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TITLE:	JOURNAL OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY
VOLUME/ISSUE/PAGES:	19/3 313-325
DATE:	2009
AUTHOR OF ARTICLE:	Katherine White and Jennifer J Argo
TITLE OF ARTICLE:	SOCIAL IDENTITY THREAT AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES
ISSN:	1532-7663
SOURCE:	OCLC: 45007090 Amicus
DELIVERY:	Post to Web: mars@haskayne.ucalgary.ca
REPLY:	E-mail: mars@haskayne.ucalgary.ca

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## Social identity threat and consumer preferences

Katherine White<sup>a</sup>, Jennifer J. Argo<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary, 2500 University Dr. N.W., Calgary, AB, Canada, T2N 1N4

<sup>b</sup> School of Business, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada, T6G 2R6

Available online 15 April 2009

### Abstract

Although marketers often link brands with an aspect of consumer social identity, the current research demonstrates that such brand-identity linkages may sometimes have negative consequences. Consumers motivated to protect and maintain feelings of individual self-worth alter their product evaluations and choices to avoid a threatened aspect of their own social identity. Whereas those low in collective self-esteem (CSE) tend to exhibit such identity avoidance effects, those high in CSE maintain associations with an identity-linked brand even when that social identity is threatened. Moreover, when the consumer feels positively about the self via self-affirmation, the effect among low CSE consumers is mitigated. Finally, it is demonstrated that differences in the use of identity as a resource underlie the effects.

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### Social identity threat and consumer preferences

Consider an advertising tagline from Secret—“Strong Like A Woman” or the classic slogan from Molson—“I am Canadian.” These marketing campaigns highlight a connection between one aspect of the consumer’s social identity (being a woman or being Canadian, respectively) and the brand. Indeed, such identity-linking strategies have been endorsed as an effective means of appealing to consumers (e.g., Bolton & Reed, 2004). We propose, however, that threats to social identity can influence the effectiveness of such identity-linking strategies. For example, an advertising tagline for Tide with Febreze — “It’s the difference between smelling like a mom and smelling like a woman” (Tide, 2007). This advertisement suggests that smelling like a mom is undesirable and that by using Tide the consumer can instead smell like a woman. In other words, Tide is promoting its odor-removal benefit by threatening one aspect of the consumer’s social identity (i.e., being a mother) and offering a product that is associated with a non-threatened aspect of identity (i.e., being a woman). Research shows that different aspects of social identity (seeing the self as an African American, a woman, etc.) can become threatened based on the situation (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995), and it thus seems likely that consumers will sometimes avoid associating with such identities.

Using social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as a framework, we examine the conditions under which consumers will avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of their social identity. We define social identity as the component of the self-concept that is derived from actual or perceived membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). We propose that those who strongly value and identify with the aspect of social identity (those high in collective self-esteem; CSE) will not alter their product preferences in response to identity threat. However, those low in CSE are predicted to avoid identity-linked products when the identity is threatened.

We further contribute to the literature by proposing that these effects are driven by a desire to protect individual self-worth (Steele, 1988). To examine this, we explore the moderating role of collective self-esteem (CSE), the positivity of the product along the threatened dimension, and self-affirmation on consumer responses to social identity threat. First, we show that while those low in CSE often protect the self by avoiding identity-related products under identity threat, those high in CSE maintain their preferences under such threat. Second, we demonstrate the novel finding that dissociation from a threatened identity by avoiding a product is dependent on the product’s valence—that is, its ability to confer positive or negative associations to the self. Those low in CSE avoid products that are negative (but not positive) with regard to the threatened dimension. Third, we show that when those low in CSE are able to restore feelings of self-worth via self-affirmation this avoidance tendency is mitigated. Finally, we highlight the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [kate.white@haskayne.ucalgary.ca](mailto:kate.white@haskayne.ucalgary.ca) (K. White), [jennifer.argo@ualberta.ca](mailto:jennifer.argo@ualberta.ca) (J.J. Argo).

mechanism underlying our effects by demonstrating that the effects are mediated by the use of gender identity as a resource.

### *Social identity threat and consumption*

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and its extension, social categorization theory (Turner, 1985), propose that identity is comprised of two components: personal identity (i.e., identity related to a person's individual sense of self) and social identity (i.e., identity related to groups to which a person belongs or is affiliated). The theory purports that situational demands can activate one particular component of identity which will, in turn, impact the way an individual thinks, feels, and behaves. Thus, an individual can respond to the context in ways consistent with personal identity or one of many possible aspects of social identity (e.g., father, Canadian, golfer; Brewer, 1991; Deaux, 1996). Research further suggests that individuals endeavor to maintain positive self-worth (Dunning, 2007; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 2000) and that they not only strive to maintain positive self-views via the individual self, but also via the social self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Given this, it seems likely that consumers will, at times, be motivated to avoid social identities that temporarily become imbued with negative associations.

Although not extensively explored, the stereotype threat literature provides preliminary evidence that identity threat in the form of activated stereotypes leads individuals to express a lesser preference for identity-consistent behaviors (i.e., black participants reported decreased enjoyment of watching sports, listening to rap music, and being a "lazy couch potato" when under stereotype threat; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Study 3). Thus, past research shows that individuals report a decreased tendency to enjoy behaviors that have the potential to reinforce chronically held, pre-existing stereotypes. While that work focuses on chronic stereotype threats, the current work shows that more temporary, contextual threatening information about an aspect of social identity can lead to the avoidance of products associated with that identity.

In the marketing context, aspects of identity that are temporarily made salient have been shown to influence consumer preferences. For example, priming (Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001) and social distinctiveness (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994; Grier & Deshpandé, 2001; Wooten, 1995) can activate a particular aspect of social identity, leading to congruent consumer attitudes and behaviors. We propose that an identity threat that temporarily arises in the social context can also influence consumer preferences and that, under certain conditions, consumers will avoid products associated with the threatened aspect of identity.

In order to demonstrate that consumers are sometimes motivated to avoid products associated with a temporarily threatened aspect of social identity, we conducted a pilot study. One hundred undergraduates participated in a 2(social identity threat: gender threat vs. no threat) × 2(product evaluation: gender film × university film) mixed-model experimental design, with product evaluation as the within-subjects measure. Participants were led to believe that they would be taking part in two unrelated studies and first read an article which served as the social identity threat manipulation, using gender as the focal

social identity. In the gender threat condition participants read that their gender group was earning low GPAs, had a high likelihood of dropout, was relatively unsatisfied with their programs, and tended to take a long time to secure employment after graduating from university. In the no threat condition, participants read a neutral article. As part of the second study, participants rated a variety of products (e.g., personal care products and products available in the bookstore) and interspersed among these products were two films that pretested as being related to the participant's own gender identity (i.e., *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* and *First Daughter* for female identity and *Rocky VI* and *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* for male identity) and two films that pretested as being related to his/her identity as a university student (i.e., *Persons of Interest* and *Before Night Falls* [documentaries]). They were given a summary of each film and evaluated the films on nine-point scales in counterbalanced order (unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like, and bad/good; White & Dahl, 2006;  $\alpha = .81$  for female films,  $\alpha = .71$  for male films, and  $\alpha = .88$  for university films). A significant interaction between social identity threat and product evaluations emerged,  $F(1, 98) = 4.05, p < .05$ .<sup>1</sup> Consistent with predictions, those in the gender threat condition demonstrated a weaker preference for the gender films ( $M = 5.14$ ) than did those in the no threat condition ( $M = 5.95$ ),  $t(98) = 2.72, p < .01$ . No differences in evaluations emerged for the university films ( $M_{\text{gender threat}} = 6.51, M_{\text{no threat}} = 6.47; t(98) = .13, p > .90$ ). While the difference between ratings of university and gender films was statistically significant in the gender threat condition,  $t(98) = 4.48, p < .001$ , this difference was not significant in the no threat condition,  $t(98) = 1.80, p > .05$ . Thus, consumers experiencing gender identity threat showed a relatively greater avoidance of gender-related (but not university-related) films than those not under threat.

