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## THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE SOCIAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SPHERE IN SITUATIONS OF THREAT TO THE SELF IN WOMEN AND MEN WITH DIFFERENT SELF-ESTEEM<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of experimental research was to establish the role of self-esteem and type of threat in the attractiveness of self-presentation in women and men in the social and instrumental sphere. Research carried out in a group of 120 persons showed that self-esteem differentiated self-presentation attractiveness differently among women and men. In the female group, independently on the situation and declared effort to express particular features, subjects with low self-esteem were more attractive in the social sphere than persons with high self-esteem, however, they did not differ in the attractiveness of the instrumental sphere. And in the group of men, independently of the situation, high self-esteem persons were more attractive in the instrumental sphere than low self-esteem persons, but in the social sphere, in a neutral situation equal as well as social threats, low-self-esteem people were estimated higher than high self-esteem people. Research has shown small sex differences in the range of motivation and attractiveness of self-presentation.

**Keywords:** attractiveness of self-presentation, self-esteem, threat to the Self, sex differences

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In a situation of threat to the Self persons with high and low self-esteem make a different impression on their audiences: persons with low self-esteem arouse more positive feelings than persons with high self-esteem who are attributed with unfavourable – antagonising – interpersonal characteristics, such as arrogance, hostility, inability to cooperate, etc. (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). The variable explaining the above relationships is the threat-induced activation of the independent Self in persons with high self-esteem

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and of the interdependent Self in persons with low self-esteem. As demonstrated by Vohs and Heatherton (2001), the situational activation of the independent Self, regardless of an individual's self-esteem, leads to concentration on own competencies, triggers competition, boastfulness and a tendency to depreciate the environment. The activation of the interdependent Self, on the other hand, evokes interpersonal orientation: Openness to the needs of others, readiness to cooperate and compromise.

In a neutral situation, there is no observed difference in the attractiveness of people with different self-esteem because, as Vohs and Heatherton claim (2001), self-esteem is not permanently related to the dominance of a particular type of the Self. However, studies in this field are inconsistent - some of them demonstrate a lack of relationship between self-esteem and how the Self is construed (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001), and in other studies, a positive relationship between self-esteem and the independent Self was shown (Hannover, Birkner, & Pöhlman, 2006; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Reid, 2004; Stojanowska, 2009; Stojanowska & Toć, 2010).

Depending on the type of the activated Self, an individual presents himself or herself differently. When the independent Self is active, self-promotion dominates, emphasising the efficiency and independence of an individual in action; when the interdependent Self is active, self-presentation is defensive, creating the image of a "socially accepted" person (Lalvani & Shavitt, 2009). As demonstrated by the study by Lalvani and Shavitt (2009), this difference of desired images is reflected in the behaviour of an individual only under certain conditions – the lack of previous opportunity of self-affirmation, concentration on oneself and a belief in the effectiveness of own behaviour. In a situation of failure, the subjects did not necessarily want to prove themselves in a field which was significant for their identity and were choosing tasks which were not important for the Self, for example, individuals with an independent Self more often decided to test their knowledge in the field of social correctness than the ability to act independently, and individuals in an interdependent self after a failure were more often choosing tasks which tested the ability of self-reliance. This means that the activation of a particular type of the Self can be a variable insufficient to evoke self-presentation goals which are compatible with it because a threat can not only motivate to the direct defence of an important sphere of an individual's functioning but it can also cause avoidance behaviours concentrated on a less important sphere of life. The findings of research conducted by Vohs and Heatherton (2001, study I) are inconsistent with the above rule and demonstrate that in a situation of threat to the intellectual sphere, persons with high self-esteem were searching for information about themselves in the area of characteristics pertaining to their efficiency, and thus corresponding to the nature of the threat. None of the described studies, that is neither those conducted by Vohs and Heatherton (2001) nor Lalvani and Shavitt (2009), introduced a social threat, it is therefore not known whether the content of the threat differentiates between the self-presentation behaviours of persons with low self-esteem and those of persons with high self-esteem.

## 2. CURRENT STUDY

The subject of the presented research are self-presentation behaviors of people with low self-esteem and high self-esteem in situations of threat to the Self in the intellectual and interpersonal sphere, considered both in terms of subjective motivation to present

a particular image (declared effort towards the expression of social and efficiency features) as well as social perception – of the attractiveness of self-presentation in the assessment of a partner in interaction.

