

EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN AS A FUNCTION OF THEIR SEX, ACHIEVEMENT, AND PERSONAL HISTORY¹

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A study was designed to investigate the conditions under which women are prejudiced against women. Paintings were shown to 120 college women for evaluation. Half of the subjects thought that the artist was female, half thought that the artist was male; half thought that the painting was an entry in a contest, half thought that it was a winner. Some questionnaire data showed that women judged the entry paintings by men to be significantly better than the identical paintings by women. Winning paintings were not evaluated differently depending on sex. Obstacles faced by winners or entrants had no effect. It was concluded that women who are attempting to accomplish are judged less favorably than men, but that women who have successfully accomplished work are evaluated as favorably, as are men.

One explanation for the apparent failure of women to achieve as much success as men is prejudicial evaluations of their work by men (cf. Klein, 1950; Scheinfeld, 1944). If men undervalue the accomplishments of women, women also may do so. Women's misjudgment of themselves should contribute to an actual lack of achievement. If women devalue their own and each other's work, they should be less willing to try to achieve and less supportive of their fellow women's efforts. The present study investigates the conditions under which women devalue female performance.

Goldberg (1968) designed a study to investigate prejudice among women toward women in the areas of intellectual and professional competence. College women were asked to evaluate supposedly published journal articles on linguistics, law, art history, dietetics, education, and city planning; for each article, half of the subjects saw a male author's name and half saw a female author's name. The results confirmed the hypothesis

that college women value the professional work of men more highly than the identical work of women. Women devalued female work for no other reason than the female name associated with the article. Sensitivity to the sex of the author served to distort judgment and thereby prejudice women against the work of other women.

Using the identical procedure, Pheterson (1969) explored prejudice against women among middle-aged, uneducated women. The professional articles were on marriage, child discipline, and special education. The results did not support the findings of Goldberg. Women judged female work to be equal to male work; in fact, evaluations were almost significantly more favorable for female work than for male work.

The differing results of Goldberg and Pheterson were perhaps due to the different subjects used, to the different articles, or to some combination of the two. One plausible explanation might be that the printed articles had different significance for the two sets of subjects. College women see the printed word frequently, are taught to be critical, and may take the publication of a paper relatively lightly. They might have viewed the articles simply as vehicles for presenting ideas or proposals. Uneducated women, on the other hand,

¹This study was supported, in part, by funds from National Science Foundation Grant GS 27292 to the second author.

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might regard the publication or, even, writing of an article as a big accomplishment in itself, regardless of the specific ideas presented. Perhaps all women judge women less favorably than men when evaluating their proposals or unfinished work because men are more likely to succeed. That is, given a piece of work which has uncertain status, the man's, rather than the woman's, is more likely in our society to eventually be successful. On the other hand, women may judge the recognized accomplishments or already successful work of women to be equal to or even better than the same work of men. Success is less common for women. A contrast effect may cause people to overvalue achievement when they expect none. Also, women may overvalue female accomplishment because they assume that women face greater obstacles to success and therefore must exert more energy, display more competence, or make more sacrifices than men.

The present study was designed to investigate the divergent results of Goldberg (1968) and Pheterson (1969) and, further, to test the previously presented arguments. Women were asked to judge paintings created by men and women. Some paintings represented attempts to accomplish, that is, were entries in art competitions. Other paintings represented actual accomplishments—they had already won prizes. The first hypothesis was that women will evaluate male attempts to accomplish more highly than female attempts. The second hypothesis was that women will evaluate female accomplishments as equal to or better than male accomplishments.

The above hypotheses suggest that people judge successful persons more highly when they have more odds against them (as women presumably do.) Thus, a woman's accomplishment might be praised more than a man's accomplishment because women face greater obstacles. Our culture shows great admiration for the achievements of the handicapped or underprivileged (Allport, 1958). A third hypothesis was formulated to explore this admiration and its influence on female judgments. It stated that women will evaluate the accomplishments of people with personal odds against them more favorably than the accomplishments of people without such odds.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 120 freshmen and sophomore women students at Connecticut College. College women were used to permit a replication of the Goldberg (1968) study within the experimental design. They volunteered in student dormitories for immediate participation in the 15-minute task.