### *Moderating role of collective self-esteem*

The tendency to avoid a threatened aspect of social identity is expected to be moderated by collective self-esteem (CSE) which is defined as the degree to which the individual sees the self as a worthy member of the social group, values the social identity, and sees the social identity as important to the self-concept (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). In general, it has been shown that those who do not highly value and identify with the social group tend to protect the individual self<sup>2</sup> by avoiding association with the group under threatening circumstances (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997; Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995). This past research has largely

<sup>1</sup> Although some research finds gender differences in consumer responses (e.g., Sengupta & Dahl, 2008), in this study (and in all of the studies in this paper) including participant gender as a factor did not predict significant variance in the dependent variable, or interact with other independent variables to predict the dependent variable. Thus, participant gender is not further discussed.

<sup>2</sup> By self-protection we refer to a response wherein the individual tends to avoid negative consequences for the self (e.g., Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Tice 1991).

examined responses in intergroup contexts (wherein ingroup members are compared in some way to outgroup members). For example, under conditions where group memberships are formed in the laboratory, those lower in ingroup identification (based on an experimental manipulation) reported a decreased desire to work on another group-related task when the ingroup performed more poorly than the outgroup (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). In addition, in the context of pre-existing group memberships (i.e., being a psychology student), those who did not highly identify with the group were less likely to see the self as a stereotypical group member as compared to those who did highly identify with the group, particularly when the group was low in status (Spears et al., 1997). Thus, those who do not strongly value and identify with a given group membership (i.e., low CSE) are more likely than their counterparts to psychologically set themselves apart from the group when it is a low status group, rather than demonstrating group solidarity under such conditions. Differing from this earlier work, our research shows that even in non-intergroup contexts, temporary situational threats to an aspect of social identity can lead to evaluations, behavioral intentions, and choices that enable the avoidance of products associated with that identity, particularly when consumers are low in CSE.

We posit that those low and high in CSE both experience threat and both wish to feel positively about the self, but that they engage in different responses to do so under identity threat. Those low in CSE engage in a self-protective response by avoiding negative consequences for the individual self and dissociate from the group membership when it is threatened, whereas those high in CSE maintain their group associations when under social identity threat. We make this prediction by drawing upon past theorizing that suggests that those who do not highly identify with and value the social group wish to protect the individual self from threat and do so by dissociating themselves from a threatened social identity (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997). On the other hand, those who highly identify with and value the social group (e.g., high CSE individuals) tend to maintain and reaffirm their allegiance to the social identity in the face of threat because they derive their self-image to a large extent via the social identity and as such are unlikely to reject an important part of the self (Ellemers et al., 1997; see also Doosje et al., 1995; Spears et al., 1997). Thus, it is anticipated that while those low in CSE will avoid identity-linked products when threatened, those high in CSE will display a group-level reaction of “sticking together” under threat and will maintain their bond with identity-linked products.

#### *Positivity of the product with regards to the threatened dimension*

Given that we believe that consumers low in CSE avoid products associated with a threatened identity in an effort to protect the self from threat (i.e., to avoid negative consequences for the individual self), we anticipate that consumers low in CSE will only be motivated to avoid products that are negatively related to the threatened domain. That is, if one's intellect as a female is threatened, female products low in intellectual depth should be avoided, but female products high in intellectual depth

should not be avoided. This is because products that are negative with regard to the threatened dimension will provide greater potential threat to the self, while products that are positive regarding the threatened dimension can act as a buffer to the threat and allow the individual to feel more positively about the self. Thus, those low in CSE will negatively evaluate products that are negative, but not positive, with respect to the threatened dimension. This expectation is consistent with research on stereotype threats that has shown that individuals only disfavor characteristics and behaviors that are explicitly negatively associated with the stereotyped domain (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004).

#### *Self-affirmation*

Given our conceptualization that the effects among those low in CSE are driven by a desire to avoid negative consequences for the individual self, it is reasonable to predict that if self-worth is maintained via other means, the tendency to avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity should be attenuated (Steele, 1988). According to self-affirmation theory, people wish to protect and maintain self-integrity or self-worth (Steele, 1988). Further, if the individual is given the opportunity to restore feelings of self-worth by an alternative means, self-protective reactions to threatening circumstances are mitigated (Steele, 1988; see also Tesser, 2000). For example, when people are given the opportunity to self-affirm (i.e., acknowledge values that are important to the self) tendencies to hinder a close other's performance after a threatening upward social comparison (Tesser & Cornell, 1991), to generate more downward than upward counterfactuals in response to negative life events (White & Lehman, 2005), and to derogate others when threatened (Fein & Spencer, 1997) are reduced. Thus, we propose that, under conditions of threat and no self-affirmation, consumers low in CSE will report weaker preferences for a product related to the threatened identity than will those high in CSE. When the opportunity to affirm the self is available, those low in CSE should no longer be motivated to protect the self and these differences will be attenuated.

#### *Use of identity as a resource*

In our first three studies we propose that consumer responses to threat are driven by a desire to maintain self-worth. We demonstrate this through the moderating roles of CSE, positivity of the product, and self-affirmation. To provide further converging evidence of this process, we also examine the mediating role of identity as a resource that protects the self from threat (in Study 4). Past research proposes that because group memberships can foster a sense of belonging and connectedness (Correll & Park, 2005; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004), that the group membership itself can serve as a resource that protects the individual from certain types of threat (e.g., social rejection, Knowles & Gardner 2008).

We further posit, however, that the group membership has differential benefits for those who are low versus high in CSE. Although not tested within an experimental framework,

evidence does suggest that individuals high (versus low) in CSE who experience chronic threats to identity (e.g., African Americans) are able to feel more positively about the self (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). It may be that those high in CSE use their identity as a resource which helps buffer against threat (e.g., Ethier & Deaux, 1994). That is, for those high in CSE, the group itself becomes a resource—it provides a sense of belonging, connectedness, and cohesiveness (see Correll & Park, 2005; Knowles & Gardner 2008)—that the individual can draw on as a source of strength in response to social identity threat. We propose that, for those who are low in CSE, group identity will not serve as a resource. When under threat, those low in CSE will be less likely to report using their group as a resource as compared to when no threat is present, a finding which will relate to a decrease in preference for identity-related products under threat. For those high in CSE, their group membership should continue to serve as a social resource when faced with social identity threat and they will maintain their preferences for identity-linked products. Thus, we predict that use of gender identity as a resource will mediate reactions to identity threat.

#### *The current research*

To test our predictions, we conduct four experiments to explore the conditions under which consumers avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of social identity. Study 1 shows that individual differences in CSE moderate the influence of a social identity threat on consumer preferences. Study 2 demonstrates the level at which the dissociation occurs by exploring whether consumers avoid products that are both positive and negative with regard to the threatened dimension. Study 3 reveals that when those low in CSE are able to cope with threat via self-affirmation, the tendency to avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity is mitigated. Finally, Study 4 examines the mechanism underlying our effects by demonstrating the mediating role of the use of gender identity as a resource.