Motivation to create a certain image does not have to translate to an actual result – the attractiveness of self-presentation – because strong motivation with a low assessment of the efficiency of one's own self-presentation increases social anxiety, which in turn can impair behaviour (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980; Leary & Atherton, 1986; Pontari & Schlenker, 2001). Therefore, individuals with low self-esteem who chronically experience an increased level of social anxiety and are convinced about the low efficiency of their own behaviours can present themselves in a less attractive way than individuals with high self-esteem who assess their abilities as good enough and, due to their self-confidence are able to present themselves in a conquering and successful manner.

A threat to the Self in a particular sphere of life can have different motivational value for individuals who define their identity in different ways. For individuals with high self-esteem, focused on the independent Self in a situation of threat (Vohs & Heatherton, 2001), a threat to the efficiency sphere is more important than a threat to the social sphere, contrary to individuals with low self-esteem who in situations of any kind of threat to the Self think about themselves mainly in terms of social relationships. It should also be assumed that individuals with high self-esteem, convinced about unconditional acceptance by others (cf. Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000), better endure threats in the interpersonal than in the instrumental sphere. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem who are convinced about the permanent necessity to deserve acceptance can react with stronger anxiety to threats to the interpersonal sphere which are well-aimed at the most sensitive sphere of their life: a chronically unsatisfied need to belong (Leary et al., 1995). Differences between the two sexes can also be expected: for women, a threat to the Self in the social sphere which is stereotypically associated with the female sex can generate more anxiety than for men, for whom a threat to the instrumental sphere – stereotypically the domain of men – can cause more discomfort than for women (cf. Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992).

The following research questions were formulated:

1. Do individuals with low and high self-esteem in a situation of social and instrumental threat to the Self make self-presentation that is diverse in terms of attractiveness in these spheres?
2. What role is played in self-presentation by the motivation to present oneself attractively?
3. Are there gender differences in the attractiveness of self-presentation in the social and efficiency sphere?

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The research involved 120 women and 120 men aged 19-28 years. They were students of the University of Finance and Management in Warsaw majoring in a variety of fields, except for psychology. Sixty women and 60 men (those who met the condition of low or

high self-esteem) were assigned the task to make self-presentation. The remaining 120 people (with average self-esteem) participated in the research as interviewers (they were always of the same sex as the participant) assessing the attractiveness of the participants.

### 3.2 RESEARCH VARIABLES

#### *Independent variables:*

Type of threat (social, intellectual, control group)

Level of self-esteem

Level of anxiety before and after manipulation with the threat

#### *Dependent variables:*

The declared effort made to present oneself attractively in the social sphere

The declared effort made to present oneself attractively in the instrumental sphere

The attractiveness of self-presentation in the social sphere

The attractiveness of self-presentation in the instrumental sphere

### 3.3 MANIPULATION WITH THE THREAT AND THE MEASUREMENT OF THE EFFICACY OF MANIPULATION

Individuals who met the condition of low or high self-esteem were randomly assigned to one of three groups: with an intellectual threat, with a social threat, or to the control group. The subjects from the group with intellectual threat were informed that they were taking a test on intellectual skills and then they were solving selected spatial orientation tasks from the APIS-Z method for surveying general intelligence (Matczak, Jaworowska, Szustrowa, & Ciechanowicz, 1995), in a limited time of 5 minutes, which did not allow the subjects to perform the task correctly. A moment after the task was completed, they were informed that they had scored below the average, while 75% of participants of their age score above the average. In the group with a social threat, participants responded to questions about social functioning based on the social competency questionnaire (KKS) developed by Matczak (2001). After the task was completed, they were informed that their score was below the average, and that it indicated that they could have problems maintaining successful social contacts in the future. In the control group, the participants were informed that the test is aimed at verifying the diagnostic value of methods (and therefore they would not receive any feedback), and then half of them were solving an intelligence test, and the other half – a social test.