Experimental Design

There were three experimental manipulations constituting a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design. Eight paintings were presented to small groups of subjects for evaluation. The sex of the artist, the status of the painting, and the personal odds faced by the artist were manipulated, such that for each painting half of the subjects thought that it had been created by a male artist, and half thought that it had been created by a female artist; half thought it was a prize-winning painting, and half thought it was just an entry in a show; half thought the artist had faced unusually severe obstacles, and half thought the artist had faced no unusual obstacles. Each subject participated in each experimental condition, evaluating all eight paintings sequentially. The identity of each painting was counterbalanced among subjects, so that all conditions were represented for each painting.

Procedure

Subjects were seated in a room equipped with a slide projector and screen. Each subject was given a booklet and was told to read the directions:

Slides of eight paintings will be shown in conjunction with brief biographical sketches of the artists. After viewing the slide, turn the page and answer five evaluative questions about the painting. No personal information about your identity, talents, or tastes is required. This is a study of the artistic judgments of college students.

The subjects were then instructed to read the first artist sketch, inspect the projected painting, turn the page and answer the appropriate questions, and then proceed in the same manner for each of the eight slides.

Eight slides of unfamiliar modern art paintings were used. To accompany them, fictitious artist profiles were composed to include the eight experimental conditions. These profiles appeared in the booklets in different orders for the different subjects. Half of the profiles described a female artist, and half described a male. Their age, residence, and occupations were briefly described (identical for male or female). For example, "Bob (Barbara) Soulman, born in 1941 in Cleveland, Ohio, teaches English in a progressive program of adult education. Painting is his (her) hobby and most creative pastime." Cross-cutting the sex manipulation, half of the profiles described the painting as a contest entry (e.g., "She has entered

TABLE 1

MEAN COMPETENCE RATINGS OF MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS WITH WINNING OR ENTRY PAINTINGS

Status of painting	Sex of artist	
	Male	Female
Winner	3.483	3.483
Entry	3.562	3.354

this painting in a museum-sponsored young artists' contest"), and half described it as a recognized winner (e.g., "This painting is the winner of the Annual Cleveland Color Competition"). In a third manipulation, half of the profiles described the painter as having had obstacles to success (e.g., "An arm amputee since 1967, he has been amazingly productive as an artist").

After each slide, the subjects turned a booklet page. Five questions asked the subjects to evaluate the paintings on a scale of 1-5, with higher ratings representing more favorable evaluations. After every slide, the following questions were posed: (a) Judging from this painting, how technically competent would you judge Mr. (or Miss) _____ to be? (b) How creative would you judge Mr. (Miss) _____ to be? (c) What rating would you give to Mr. (or Miss) _____ for the overall quality and content of his (her) painting? (d) What emotional impact has Mr. (or Miss) _____ instilled in his painting? (e) Judging from this painting, what prediction would you make for the artistic future of Mr. (or Miss) _____.

After all eight slides were shown, the study was explained, and the subjects were asked not to discuss it.

RESULTS

The questionnaire data were analyzed using four-way analyses of variance, with three experimental conditions and subjects as the fourth factor. Three questions asked the subjects to evaluate the artists; these were assumed to be directly relevant to the hypotheses.

The first question, technical competence, revealed an overall rating of the male artists as significantly superior to the female artists ($F = 3.99$, $df = 1/119$, $p < .05$). There was a significant Sex \times Painting Status interaction ($F = 5.42$, $df = 1/119$, $p < .05$). Inspection of the mean ratings of males and females under winner and entry conditions indicates that the main effect of male superiority was attributable to the entry condition and showed no differences in the winner condition. Means

TABLE 2

MEAN RATINGS OF ARTISTIC FUTURE OF MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS WITH WINNING AND ENTRY PAINTINGS

Status of painting	Sex of artist	
	Male	Female
Winner	2.970	2.987
Entry	3.062	2.812

in the entry condition differed significantly in favor of men ($t = 1.99$, $p < .05$); means in the winner condition were identical (see Table 1). All other main effects and interactions were not significant.

The question concerning the artistic future of the artist produced results paralleling the competence data (see Table 2). There was a significant Sex \times Painting Status interaction ($F = 4.52$, $df = 1/119$, $p < .05$). Males were evaluated significantly more favorably than females for their entry paintings ($t = 1.92$, $p < .06$). Evaluations did not differ significantly for the winning paintings, although evaluations tended to favor the female winners.

A third question, asking about the artist's creativity, yielded no significant differences. (Intuitively, these data are not surprising, given the ambiguity of the term "creative." Also, "creativity" has some feminine connotations which judges may not wish to attribute to men, even when they believe the men are better artists.) In addition, the subjects evaluated the paintings themselves, equally among conditions (their quality and their emotional impact). Bias apparently was directed toward the performer, rather than toward his or her work.