#### **Study 1**

In Study 1 we explore whether consumers who avoid association with a threatened identity will do so by choosing alternative products that are neutral with respect to identity. In addition, we examine the moderating role of CSE. As noted earlier, under conditions of identity threat, those high in CSE often maintain their affiliation the group, while those low in CSE often protect themselves by deemphasizing their connection with the group. Thus we predict that,

**H1a:** Consumers who are low in CSE will be less likely to choose a product associated with their own gender identity (vs. a neutral product) when exposed to gender threat, as compared to when no threat is present.

**H1b:** Consumers high in CSE will maintain their preferences for a product associated with their own gender identity regardless of the presence or absence of social identity threat.

#### *Method*

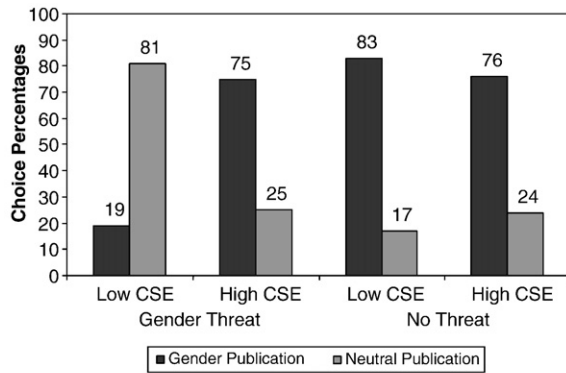
Seventy-six undergraduates took part in a 2(social identity threat: gender threat vs. no threat) × 2(CSE: low vs. high) between-subjects experimental design in exchange for payment. Participants took part in a study ostensibly interested in personality and student's reactions to recent research findings regarding workplace performance. Embedded in a number of filler questionnaires, was the CSE scale, which participants completed using gender as the pertinent identity (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992). Participants were asked to think about their gender as a social group and respond to items such as "I am a worthy member of this 'social' group" and "This 'social' group is an important reflection of who I am." Past research finds that people do differ in the degree to which they identify with their gender group (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992). The CSE items were averaged ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and the scale was mean centered for analysis.

All participants then read an article reporting recent research regarding workplace performance, which served as our identity threat manipulation (using gender as the pertinent identity; see Dietz-Uhler, 1999 for a similar manipulation). Participants in the gender threat condition read that their own gender demonstrates weak analytical reasoning skills, low levels of motivation in the workplace, and a poorly developed sense of social intelligence (i.e., the ability to read and respond to interpersonal situations). In contrast, those in the no threat condition read that both genders are similar on these characteristics. A pretest confirmed the effectiveness of this manipulation. Participants were then told that we had some products left over from another study, and, as thanks for participating, they could choose a product to take with them. They were given a choice between two publications, one associated with their own gender identity and one that was neutral with regard to gender identity. Based on a pretest, we selected *Cosmopolitan* for female identity, *Sports Illustrated* for male identity, and *US* magazine as a product perceived as neutral with regard to gender. Finally, participants indicated their gender and age, and completed a suspicion probe. The suspicion probe revealed that no participants correctly identified the hypotheses or were aware that the two portions of the experiment were connected. Because this finding holds true across all of the studies, this variable is not further discussed.

#### *Results and discussion*

##### *Social identity threat, collective self-esteem, and publication choice*

Binary logistic regression was conducted with social identity threat, the continuous CSE measure, and their interaction term as the independent variables and publication choice as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed that the interaction term was significant ( $\beta = 2.70$ ,  $Wald = 6.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This interaction qualified main effects for social identity threat ( $\beta = -1.46$ ,  $Wald = 6.65$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and CSE ( $\beta = -2.33$ ,  $Wald = 6.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To facilitate an examination of the interaction, a median split was performed on the CSE index. Examination of the frequencies of the publication choices revealed that, consistent



Note: For ease of presentation of the data, a median split was conducted on the CSE index to create a group of consumers who were low in CSE and to create a group of consumers who were high in CSE.

Fig. 1. Publication choice percentages as a function of identity threat and collective self-esteem (Study 1).

with hypothesis 1a, those low in CSE were less likely to choose the gender publication when threat was present (19%) rather than absent (83%;  $\chi^2(1) = 15.65, p < .001$ ; please see Fig. 1). As predicted in hypothesis 1b, participants high in CSE continued to prefer the gender publication over the neutral publication, regardless of whether the threat was present (75%) or absent (76%;  $\chi^2(1) = .23, p > .20$ ).

### Discussion

The results of Study 1 revealed that when social identity threat was present consumers low in CSE were more likely to choose a neutral product over a gender-related product, but when no social identity threat was present these consumers were more likely to select the gender-related product. In contrast, high CSE consumers maintained their preferences for the gender-related product regardless of the presence or absence of threat. This supports the notion that those more motivated to protect the self from threat avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity. On the other hand, those who more strongly identify with and value the social group maintain their affinity for products linked with the identity, even under identity threat. It is noteworthy that low CSE consumers selected qualitatively distinct products (e.g., *US* versus *Cosmopolitan*) when exposed to a social identity threat versus under neutral conditions. It appears as though certain consumers are willing to forgo an option that may be more intrinsically satisfying in order to avoid the negative associations of a threatened aspect of identity.

### Study 2

In Study 2 we extend our examination of the avoidance of products associated with a threatened aspect of identity using a different methodology. The experimental design in the preceding study was such that participants were threatened on the basis of their own gender identity (vs. no threat), but were never threatened on the basis of the alternative gender identity. In addition, participants in the previous study could choose a product related to their own gender identity (vs. a neutral), but not a product associated with the alternative gender identity. In Study 2, rather than examining the relative preference for products related to a

threatened identity versus a neutral product, we examine evaluations of products associated with the consumer's own gender identity and products associated with the opposite gender identity. Because we found no moderating effects of participant gender in the pilot study and Study 1, we selected female participants only and had them read an article that threatened female gender identity (consistent threat), threatened male gender identity (inconsistent threat), or was neutral (no threat).

The methodology of Study 2 allows us to rule out a potential alternative explanation for the findings. In particular, it is possible that consumers avoid products associated with *any* identity that is described negatively, not only products associated with an aspect of their own identity when it is threatened. This alternative would predict that females will avoid male-related products when male identity is threatened. In contrast, our view predicts that females should not show greater avoidance for male-related products when male identity is threatened versus not threatened, and will only demonstrate the avoidance of female products when their own identity is threatened.

In addition, Study 2 allows us to test for the moderating role of the positivity of the product along the threatened dimension (i.e., intellectual depth). That is, if female consumers are threatened in terms of intelligence, will they avoid only female-related products low in intellectual depth or will they also avoid female-related products high in intellectual depth? If those low in CSE are motivated to protect the self, it should be the case that they avoid products that carry negative associations, but not positive associations when experiencing identity threat. Some research on stereotype threat demonstrates that individuals only disfavor characteristics that are explicitly negatively associated with the threatened dimension (Pronin et al., 2004), whereas other research shows that those experiencing stereotype threat will avoid positive and negative behaviors associated with the threatened dimension (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Given our conceptualization that we believe that those low in CSE wish to repair threats to the self, we predict, that low CSE females will avoid female products low, but not high in intellectual depth when their intellect as females is threatened.