The level of anxiety was checked before and after manipulation with the threat (or before and after the task was performed in the control group) in the subgroups distinguished according to sex, self-esteem and type of threat (social – intellectual – control group). Before manipulation for the level of situational anxiety, two main effects were obtained: of sex [ $F(1, 119) = 4.97, p < 0.05; \eta^2 = 0.04$ ] and of self-esteem [ $F(1, 119) = 14.1; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.12$ ]. Women had a higher level of anxiety ( $M = 15.96, SD = 3.32$ ) than men ( $M = 14.7, SD = 3.18$ ), similarly, people with lower self-esteem declared a higher level of anxiety ( $M = 16.4; SD = 3.27$ ) than people with higher self-esteem ( $M = 14.26; SD = 3.00$ ). After the manipulation (providing information posing a threat to the Self), two main effects were obtained: of self-esteem [ $F(1, 119) = 15.86; p < 0.01; \eta^2 = 0.13$ ] and of threat [ $F(2, 118) = 7.07; p < 0.01; \eta^2 = 0.12$ ]. As before the manipulation, people

with lower self-esteem experienced higher levels of anxiety ( $M = 19.97$ ,  $SD = 4.83$ ) than people with higher self-esteem ( $M = 17.17$ ,  $SD = 3.07$ ). People who have experienced a threat, regardless of its type, experienced a higher level of anxiety ( $M_{\text{intellectual var.}} = 19.00$ ,  $SD = 4.18$ ,  $M_{\text{social var.}} = 19.93$ ,  $SD = 4.76$ ) than people from the control group ( $M = 16.77$ ,  $SD = 3.17$ ). The last result proves the efficacy of manipulation with the threat. There were no significant gender differences in terms of the level of anxiety caused by different types of threats (social/intellectual). Similarly, the type of threat did not differentiate the level of anxiety in people with different self-esteem.

### 3.4 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Participation in the research was voluntary. The subjects were informed that the research concerns establishing contacts with new people and is carried out as part of Master degree theses. Research in the group of women was carried out by Beata Kołaczyńska (2008), and in the group of men by Maciej Gocałek (2008).

Participants started by filling out a Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and a State-Trait Anxiety Inventory STAI-XI (half of the statements in this inventory). Persons meeting the condition of low or high self-esteem were then randomly assigned to one of three groups: with an intellectual threat, with a social threat, or to the control group. In the intellectual threat group, the participants performed tasks which allegedly tested their intellectual skills, and, shortly after their completion, were informed that they obtained poor results. In the social threat group, the participants solved a test which allegedly tested their social skills, and then were informed that they obtained poor results. The control group which did not obtain any feedback, on the other hand, was informed that the tasks they had been performing were aimed at checking the diagnostic value of the methods used. Half of the participants in this group solved an intelligence test, and the other half a social competency test. After being given feedback (or taking a test in the control group) the participants filled out the STAI-XI inventory (second half of the inventory). The next information was that establishing contacts with new people is an important social skill and that to this end, they were going to take part in a short interview during which they should be trying to make a positive impression on the interaction partner. The interview was carried out by people who did not know the research procedure and did not take any tests except for those surveying self-esteem and anxiety. They were given a sheet of paper with questions they were supposed to ask the participants. They were also asked not to comment on the participants' answers and that the interview should last no longer than 5 minutes. The questions asked were typical for a job interview and pertained to the psycho-social functioning (strengths and weaknesses of the participants, how they feel they are assessed by others etc.). After the completion of the interview, the participants assessed their effort made to demonstrate particular (social and efficiency) features on a 7-point scale, and the interviewers assessed the impression that the interviewee had made on them in the scope of the same features. At the end, participants from the threat-manipulated groups were informed about the manipulation and an explanation of the real purpose of the research was provided, and all questions were answered. The scheme of the research is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Research scheme*

| Individuals with low self-esteem |     |                           |    |               |    | Individuals with high self-esteem |    |                           |    |               |    |
|----------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|----|---------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|---------------------------|----|---------------|----|
| Social threat group              |     | Intellectual threat group |    | Control group |    | Social threat group               |    | Intellectual threat group |    | Control group |    |
| F*                               | M** | F                         | M  | F             | M  | F                                 | M  | F                         | M  | F             | M  |
| 10 <sup>^</sup>                  | 10  | 10                        | 10 | 10            | 10 | 10                                | 10 | 10                        | 10 | 10            | 10 |