The data presented above support our first and second hypothesis. Women value male work more highly than female work when it is only an attempt or entry; however, this bias dissipates when the work advances from entry to winner. The third hypothesis concerning the odds condition was not confirmed; there were no significant differences among the odds conditions.

DISCUSSION

Some professional women have claimed that their work is evaluated by men less well than

it would be if they were men (e.g., Klein, 1950). The recent data of Goldberg (1968) and Pheterson (1969) have added a new dimension to the attitudinal factors inhibiting female success. Under certain conditions, even women are prejudiced against the performance of other women. The present study investigated one aspect of this prejudice. Women evaluated female entries in a contest less favorably than identical male entries, but female winners equally to identical male winners.

The implications of this finding are far-reaching. The work of women in competition is devalued by other women. Even work that is equivalent to the work of a man will be judged inferior until it receives special distinction, and that distinction is difficult to achieve when judgment is biased against the work in competition. According to the present data and those of Goldberg, women cannot expect unbiased evaluations until they prove themselves by award, trophy, or other obvious success. Obvious success is perceived differently by some groups than by others. The present research was based on the speculation that uneducated, middle-aged women perceived published articles as signs of obvious success, whereas college women perceived such work simply as a presentation of ideas. Women were prejudiced against female ideas but not against female success. The manipulation of entry and winner in this study permitted controlled examination and confirmation of that speculation.

A question might be raised regarding the strength of the present findings. Of five questionnaire items, only two supported our hypothesis. These were the first question (technical competence of the artist) and the fifth (the artist's future). However, a priori reasoning would suggest that these were the very questions where one would expect bias against women to occur. As mentioned earlier, creativity is ambiguous and may have feminine connotations. The paintings themselves were abstract, unknown, and also difficult to judge on the dimensions covered (quality and emotional impact). If people are expecting men to perform better than women, they should have the strongest expectations about tasks

on which society has already labeled men as superior. In everyday life, many professional men are regarded as technically competent and are successful; we see fewer women in these positions (girls are not raised to be engineers or business executives). Thus, the subjects might simply be described as reflecting attitudes in society at large. They assumed the men to be more competent and predicted a more successful future for men *unless* there was evidence to the contrary, that is, that the women had, in fact, succeeded. The subjects probably did not have very strong convictions about whether men are more creative than women (husbands usually leave such creative tasks as home decorating and sewing to their wives). The quality and emotional impact of an abstract painting is also unlikely to have aroused strong attitudes favoring men. We argue, then, that our questionnaire data reflected the differing expectations which women (or men) have about men and women. That is, a woman will probably be less competent and her accomplishments fewer than a man, although she may be as creative (but probably not in science or business) and certainly as "emotional." Such an analysis implies that the subjects were not really judging the artists or paintings at all, but were simply expressing attitudes they held prior to the study. This, of course, was our purpose.

The third hypothesis, which predicted evaluations of paintings by people with odds against them to be more favorable in the winner condition than evaluations of identical paintings by people without odds, was not supported by the data. It is possible that the odds manipulation was too obvious. Perhaps some subjects were immediately aware of their special admiration for achievers with odds and therefore controlled their responses or underrated them, thus masking any positive bias the odds may have instilled. Informal subjects' feedback after the task supports this explanation. No subject suspected the importance of artist sex differences; however, many subjects reported the suspicion that they were expected to overvalue paintings of the handicapped or underprivileged. This suspicion may have caused a reaction which

obscured prejudicial responses. Remaining to be demonstrated, then, is the hypothesis that obstacles make successes seem greater.

Why do women devalue each others' performance? If one accepts women as a group which has important similarities to minority groups in our society, the answer is obvious. The members of minority groups, and women, have less power and fewer opportunities than do the dominant group, white Anglo-Saxon males. Self-defeating as it is, groups feeling themselves to be the target of prejudice nevertheless tend to accept the attitudes of the dominant majority. This process has also been called identification with the aggressor (Allport, 1958). Women, then, when confronted with another woman who is trying to succeed in some endeavor, will assume that she is less motivated, less expert, or simply less favored by others than a man would (all these assumptions may be perfectly true).

Our data suggest that women do not devalue another woman when she has attained success. Without evidence, we think men do not either. In fact, a woman who has succeeded may be overevaluated. The present study apparently did not afford a proper test of this hypothesis. Perhaps if the artists had been identified as famous and really superior, women would have been rated more highly than men.

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(Received September 29, 1970)