**H2a:** Female consumers low in CSE will have more negative evaluations of low-intellect female products (but not high-intellect female products, high-intellect male products, or low-intellect male products) when a consistent identity (i.e., female) is threatened than when an inconsistent identity (i.e., male) is threatened or when no threat is present.

**H2b:** Female consumers high in CSE will maintain their evaluations of low-intellect female products regardless of the social identity threat.

### Method

One hundred twenty-six female undergraduates took part in exchange for payment. This study utilized a 3 (social identity threat: consistent threat vs. inconsistent threat vs. no threat)  $\times$  2 (CSE: low vs. high) between-subjects experimental design. The dependent variable of interest was evaluations of biographies.

Participants were told that they would be taking part in two unrelated studies. At the beginning of the session participants completed the CSE scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ), along with a number of filler questionnaires. They then received information that threatened their own gender identity (consistent threat), that threatened male gender identity (inconsistent threat), or that was neutral with regard to gender identity (no threat). The articles described in Study 1 were altered slightly to increase the explicitness of threat to intellect and were used in this study.

In what was ostensibly a second study, participants were asked to evaluate a series of biographies which, according to a pretest, were highly related to male identity or female identity, and were also evaluated either as low or high in intellectual depth. In addition, a pretest revealed that all female biographies were perceived as being equally related to female identity and all male biographies were perceived as being equally related to male identity. Participants read a short description of each person and then evaluated all 12 biographies in randomized, counter-balanced order on three nine-point scales (unfavorable/favorable, dislike/like, and bad/good; White & Dahl, 2006). Thus, each participant evaluated all of the low-intellect female products (Britney Spears' biography, Paris Hilton's Biography, and Whitney Houston' Biography;  $\alpha = .91$ ), high-intellect female products (Marie Curie's biography, Hilary Clinton's biography, and Condoleeza Rice's biography;  $\alpha = .91$ ), low-intellect male products (Bobby Brown's biography, Kevin Federline's biography, Flavor Flav's biography;  $\alpha = .92$ ), and high-intellect male products (David Suzuki's biography, Al Gore's biography, and Pierre Trudeau's biography;  $\alpha = .86$ ). After completing all of the biography evaluations, participants completed manipulation checks for perceived intellectual depth and these were successful.

Results and discussion

Social identity threat, collective self-esteem, and biography evaluations

As predicted, 3(social identity threat: consistent threat vs. inconsistent threat vs. no threat)  $\times$  2(CSE: low vs. high) ANOVA revealed a significant two-way interaction when predicting evaluations of low-intellect female products ( $F(2, 121) = 4.71, p < .05$ ).<sup>3</sup> Among participants low in CSE, those in the consistent threat condition reported more negative evaluations of the low-

intellect female products ( $M = 2.71$ ) than did those in the inconsistent threat condition ( $M = 3.81; t(121) = 2.14, p < .05$ ) and those in the no threat condition ( $M = 3.56; t(121) = 2.77, p < .01$ ; Fig. 2). Among those high in CSE, participants in the consistent threat condition reported similar evaluations of the low-intellect female products ( $M = 4.06$ ) compared to those in the inconsistent threat condition ( $M = 3.48; t(121) = 1.28, p < .25$ ) and those in the no threat condition ( $M = 3.55; t(121) = 1.19, p < .25$ ). As anticipated, the interaction between threat and CSE did not significantly predict evaluations of high-intellect female products ( $F(2, 121) = .01, n.s.$ ), high-intellect male products ( $F(2, 121) = .07, n.s.$ ), or low-intellect male products ( $F(2, 121) = 1.90, p < .20$ ).

The results support our conceptualization that those low in CSE only avoided low-intellect female products (and not high-intellect female products, high-intellect male products, or low-intellect male products) when their own gender identity (vs. the alternative gender identity) was threatened. Those low in CSE did not avoid female products that were perceived as being high in intellectual depth, highlighting an important boundary condition for our effects. We believe the effects are driven by

<sup>3</sup> Using a regression approach to the data reveals the same results. Following Aiken and West (1991; see also West, Aiken, & Krull, 1996), we coded the threat variable to create two variables. For one dummy variable, the consistent threat condition was given a value of 1 (and no threat and inconsistent threat were given values of 0) and for the second variable the inconsistent threat condition was given a value of 1 (and no threat and consistent threat were given values of 0). As anticipated, linear regression analysis including each dummy coded variable, the continuous centered CSE index, and the interaction terms in the equation predicting evaluations of low-intellect female products revealed the a significant interaction between CSE and the variable coded to reflect consistent threat, ( $t(120) = 2.02, p < .05$ ), and a lack of significant interaction between CSE and inconsistent threat ( $t(120) = .92, n.s.$ ). Similar analyses revealed that the interaction between CSE and the consistent threat dummy variable did not significantly predict evaluations of high-intellect female products ( $t(120) = 1.29, n.s.$ ), high-intellect male products ( $t(120) = .97, n.s.$ ), or low-intellect male products ( $t(120) = 1.50, p < .15$ ).

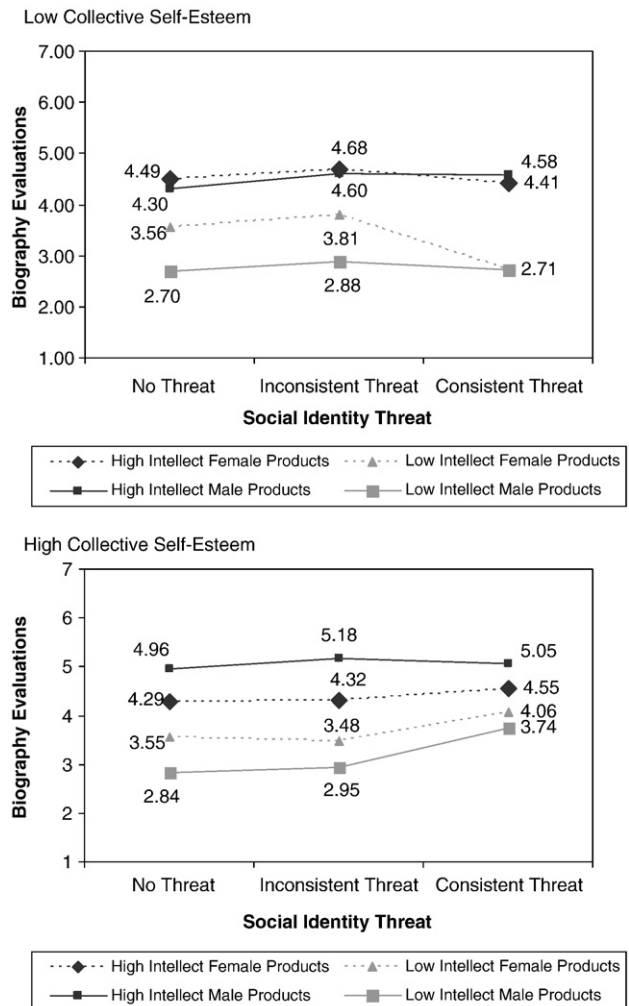


Fig. 2. Product evaluations as a function of identity threat and collective self-esteem (Study 2).

low CSE females being motivated to avoid female-related products that are negative (but not positive) with regard to the threatened domain (e.g., intellect).

