attribution $\times$ Gender RS: $\gamma = -0.09, t(69) = -3.40, p \leq .005$ (see Figure 2B).

**Alienation and motivation.** On days when women attributed a negative event to gender, they felt more alienated than on other negative days, Gender Attribution $\gamma = 0.39, t(69) = 3.53, p \leq .0001$, and less motivated, Gender Attribution: $\gamma = -0.29, t(69) = -2.22, p \leq .03$. Self-silencing and confrontation also predicted more alienation—self-silencing, $\gamma = 0.14, t(68) = 2.90, p \leq .001$; confrontation, $\gamma = 0.26, t(68) = 4.37, p \leq .0001$—but only confrontation significantly predicted lower motivation: self-silencing, $\gamma =$

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2 The percentages of negative events for which each type of attribution was endorsed were as follows: 8.73% gender, 28.7% personality, 25.15% intellectual ability, 7.1% age, 5.03% physical looks, 5.03% socioeconomic status, 1.78% sexual orientation, 1.18% language, 3.85% race, 0.89% religion, 0.44% disabilities, and 13.61% other factors.
We explored the rates of voluntarily speaking up in class as a function of sex, Gender RS, and time in the study. Figure 3A presents the predicted probabilities. We found a significant interaction of Sex (Male) × Day, $\gamma = -0.05, t(142) = -2.55, p \leq .01$, whereby the probability of voluntarily speaking in class declined over time for men, $\gamma = -0.06, t(142) = -4.86, p \leq .0005$. For women, the probability of volunteering to speak in class was additionally qualified by a significant Gender RS × Day interaction, $\gamma = 0.007, t(142) = 2.01, p \leq .03$. Women higher in Gender RS began with lower rates of voluntary participation relative to men, but high Gender RS women’s rate of volunteering remained at roughly the same level throughout. Like men, women lower in Gender RS both began with a higher level of volunteering relative to women higher in Gender RS and showed a decrease in volunteering over time. By the end of the diary period, all three groups converged to fairly similar rates of voluntary participation.

Men and women lower in Gender RS showed increasing confidence in the quality of their performance on days when they reported voluntarily participating in class discussions: Day, $\gamma = 0.041, t(127) = 3.48, p \leq .001$. However, the perceived performance of women higher in Gender RS declined over time, Gender RS × Day: $\gamma = -0.009, t(127) = -2.01, p \leq .05$ (see Figure 3B).

**Discussion**

Women, regardless of level of Gender RS, and men enter law school with comparably strong histories of academic engagement.
and achievement and equivalent expectations of success. Men and women also reported high engagement across the transition into law school. This is not surprising given that admission into a top law school likely required sustained commitment and success over one’s academic career. Yet, the competitive environment engenders self-doubts that declined across the diary period, with women who were higher in Gender RS reporting significantly more doubts than men or than women lower in Gender RS. Thus, women higher in Gender RS appear to feel more threatened than those lower in Gender RS during the transition, supporting the view that the law school experience is likely to activate pre-existing concerns about gender-based disadvantage.

Consistent with this view, the results supported the three main predictions from the Gender RS model. First, relative to women lower in RS, women who were higher in Gender RS were more likely to attribute negative events to their gender. Second, women higher in Gender RS were more likely to use self-silencing to cope with negative events attributed to gender, whereas women lower in Gender RS were more likely to use confrontation. Third, regardless of level of Gender RS, women felt more alienated and less motivated following a negative event when they attributed it to gender.

Voluntary class engagement. Women higher in Gender RS began the legal methods class less likely to volunteer answers in class than men and than women lower in Gender RS. However, over time, men and women lower in Gender RS reduced their volunteering, whereas women higher in Gender RS maintained their low rate of participation. The decrease in volunteering among men and lower Gender RS women was paralleled by increasing confidence in the quality of their performance compared to higher Gender RS women. Perhaps through feedback, men and lower Gender RS women learn to be more strategic in deciding when and how to volunteer in class, allowing them to refine their performance and build their academic confidence. In contrast, women higher in Gender RS may be relatively less strategic in presenting themselves in class and increasingly view their performance as poor. This pattern may leave them vulnerable to academic self-doubt and, over time, diminish their engagement and confidence.