\* F = females; \*\*M = males; <sup>^</sup> = number of participants in subgroups

### 3.5 MEASURES AND VARIABLE INDICATORS

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem was assessed with the use of the Rosenberg SES scale as adapted to Polish by Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, and Dzwonkowska (2007). The scale pertains to the global self-evaluation of an individual and consists of 10 statements assessed on 4-point scales. In adaptive tests, the mean value of self-esteem was 29.49 with a standard deviation of 4.29. In the presented research, individuals were qualified to the low or high self-esteem group when their results were lower or higher from the mean value at least by half of the standard deviation. Thus, individuals whose results were between 10 and 27 points ( $M = 24.4$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ) were qualified for the low self-esteem group, and individuals whose results were between 33 and 40 points ( $M = 34.8$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ), were qualified for the high self-esteem group. Individuals with average results were asked to participate in the research as interviewers.

**Situational Anxiety.** Spielberger's STAI-XI self-evaluation Inventory in its Polish adaptation by Wrześniewski, Sosnowski, and Matusik (2002) was used to survey situational anxiety. The STAI-XI scale is used for surveying the current wellbeing and consists of 20 statements, half of them describing positive, and the other half – negative emotional states. Due to the necessity of surveying twice (before and after manipulation), the scale was divided into two parts. Each of them contained a list of five positive and five negative emotional states assessed on a four-point scale. A higher global score means a higher level of currently experienced anxiety.

**The Declared Effort Towards an Attractive Self-Presentation.** Based on a pilot study carried out on a group of 50 people, features were selected from the ACL scale that were most frequently selected as necessary for interpersonal (five features) and intellectual (five features) functioning (achieving success in education and professional life). For the interpersonal sphere, they were: friendly, nice, open, tolerant and trustworthy. For the intellectual sphere - hard-working, ambitious, active, reflective, pursuing his or her goals.

After the self-presentation, the participant assessed to what extent he or she was trying to demonstrate each trait. Features were assessed on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 meant *I did not try at all*, and 7 – *I tried hard*. The sums of points, separate for interpersonal and efficiency features, were indicators of the declared effort.

**Attractiveness of Self-presentation.** In the scope of the same features that were used for assessing effort, the interviewer assessed the interviewee by answering the question what impression they made on him or her. Each feature was evaluated on a 1–7 point scale, where 1 meant the absence of this feature, and 7 – the maximum

intensity of this feature. The sums of points, calculated separately for interpersonal and efficiency features were indicators of the attractiveness of self-presentation in these spheres.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VARIABLES

In the group of women, self-esteem correlated positively with motivation to express both social and instrumental features, and negatively with the attractiveness of self-presentation in the social sphere (Table 2). The motivation to express social features was not associated with the attractiveness of self-presentation in this sphere, while the motivation to express instrumental features positively correlated with the attractiveness of self-presentation in the efficiency sphere. The attractiveness of self-presentation weakly correlated with the attractiveness of presentation of instrumental features. Although a low level of self-esteem was associated with a higher intensity of anxiety, individuals with low self-esteem presented themselves more attractively in the social sphere than individuals with high self-esteem.

Table 2

*Correlations between the variables: above the diagonal in the group of women, below the diagonal in the group of men*

|                         | Self-esteem | Anxiety (Study1) | Anxiety (Study 2) | Motivation instr. | Motivation soc. | Attractiveness instr. | Attractiveness soc. |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Self-esteem             | x           | -.46*            | -.35*             | .70**             | .62**           | n.s.                  | -.37*               |
| Anxiety (Measurement 1) | -.41*       | x                | .74**             | -.39*             | -.37*           | n.s.                  | n.s.                |
| Anxiety (Measurement 2) | -.40*       | .79**            | x                 | -.44*             | -.43*           | n.s.                  | n.s.                |
| Motivation instr.       | .68**       | -.35*            | -.27*             | x                 | .86**           | .39*                  | -.24 <sup>^</sup>   |
| Motivation soc.         | .47**       | -.24*            | -.33*             | .56**             | x               | .35*                  | n.s.                |
| Attractiveness instr.   | .49**       | -.29*            | -.27*             | .47**             | n.s.            | x                     | .27*                |
| Attractiveness soc.     | n.s.        | n.s.             | n.s.              | n.s.              | n.s.            | n.s.                  | x                   |

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; <sup>^</sup>  $p < .10$

Note. Instr = instrumental features; soc = social features.