### Study 3

The primary objective of Study 3 is to further explore consumer reactions to social identity threat. In order to do so, we examine the moderating role of self-affirmation. As noted in the introduction, when individuals are given the opportunity to affirm the self via the acknowledgment of important values (e.g., Steele, 1988), the tendency to protect and maintain self-worth by other means is often attenuated (e.g., Correll, Zanna, & Spencer, 2004; Tesser & Cornell, 1991; White & Lehman, 2005). In our conceptualization, identity threat leads low CSE individuals to attempt to protect and maintain self-worth by avoiding products associated with the threatened aspect of identity. Thus, among consumers low in CSE who are given the opportunity to cope with the threat, the tendency to avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity should be mitigated. In the current research, we manipulate participants' ability to cope with identity threat via a self-affirmation task and predict that:

**H3a:** Consumers low in CSE will demonstrate the weakest preference for identity-related options when they are not self-affirmed and a social identity threat is present (versus when they are self-affirmed and/or a social identity threat is absent).

**H3b:** Consumers high in CSE will not demonstrate a weaker preference for identity-related options regardless of whether or not they are self-affirmed or whether a social identity threat is present versus absent.

To enhance the generalizability of our findings we examine the implications of social identity threat by using a different social identity—nationality—and examine intentions regarding hockey teams as our main dependent measure. Canadian nationality was used as the ingroup identity and American nationality was used as an outgroup (i.e., comparison) identity. Thus, we expect the predicted differences for those threatened and low in CSE to be evident for options related to Canadian identity, but not for the options related to American identity. For those high in CSE it may be that they maintain their preferences for the identity-related options in the face of threat as in Studies 1 and 2. However, given that participants evaluate hockey teams related to both an ingroup and a dissociative outgroup it is also possible that those high in CSE will bolster their preferences by showing more positive evaluations of the ingroup options when not self-affirmed and threatened (versus not threatened). This is because those high in CSE may be particularly sensitive to avoiding dissociative outgroups (White & Dahl, 2007) and may be more likely to show ingroup-serving biases when dissociative outgroup cues are present (Wilder & Shapiro, 1984). Further, it is possible that threat might further increase the tendency to bolster product preferences when dissociative cues are present. Past research in intergroup contexts shows that social identity threat can lead to a desire to resolve this threat,

often in ways that result in high levels of ingroup favoritism and allow the group to be viewed in a more positive light (e.g., Rothgerber, 1997). This finding is enhanced when the individual feels a strong sense of identification with the group (Hutchinson, Jetta, Christian, & Haycraft, 2006; Wann & Grieve, 2005).

### Method

One hundred fifty-two undergraduates from a large Canadian University participated in a 2(social identity threat: nationality threat vs. no threat) × 2 (self-affirmation: affirmation vs. no affirmation) × 2(CSE: low vs. high) × 2(consumption intentions: Canadian team vs. American team) mixed-model design, with consumption intentions being the within-subjects measure.

Participants took part in a session that was again presented as two separate studies. In the first study, they completed personality questionnaires, embedded in which was the measure of CSE ( $\alpha = .77$ ), this time worded to reflect nationality. In addition, participants were asked to read an article regarding Canadians' use of natural resources and were told that their opinions on the consumption of natural resources would later be solicited. The topic of the article was selected because Canada's natural environment is very important to Canadians as evidenced in a pretest. This article was used to achieve the social identity threat manipulation. In the nationality threat condition, participants read that Canadians were doing a very poor job of conserving their natural resources. In the no threat condition, participants read neutral information regarding Canadians' use of natural resources. Pretesting confirmed the effectiveness of the identity threat manipulation.

After this task, participants completed filler personality measures and the manipulation of self-affirmation. Following past research (e.g., Steele, 1988; White & Lehman, 2005), participants were told that the task was a measure of personality and were asked to rank order eleven traits and values. In the self-affirmation condition participants were asked to write about why their first ranked value was important to them, and to describe a time in their lives when that value was meaningful to them. In the no self-affirmation condition, participants wrote about why their ninth ranked value might be important to a typical student at the university, and to describe a time when that value could be imagined as being meaningful to someone else.

In the second part of the experiment participants were told that the researchers were interested in consumer evaluations of leisure/entertainment activities. Participants were asked to evaluate a variety of different activities, including watching hockey. The consumption intentions items were: "How likely would you be to watch a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ hockey game?", "How likely would you be to pay to watch an a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ hockey game if it were only available on pay per view?", and "How likely would you be to purchase merchandise associated with \_\_\_\_\_?" (very unlikely [1]/very likely [9]). These items were completed for National Hockey League teams that pretested as being strongly related to Canadian identity (Canadian teams;  $\alpha = .83$ ) and not strongly related to Canadian identity (American teams;  $\alpha = .89$ ).



## Results and discussion

### Social identity threat, self-affirmation, collective self-esteem and consumption intentions

To examine the mean values of consumption intentions towards both the Canadian teams and the American teams, we computed a median split on the CSE index. A 2(social identity threat: nationality threat vs. no threat)  $\times$  2(self-affirmation: affirmation vs. no affirmation)  $\times$  2(CSE: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (consumption intentions: Canadian team vs. American teams) mixed-model ANOVA using consumption intentions as the within-subjects measure, revealed the expected 4-way interaction ( $F(1, 144)=5.68, p<.05$ ).<sup>4</sup> When selecting for those low in CSE who were not self-affirmed, participants reported lower evaluations of the Canadian teams when threatened ( $M=1.98$ ) than when not threatened ( $M=2.75; t(144)=2.85, p<.01$ ). No such differences emerged for evaluations of the American teams ( $M_s=1.77$  vs.  $2.09$  respectively,  $t(144)=1.19, p<.25$ ; refer to Fig. 3). Those high in CSE who were not self-affirmed demonstrated significantly more positive evaluations of the Canadian teams when threatened ( $M=3.68$ ) as opposed to not threatened ( $M=2.42; t(144)=5.04, p<.001$ ).

### Discussion

The results of Study 3 demonstrate that when national identity was threatened and the opportunity for self-affirmation was not available, those low in CSE reported more negative consumption intentions towards Canadian teams than did those high in CSE. This tendency was only exhibited for the teams associated with the threatened identity (Canadian teams) and not for teams associated with an outgroup identity. Importantly, low CSE consumers did not report more negative consumption intentions towards products associated with a threatened aspect of their own identity when they were first given the opportunity to affirm the self. Thus, when able to cope with identity threat by an alternative means, those low in CSE no longer avoided the option associated with the threatened aspect of identity. It is also noteworthy that consumers high in CSE who were not self-affirmed demonstrated significantly more positive evaluations of the Canadian teams when threatened as opposed to not threatened. This finding highlights the possibility mentioned earlier that the presence of a dissociative outgroup may lead those high in CSE to bolster their preferences for identity-related products.