Given that the legal method course was intended as an immersive process that rapidly builds skills and desensitizes people to the public performance and feedback that characterizes socialization into the legal profession, any negative effect of Gender RS may be temporary. Alternatively, this normatively stressful experience may be less effective, and perhaps more harmful, for women who anxiously expect gender-based rejection than for men or for women who do not feel threatened by the possibility of gender-based disadvantage.

General Discussion

Concerns that being female limits the likelihood of one’s competencies and contributions being recognized, appreciated, and rewarded were predicted to powerfully shape how women perceive and cope with social evaluation in prestigious competitive organizations. In support of this prediction, the results of studies using a variety of methods and measures showed that, in such institutions, women who expected and were concerned about rejection based on their gender showed the pattern of threat-fueled responses predicted from classical and contemporary perspectives on the consequences of dependency on powerful others whose support is dubious.

First, women high in Gender RS detected gender-based rejection more often, consistent with cue-triggered hypervigilance for threat. Second, they engaged in self-silencing and avoidance of discretionary evaluative opportunities, consistent with wanting to prevent rejection from powerful members of the institution on whose approval they depended. Third, the perception of gender-based rejection in negative experiences and the use of self-silencing led women to feel more alienated and less motivated. Thus, although presumably developed to help women manage the very real threat of gender-based rejection in consequential social evaluative situations, the Gender RS system may unintentionally compromise success in those situations.

Overall, the results show how gender inequities in advancement in competitive institutions may emerge through gender differences in the experience of normatively stressful evaluative situations.
Although men and women find these situations equivalently stressful, women more often view their gender as contributing to negative outcomes. Yet, how women perceive and cope with these situations depends on their preexisting level of concern and uncertainty about the role of their gender in their treatment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Captured in our Gender RS measure, this dispositional variability is not reducible to general sensitivity to rejection or to perceiving the world through the lens of gender (Study 2). Moreover, the activation and influence of the Gender RS disposition is specific to situations in which gender-based rejection is a plausible explanation for negative outcomes (Study 3).

**Dynamics of Perceiving and Coping With Gender Threat in Competitive Institutions**

Our research can be viewed as an attempt to understand the processes through which individual women respond when they perceive their gender as widening the gap between the goal of merit-based success and the means available to develop and demonstrate merit (Merton, 1938). Our findings suggest that attributions of specific negative outcomes to gender magnify awareness of this gap and elicit self-silencing, presumably to fit in and forestall rejection. However, the cost associated with self-silencing was anger-tinged alienation (Study 5). Such alienation resembles the apparently helpless anger experienced by low-power women patronized by high-power men in Vescio et al.’s (2005) research. This helpless anger was in contrast with the empowering anger experienced by similarly patronized, low-power men. This latter response suggests the potential effectiveness of disparagement by people like them can succeed through effort. However, the harshness of this gap and elicit self-silencing, presumably to fit in and forestall rejection. We sought to capture this coping mode as active and immediate confrontation of the threat source. There is reason to believe, however, that direct confrontation may elicit more backlash for women than for men (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). However, neither self-silencing nor confrontation moderated the alienation and loss of motivation that women experienced following a perceived gender-based rejection, regardless of Gender RS level. It will be particularly important for future research to establish whether self-silencing and confrontation have different long-term effects and also whether confrontation is more likely to occur following self-silencing that appear to be ineffective in gaining approval (cf. Romero-Canyas et al., 2011).

**Issues for Future Research**

Although we were unsuccessful in finding coping strategies that moderated the negative effects of gender-based rejection, other research suggests possibilities for consideration. For example, Stewart and Dottolo (2005) identified potential ways that women graduate students draw on peers with similar experiences for emotional support and advice about how to navigate the system and for partnership in collective action to remedy discriminatory situations. Peers who share one’s identity and who have succeeded in competitive institutions may also be an effective source of inspiration and practical advice, as was found for African American students in a competitive university (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Whereas drawing effectively on social support can be a promising alternative to self-silencing, actively transforming the situation through reframing can be a promising alternative to confrontation. In a daily diary study of college students, London, Downey, Bolger, and Velilla (2005) found preliminary evidence that transformative coping following a negative race-related event increased institutional belonging among minority students. However, the ability to transform the situation requires drawing on skills and self-confidence that may be less accessible when self-regulatory resources and well-being have been depleted by the stress of chronic concerns about status-based discrimination. Not surprisingly, then, London et al. found transformative coping was used less frequently than confrontation or self-silencing.