In the group of men, self-esteem correlated positively with the motivation to present features in both spheres and with the attractiveness of self-presentation in the instrumental sphere, and negatively with situational anxiety. Moreover, the motivation to express instrumental features was positively related, and situational anxiety was negatively related with the attractiveness of self-presentation in this sphere. In order to verify the role of self-esteem, motivation and anxiety in the self-presentation of

men, a regression analysis was carried out, in which all the variables mentioned were the potential predictors of attractive self-presentation in the instrumental sphere. A statistically significant model was obtained [ $F(3, 56) = 7.33$ ;  $p < .01$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.24$ ] in which self-esteem turned out to be the only significant predictor of attractive self-presentation in the instrumental sphere (beta = 0.32,  $t(60) = 2.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and situational anxiety (beta = -0.035,  $t(60) < 1$ ) and motivation to express instrumental features (beta = 0.24,  $t(60) = 1.5$ ,  $p > .1$ ) turned out to be irrelevant factors. The result shows that men with high self-esteem make more attractive self-presentation in the instrumental sphere than men with low self-esteem for other reasons than weaker anxiety or a stronger current motivation to express these features.

#### 4.2 THE ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND TYPE OF THREAT IN THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE SOCIAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SPHERE

To avoid multivariable interactive effects, the problem was considered separately in different sex subgroups.

In the group of women, in the variance analysis scheme: level of self-esteem x type of threat x type of assessed features (instrumental – social), the interaction effect of self-esteem and type of features was obtained:  $F(1, 54) = 15.84$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.23$ . Regardless of the situation (the presence of threat), women with low self-esteem presented themselves more attractively in the social sphere ( $M = 30.30$ ,  $SD = 3.15$ ) than women with high self-esteem ( $M = 26.5$ ,  $SD = 4.63$ ), and in the intellectual sphere there were no differences in the attractiveness of both groups ( $M_{\text{low self-esteem}} = 25.27$ ,  $SD = 4.90$ ;  $M_{\text{high self-esteem}} = 26.67$ ;  $SD = 5.20$ ). Women with low self-esteem presented themselves more attractively in the social than in the intellectual sphere, and women with high self-esteem presented themselves at a similar level of attractiveness in both spheres. The regularities are presented in Figure 1

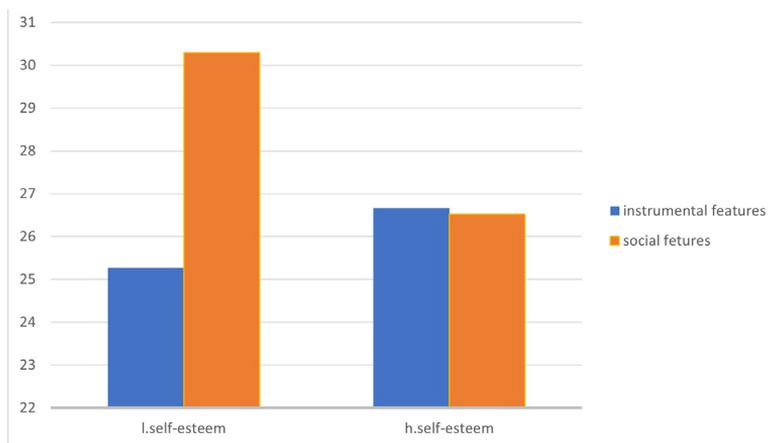


Figure 1. The attractiveness of self-presentation in the instrumental and social sphere in women with different self-esteem.