<sup>4</sup> Regression analysis reveals the same pattern of results. Given that we wished to examine the consumption intentions towards the Canadian versus American teams as a within-subjects measure, we followed the recommendations of Judd, Kenny, and McClelland (2001; see also White & Dahl, 2007; White & Peloza, 2009) by creating a difference score (with higher scores reflecting more positive evaluations of the Canadian teams relative to the American teams). Regression analysis using threat, the continuous centered CSE index, self-affirmation, the two-way interaction terms, and the three-way interaction term to predict consumption intentions revealed the anticipated significant three-way interaction,  $t(144) = 2.40, p < .05$ . Further, when selecting for threat, the interaction between CSE and self-affirmation significantly predicted consumption intentions,  $t(67) = 2.62, p < .05$ , while when selecting for the no threat condition the interaction between CSE and self-affirmation did not significantly predict consumption intentions,  $t(77) = .34, n.s.$

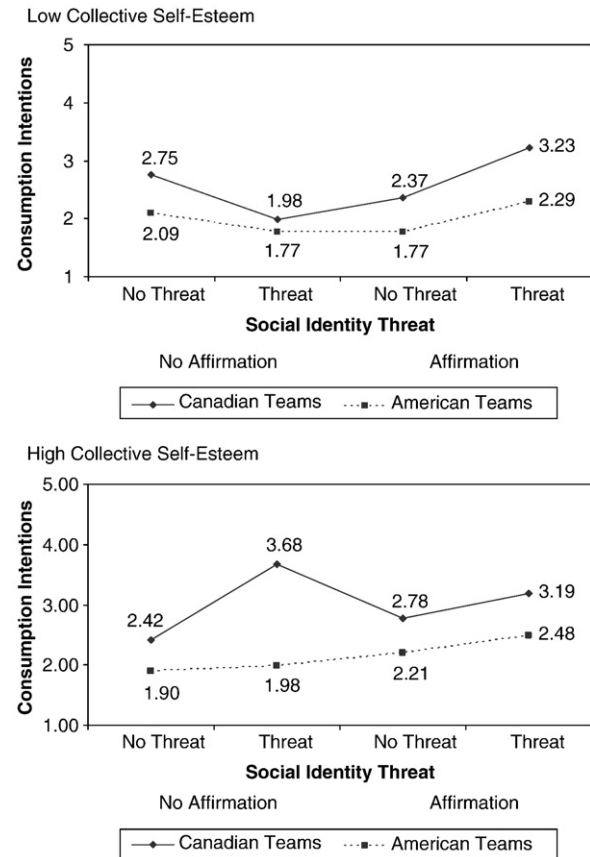


Fig. 3. Consumption intentions as a function of identity threat, collective self-esteem, and self-affirmation (Study 3).

## Study 4

In Study 4 we wish to further delineate the mechanism underlying our effects. As mentioned earlier, group membership can serve as a resource that protects the individual from certain types of threat (e.g., Correll & Park, 2005; Knowles & Gardner 2008). Recall that while we anticipate that those high in CSE will use gender identity as a resource, those who are low in CSE will not. Thus, we predict that use of gender identity as a resource will mediate the relationship between the threat  $\times$  CSE interaction and consumption intentions.

Finally, we wish to rule out two alternative possible explanations for the results. First, it may be that those low in CSE may construe negative identity information as less threatening than do their high CSE counterparts because the threatened social identity is not important to them. As a result, when the identity is under attack, those low in CSE do not find the threat to be that serious (i.e., perceive low to moderate threat) and they opt to pursue the simple solution of separating themselves from anything related to that identity. However, because the social identity is particularly important for high CSE individuals, when negative identity information is presented this should lead to heightened perceptions of threat. Under these conditions avoiding the identity is not possible, and the individual instead remains committed to the identity. A second alternative explanation is that those high in CSE report a

greater degree of reactance when under threat (i.e., a motivational state wherein the individual strives to regain control in response to perceived threatened behavioral freedom; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). One common response to reactance is to actually show a preference for the limited or threatened alternative—this may explain why those high in CSE may prefer gender-related options when threatened.

We extend the generalizability of the findings by introducing a new dependent variable. In addition to evaluations (Study 2), intentions (Study 3), and behaviors (Study 1), in Study 4 we examine whether identity threat also impacts people's reports of how much they enjoy leisure activities that are associated with their gender or that are neutral. Our conceptualization suggests that low CSE individuals will negatively evaluate products associated with their own gender group (but not neutral products) when they are threatened versus not threatened. Furthermore, we expect that the use of gender identity as a resource will mediate our effects.

**H4a:** Consumers low in CSE will have more negative evaluations of enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities, when gender identity is threatened versus when there is no threat present.

**H4b:** Consumers high in CSE will maintain their evaluations of enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities, regardless whether gender identity is threatened versus when no threat is present.

**H5:** These findings will be mediated by the use of gender identity as a resource.

### Method

One hundred thirty-three undergraduates participated in the study in exchange for course credit. This study utilized a 2(social identity threat: gender threat vs. no threat) × 2(CSE: low vs. high) × 2(reported leisure activities: gender-related leisure activities vs. non-gender-related leisure activities) mixed-model design, with reported leisure activities being the within-subjects measure.

Upon arrival, participants were told that they would be taking part in two unrelated studies. At the beginning of the session participants completed the CSE scale with respect to their gender identity ( $\alpha = .82$ ), along with a number of filler questionnaires. They then received information that threatened their own gender identity (gender threat condition) or that was neutral with regard to gender identity (no threat condition). The articles described in Study 2 were used for this purpose. At the end of this questionnaire, as what were ostensibly some more personality measures participants completed items that tapped into the use of their gender group identity as a resource (i.e., the degree to which their gender group membership gives them strength and a sense of belonging; e.g., Knowles & Gardner 2008). They were asked to consider their gender identity and to answer the following items “I feel that my group membership gives me strength,” “I do not gain any benefits from my group membership” (reverse scored), “I feel that I am a member of a cohesive group,” “I feel connected to others around me,” “I have a strong sense of

belonging,” and “I do not feel connected to others around me,” (reverse scored), “To what extent is the group meaningful and cohesive?,” “To what extent do members of the group share common goals?,” “To what extent do members of this group feel a sense of belonging?” on scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). These items were averaged to create a gender identity resource index ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

As part of what was ostensibly the second study on consumer leisure activities participants reported the degree to which they enjoyed engaging in various activities that pretested as being associated with female identity, associated with male identity, or were neutral with regard to identity. Based on a pretest, the female activities were “How much do you enjoy scrapbooking?,” “How much do you enjoy baking?,” “How much do you enjoy shopping?,” “How much do you enjoy watching figure skating?,” “How much do you enjoy watching ballet?,” the male activities were “How much do you enjoy watching boxing?,” “How much do you enjoy watching car racing?,” “How much do you enjoy watching sports?,” “How much do you enjoy drinking beer with your friends?,” “How much do you enjoy working with tools?,” the neutral activities were “How much do you enjoy bowling?,” “How much do you enjoy running,” “How much do you enjoy reading?,” “How much do you enjoy watching movies?,” “How much do you enjoy eating in restaurants?” An index of gender-related activities was created by averaging across the female items for females ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and the male items for males ( $\alpha = .76$ ), and an index of neutral activities was created by averaging across the neutral items ( $\alpha = .65$ ).

Participants also completed items to assess the importance of their gender identity: “How important is being female [male] to how you see yourself? (not at all important/very important),” “How central is being female [male] to how you view yourself? (not at all central/very central),” “How significant is being female [male] to your self-image? (not at all significant/very significant),” and “How personally relevant (i.e., important to you as a person) is being female [male] to you?” (not at all relevant/very relevant) on seven-point scales. In addition, participants completed a measure of psychological reactance (adapted from Hong & Salvatora, 1996), which included ten items such as: “I feel frustrated because I am unable to make free and independent choices,” “I am angry as my freedom of choice is restricted,” and “I feel like I am being forced to do something and, as a result, I feel like doing the opposite” on seven-point scales (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Indexes of importance ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and psychological reactance ( $\alpha = .65$ ) were created by averaging across the pertinent items for each measure.