**Implications of Institutional Arrangements for Resource Use and Voice**

The effectiveness of confidence of acceptance in helping some women succeed against the odds may have the unintentional and pernicious consequence of reinforcing discriminatory processes and structures. The alienation, loss of motivation, and apparent failure to avail of opportunities evident in women high in Gender RS may be misattributed to what Mills (1959) described as a private trouble rather than evidence of a problem in institutional arrangements. In describing the self-fulfilling prophecy, Merton (1957) cautioned that the phenomenon whereby fears are translated into reality “operates only in the absence of deliberate institutional controls” (p. 436). Our findings imply that institutions should consider the possibility of differential use of and benefits from discretionary opportunities for feedback in intended to all aid students. Just as Mendoza-Denton et al. (2002) found for African American students higher in sensitivity to race-based rejection, women higher in Gender RS were less likely to pursue and benefit from opportunities for feedback and academic help from institutional representatives than women lower in Gender RS (Studies 4 and 5) and than men (Study 5).

Although the opportunity to volunteer answers to questions in class and to receive public feedback (Study 5) may be an adaptive and empowering learning tool for those who are confident of acceptance in the institution, it may be undermining for individuals who doubt their acceptance. Perhaps using one’s voice is only truly helpful in fostering success within organizations when one feels
secure in one’s standing. Among people who doubt the acceptance of members of their group, an institutional emphasis on development and growth rather than on competition for rank may be particularly beneficial (Dweck, 2000; van den Bos et al., 2010). This benefit is illustrated in Cohen et al.’s (1999) study, on which Study 4 was based. Feedback that emphasized strengths as well as weaknesses and conveyed confidence in the student’s ability to meet high standards helped build trust in the educational process and maintain engagement among African American students.

Limitations and Caveats

Our research was conducted on women in prestigious, competitive institutions where overt sexism is prohibited and where there is gender parity at entry level. Although we view the model as applicable to women in other circumstances where gender may be a disadvantage, careful work is needed to identify the particular threats emanating from institutional structures and processes that emerge in specific situations and elicit particular coping responses. Second, whereas our research included men only to show the specific applicability of the Gender RS construct as currently operationalized to women, there are undoubtedly circumstances in which men systematically experience the threat of rejection in relation to being male. Third, the focus was on self-reports from the perspective of women under evaluation. Recent research underscores the importance of simultaneously investigating evaluative situations from the vantage point of the evaluator. Logel et al. (2009) found that male engineering students high in sexism, assessed through subtle means, behaved in a dominant and sexually interested way toward an ostensible female classmate. In a separate study, female engineering students who interacted with such sexist men did worse on an engineering test than did women who interacted with non sexist men. Fourth, the difference between low and high Gender RS women in perceptions of gender disadvantage in negative outcomes may reflect either overestimates by high Gender RS women or, instead, underestimates by low Gender RS women. Research on sensitivity to rejection for personal reasons found evidence of the latter (Romero-Canyas & Downey, 2011). If this finding generalizes to Gender RS, then low Gender RS women may strategically ignore or reframe ambiguous cues of gender disadvantage, protecting them against identifying real discrimination when it is not adaptive for them to perceive discrimination.

Conclusion

The findings show how the Gender RS model can help answer the question: How do women experience and cope with competitive achievement situations where they have reason to wonder whether their gender may impede their advancement? The results reveal the value of going beyond a group-level analysis to consider how practices in competitive institutions trigger the activation of Gender RS in some women, leading them to silence themselves in immediately self-protective ways that may imperil their advancement. In this way, the Gender RS system suggests how individual self-protective responses to threatening institutional circumstances, in the aggregate, can contribute to the continuity of institutional sexism.

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GENDER REJECTION SENSITIVITY


Biographical Information:

I am a third generation Harvard graduate, continuing a long and distinguished tradition in my family. I have had an illustrious career as an award-winning scientist and academic at an elite university for many years before assuming my current position as a full professor at Columbia.