In the group of men, a three-way interaction effect of self-esteem, type of threat and type of features:  $F(1, 54) = 8.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.25$  was obtained for the attractiveness of self-presentation. To interpret this complex interaction, the analyses were first performed separately for individuals with different self-esteem. In the group of men with low self-esteem, the interactive effect of the type of threat and the type of characteristics was obtained:  $F(5, 24) = 17.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.56$ . Men with low self-esteem in a neutral situation (control group) and social threat made more attractive self-presentation in the social than in the instrumental sphere: the control group:  $M_{\text{social}} = 30.30$  ( $SD = 3.50$ );  $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 28.10$  ( $SD = 4.40$ ); the group with social threat:  $M_{\text{social}} = 29.60$  ( $SD = 2.70$ );  $M_{\text{instrumental}} = 24.30$  ( $SD = 2.50$ ). When the instrumental sphere was at risk, the instrumental self-presentation ( $M = 28.8, SD = 3.40$ ) was more attractive than the social ( $M = 25.40, SD = 3.90$ ). The result is shown in Figure 2.

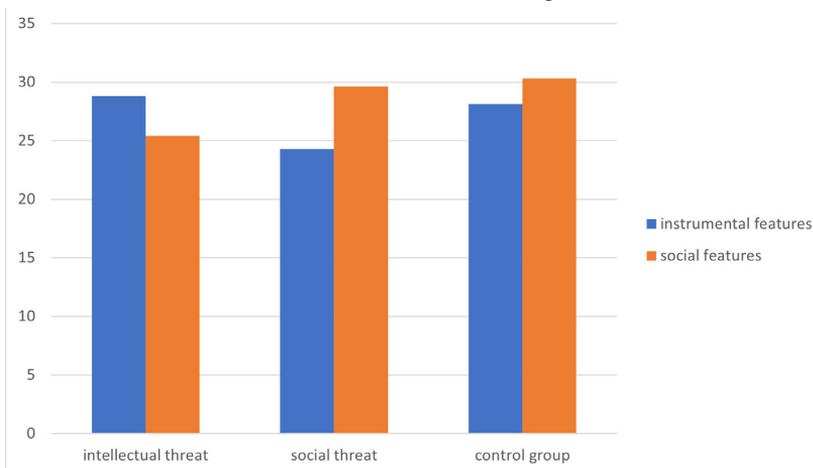


Figure 2. The attractiveness of self-presentation in the instrumental and social sphere in men with low self-esteem depending on the type of threat

In the group of men with high self-esteem, on the other hand, the following main effect of the type of features was obtained  $F(1, 27) = 42.75; p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.60$ . Men with high self-esteem, regardless of situation (type of threat) presented themselves more attractively in the instrumental sphere ( $M = 30.60, SD = 2.50$ ) than in the social sphere ( $M = 26.10, SD = 3.50$ ).

Subsequent analyses in the group of men were conducted separately for each type of features.

In the scope of social features, the following interaction effect of self-esteem and type of threat was obtained:  $F(5, 54) = 6.86; p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.20$ . Men with low self-esteem did not present themselves in the social sphere more attractively than men with low self-esteem in both control conditions [ $M_{\text{low self-esteem}} = 30.30$  ( $SD = 3.50$ );  $M_{\text{high self-esteem}} = 27.60$  ( $SD = 4.00$ ) and in a situation of social threat [ $M_{\text{low self-esteem}} = 29.00$  ( $SD = 2.50$ );  $M_{\text{high self-esteem}} = 23.60$  ( $SD = 2.50$ )], and in the situation of intellectual threat their social attractiveness was similar to that of men with high self-esteem [ $M_{\text{low self-esteem}} = 25.40$  ( $SD = 3.90$ );  $M_{\text{high self-esteem}} = 27.00$  ( $SD = 2.70$ )]. The obtained regularity is presented in Figure 3.