### Results and discussion

#### *Social identity threat, collective self-esteem, and reported leisure activity enjoyment*

A 2(social identity threat: gender threat vs. no threat) × 2(CSE: low vs. high) × 2(leisure activity enjoyment: gender-related leisure activities vs. non-gender-related leisure activities) mixed-model ANOVA, with reported leisure activities being the within-subjects measure, revealed the predicted three-way interaction,  $F(1, 129) = 7.73, p < .01$ .<sup>5</sup> Those low in CSE

rated their enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities as lower when gender was threatened ( $M=4.03$ ) versus when gender was not threatened ( $M=4.62$ ),  $t(129)=3.10$ ,  $p<.05$  (refer to Fig. 4). For those high in CSE, no differences emerged in evaluations of enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities when their gender was threatened ( $M=4.69$ ) versus not threatened ( $M=4.57$ );  $t(129)=.51$ ,  $n.s.$  No significant differences emerged for enjoyment of neutral products among those low in CSE in the threat versus no threat condition ( $M_s=5.51$  and  $5.33$ , respectively,  $n.s.$ ). Finally, no differences emerged for ratings of neutral products among those high in CSE in the threat versus no threat condition ( $M_s=5.34$  and  $5.49$ , respectively,  $n.s.$ ).<sup>6</sup>

#### Mechanism underlying the effects

Our explanation for the findings suggests that our effects should be mediated by use of gender identity as a resource. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), regression analysis confirmed that the interaction between threat and the continuous mean-centered CSE variable significantly predicted gender leisure activity enjoyment,  $t(129)=2.04$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\beta=-1.22$ . Further, the interaction significantly predicted the proposed mediator, use of gender identity as a resource,  $t(129)=2.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\beta=-1.26$ . Finally, when including the gender identity resource index in the analysis predicting enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities along with CSE, threat, and their interaction term, gender identity as a resource significantly predicted enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities,  $t(129)=3.70$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\beta=.33$ , while the relationship between the interaction and enjoyment of gender-related leisure activities was reduced to non-significance,  $t(129)=1.38$ ,  $p=.18$ ,  $\beta=-.80$ ; Sobel's test:  $z=1.98$ ,  $p<.05$  (Sobel 1982). Thus, the use of gender identity as a resource fully mediated our effects.

#### Alternative explanations

We also tested two alternative explanations for the findings. It is also possible that the importance of the identity to the self may underlie our effects. Mediation analysis failed to support this notion. While consistent with the definition of CSE, a main effect for CSE on importance was realized  $t(129)=4.16$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\beta=-.34$ , the interaction between CSE and threat did not significantly predict the importance index,  $t(129)=.34$ ,  $n.s.$ ,  $\beta=-.20$ . It is also possible that psychological reactance may underlie the effects. But again, similar to importance, the interaction between CSE and threat did not significantly predict psychological reactance,  $t(129)=.63$ ,  $n.s.$ ,  $\beta=-.39$ . In sum,

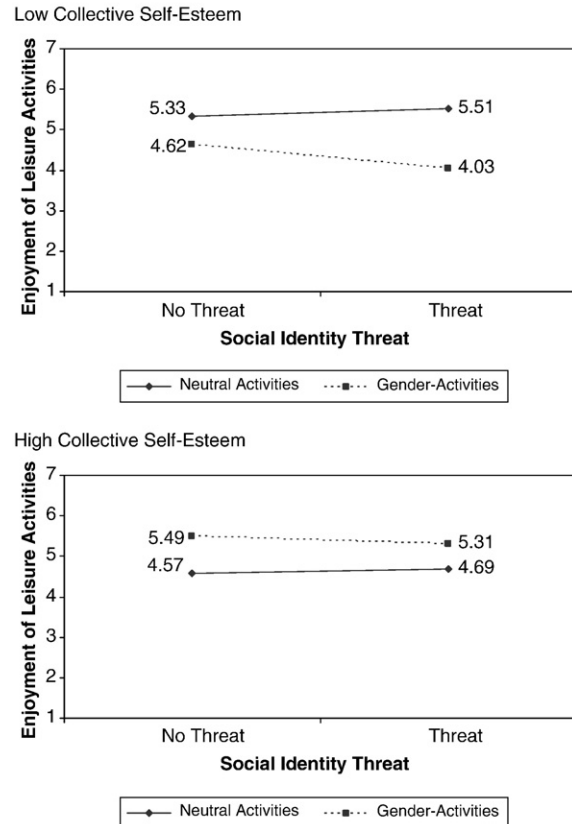


Fig. 4. Ratings of enjoyment for gender-related vs. neutral activities as a function of identity threat and collective self-esteem (Study 4).

perceived importance and psychological reactance do not statistically mediate the effects.

#### Discussion

The results of Study 4 once again show that those low in CSE avoid gender-related options (in this case, leisure activities) when their gender identity is threatened versus not threatened. Those high in CSE maintain their preferences for gender-related activities regardless of the presence or absence of identity threat. Further, in support of our conceptualization, those low in CSE exhibit the avoidance of gender-related activities only, and not neutral activities, in response to threat. Finally, we highlight the process underlying our findings by demonstrating that the use of gender identity as a resource motivates the effects, while providing evidence that perceived importance and psychological reactance do not readily account for the effects.

#### General discussion

Researchers have grown increasingly interested in how consumption relates to the self. To date, this research has largely investigated consumers' tendencies to select products that are associated with salient self-identities (e.g., Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001) and that reflect temporally stable views of the self (Sirgy, 1982). The present research adds to this literature by demonstrating that although people often use products that are consistent with who they are, under certain circumstances

<sup>5</sup> Regression analysis also was conducted using a difference score between gender-related and neutral activities as the dependent variable (Judd et al., 2001). As anticipated, entering threat, the continuous centered CSE index, and their interaction term into the equation revealed that the interaction significantly predicted enjoyment of leisure activities,  $t(129) = 2.04$ ,  $p < .05$ .

<sup>6</sup> In this study participants also completed ratings of the activities related to the alternative gender identity. Consistent with our reasoning, evaluations of the alternative gender-related activities did not vary as a function of threat and CSE ( $M_{low\ CSE/\ no\ threat} = 3.24$ ;  $M_{high\ CSE/\ no\ threat} = 3.13$ ;  $M_{low\ CSE/\ threat} = 3.24$ ;  $M_{high\ CSE/\ threat} = 2.71$ ,  $F(1, 130) = .58$ ,  $n.s.$

they avoid products associated with aspects of their own identity that become contextually imbued with negative associations. Further, while past research shows that more general threats to the individual self (e.g., reminders of one's own mortality) can lead to changes in consumption behaviors (e.g., Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004a, 2004b; Ferraro, Shiv, & Bettman, 2005), we demonstrate that threat to an aspect of the consumer's own social identity has implications for consumer behavior.

The current research builds upon social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) by demonstrating unique responses to social identity threat—shifts in product preferences, intentions, and choices. Our findings show that consumers avoid products related to a threatened identity (pilot study) and that this avoidance tendency is most pronounced among consumers who are low in CSE (Studies 1–4). We demonstrate important boundary conditions for our effects including the positivity of the product related to the threatened dimension and self-affirmation. Although identity threat leads consumers to be more likely to avoid gender-related products low in intellectual depth after experiencing threat in the domain of intellect, consumers do not avoid gender-related products high in intellectual depth under these conditions (Study 2). Further, when given the opportunity to cope with the threat via the affirmation of important values, the tendency to avoid products associated with a threatened aspect of identity among those low in CSE is mitigated (Study 3). Finally, we empirically demonstrate the process underlying our effects—the differential use of gender identity as a resource.

The results in Study 3 are particularly interesting as they demonstrate the novel finding that threats to *social* identity can be resolved via a manipulation aimed at reaffirming the *individual* self. This suggests that although there are individual and social levels of the self (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986), there may indeed be a “common currency” of self (e.g., Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983; Tesser, 2000; Tesser & Cornell, 1991). That is, people have an underlying desire to maintain positive feelings of self-worth and, if feelings of self-worth are threatened, they will use whatever means available to restore threats to the self (even if restoration takes place in an alternative domain than the original threat). For example, a threat to self via cognitive dissonance can be reduced by an alternative means such as making a favorable social comparison (Steele & Liu, 1983; Tesser, 2000). While this demonstrates that threat to the individual self can be resolved by affirming the individual self via another route, the current research demonstrates that threats to the *social self* can also be ameliorated through affirmation via the *individual self*.

By elucidating the conditions under which consumers avoid products related to a temporarily negatively viewed aspect of social identity our research makes a unique contribution to the literature. Our proposition that consumers will avoid products associated with situationally negatively viewed identities is complementary to other motivational accounts of consumer behavior suggesting that consumers desire to avoid negative implications for the self (e.g., Argo, White & Dahl, 2006; Sengupta, Dahl, & Gorn, 2002; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007; see also Berger & Heath 2007). For example,

White and Dahl (2006, 2007) find that consumers avoid products associated with dissociative reference groups (i.e., groups with whom the consumer does not wish to be a member of and is motivated to avoid). Our work extends this past research in at least two important ways. First, while the current research also suggests that consumers will avoid a negatively viewed (i.e., threatened) social identity, instead of demonstrating the avoidance of a product associated with *undesired outgroups*, we show that consumers avoid association with a product related to a situationally threatened aspect of their *own* identity. This is telling because although it is relatively easy to avoid association with a dissociative group with which one does not belong, it is far more difficult to dissociate oneself from an aspect of one's own social identity that is relatively stable and non-permeable (i.e., difficult to leave). Second, whereas White and Dahl (2006, 2007) examine the avoidance of social identities that are chronically viewed as carrying negative associations, the current research examines the avoidance of products associated with a social identity that temporarily becomes threatened based on the situation. Thus, the proposition that consumer preferences can be swayed by temporary threats to an aspect of the individual's own social identity represents a unique and important phenomenon.

#### *Practical implications and directions for future research*

Research shows that different aspects of social identity (e.g., African American, a woman, etc.) can become situationally threatened (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995). Anecdotally, there are many examples of a social identity becoming threatened in a variety of circumstances—from friends teasing the comic book geek, to negative media portrayals of one's ethnic group, to disagreeing with one's country's foreign policy. In response to such threats, those low in CSE are likely to shift consumer behaviors to avoid association with the threatened identity.

From a practical standpoint, marketers do often link products with specific social identities. For example, a campaign from Stanfield's links their brand of underwear with male gender identity by promoting a no-nonsense, masculine image and poking fun at unmanly behaviors with the catch phrase “You don't have to see them to know who's wearing them.” Our results suggest that such identity-linking strategies may only be effective under certain conditions. First, advertisers should avoid linking identity in ways that invoke negative stereotypes regarding the identity (Johar, Moreau, & Schwarz 2003). Second, if the identity becomes threatened and the consumer does not highly identify with and value the identity, the product may be avoided. Thus, it is imperative that marketers wishing to link their brand with an aspect of identity also foster positive CSE towards that identity. One example of this is the Dove campaign, which not only links the product with female identity, but concurrently encourages females to feel positively about their gender identity. An interesting direction for future research would be to examine the ways in which positive CSE might be enhanced with regard to a particular aspect of social identity and how this relates to resilient identification with the brand.

Consumers should also be cognizant that advertisers may threaten one aspect of social identity in an attempt to promote a product associated with an alternative facet of identity. Consider, for example, the Tide with Febreze example presented earlier which promotes its product benefit by threatening one aspect of the consumer's social identity (i.e., being a mother) and offering a product that is associated with a non-threatened aspect of identity (i.e., being a woman). Although we view the identity threat in the current studies as situational and the effects of identity threat as being a temporary response, we show that threat that emerges in the situational context can lead to the avoidance of certain products. As such, even temporary identity threat has implications for consumers. One other possibility is that persistent threats in the social environment might have more enduring effects on consumers. Thus, future research might investigate whether recurrent threats (such as racial stereotypes) lead to more permanent tendencies to avoid products associated with the pertinent identity. Another avenue for future research would be to further explore the finding (in Study 2) that females only avoid low-intellect females associated with being female when threatened by testing whether consumers avoid any identity-related product that conveys negative associations when threatened (e.g., is the effect specific to the threatened domain or more general in nature; e.g., Hao-Shan & Wyer 2008).

Further, it would be interesting to examine the conditions under which consumers would *strengthen* their bond with their identity in response to identity threat as compared to under neutral conditions. It is noteworthy that in Study 3 those high in CSE who were not self-affirmed evaluated Canadian teams more positively under threat as compared to when no threat was present. One interesting possibility is that the design of Study 3 highlighted the presence of a dissociative outgroup (a group the individual does not wish to be a member of; White & Dahl, 2006) by including evaluations of the American teams. Perhaps the presence of a dissociative outgroup increases self-categorization as an ingroup member (particularly among those already high in CSE), leading to identity bolstering rather than identity avoidance. Indeed, past research suggests that factors that enhance self-categorization processes can lead to group enhancing biases (e.g., Ellemers et al., 1997) and that making outgroups salient under threatening circumstances can lead individuals to more strongly affiliate with the ingroup membership (Rothgerber, 1997). Future research could examine whether making outgroups salient, and even whether the source of the threat itself stems from an outgroup, might lead to increased self-categorization and subsequent identity bolstering among those high in CSE. Another possibility is that consumers for whom public self-image concerns are relevant (Lau-Gesk & Drolet, 2008; White & Dahl, 2007), might bolster the identity when it is threatened and it is in public.

One other interesting direction for research that might reveal conditions under which consumers will bolster their product preferences in response to threat has to do with a different type of threat — a threat to the brand rather than to the self per se (e.g., when negative information is learned about the brand). It may be

that the degree to which the consumer feels a sense of attachment or connection to the brand (e.g., Escales & Bettman, 2003; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) would moderate consumer responses to a brand threat. It is possible that consumers who feel a strong connection to the brand itself will demonstrate resilience in response to threat, demonstrating more positive brand evaluations when threatened vs. not threatened.

Future research might also profitably examine the role of threat to different types of social identities in determining consumer preferences. This examined threats to relative stable and global identities such as gender and nationality. It is noteworthy that it is difficult for consumers to actually leave such social groups (i.e., these are more likely ascribed identities). We believe this fact makes the current findings all the more compelling—it is particularly telling that participants will distance themselves from temporally consistent and global identities. While research often examines the role of ascribed consumer identities in determining consumer outcomes (e.g., White & Dahl, 2006, 2007), other identities that dictate consumer behavior are achieved and may be more malleable in nature (e.g., skateboarder, yoga student). Although there are numerous directions for future research beyond those mentioned here, we see the current research as a first step towards demonstrating the conditions under which consumers will shift product preferences in response to contextual social identity threats.

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