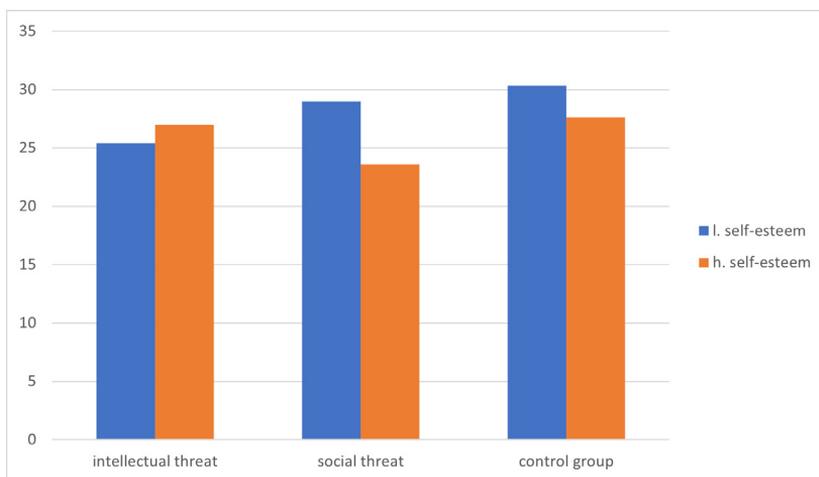


Figure 3. The attractiveness of self-presentation in the social sphere depending on the type of threat in men with different self-esteem

In the scope of instrumental features, two main effects were obtained: of self-esteem [ $F(1, 59) = 20.92; p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.28$ ] and the type of threat [ $F(2, 58) = 7.83; p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.23$ ]. Men with high self-esteem, regardless of the situation, presented themselves in this sphere more attractively ( $M = 30.60, SD = 2.54$ ) than men with low self-esteem ( $M = 27.10, SD = 3.98$ ). Moreover, regardless of self-esteem, both in a situation of intellectual threat and a neutral situation (control group) men presented themselves more attractively in the scope of instrumental features than in the conditions of social threat:  $M_{\text{intellectual threat}} = 30.25 (SD = 3.20)$ ;  $M_{\text{control group}} = 29.60 (SD = 3.60)$ ;  $M_{\text{social threat}} = 26.70 (SD = 3.70)$ .

#### 4.3 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN THE INSTRUMENTAL SPHERE.

An interaction effect was obtained between sex and the type of threat  $F(3, 114) = 3.90; p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.07$ . Only in a situation of intellectual threat did men make more attractive self-presentation in the instrumental sphere than women:  $M_M = 30.25 (SD = 3.20)$ ,  $M_F = 24.50 (SD = 6.50)$ . In the remaining conditions, sex differences were statistically insignificant.

**In the Social Sphere.** For the attractiveness of self-presentation in the social sphere, a three-way interaction effect of gender, self-esteem and type of threat was obtained:  $F(11, 108) = 4.73; p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.08$ . To interpret it, two-way analyses of the gender x self-esteem variance were conducted, separately for each of the three survey conditions (intellectual threat, social threat, neutral conditions). The analyses showed that only in the conditions of intellectual threat in individuals with low self-esteem statistically significant gender differences were obtained. The interaction effect gender x self-esteem was:  $F(3, 36) = 7.20; p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.17$ . In individuals with low self-esteem in a situation of intellectual threat, women presented themselves more attractively in

the social sphere ( $M = 30.40$ ;  $SD = 3.20$ ) than men ( $M = 25.40$ ;  $SD = 3.90$ ). In people with high self-esteem, on the other hand, gender differences turned out to be insignificant. In the remaining conditions - of social threat and in neutral conditions, no differences were obtained for the attractiveness of self-presentation in the social sphere.

#### 4.4 MOTIVATION TO EXPRESS SOCIAL AND INSTRUMENTAL FEATURES IN PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT SELF-ESTEEM

**In the Group of Women.** The interaction effect was obtained: self-esteem and type of motivation:  $F(1, 59) = 52.00$ ;  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.20$ . Regardless of the situation (the occurrence of the threat and its type), women with high self-esteem declared a similar intensity of motivation to present both types of features [ $M_{\text{instrumental features}} = 31.26$  ( $SD = 2.90$ ),  $M_{\text{social features}} = 31.00$  ( $SD = 2.90$ )] and in both cases significantly higher than women with low self-esteem, who declared a higher motivation in the scope of social than instrumental features [ $M_{\text{social features}} = 25.96$  ( $SD = 5.40$ ),  $M_{\text{instrumental features}} = 23.60$  ( $SD = 6.50$ )].

**In the Group of Men.** A three-way interaction effect was obtained at the level of statistical trend: self-esteem x type of threat x type of motivation:  $F(2, 54) = 3.07$ ;  $p < .06$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.10$ , which is explained by the average values of simple effects in Table 3. In the group of men with low self-esteem, the participants declared higher motivation to express social than instrumental features in a neutral situation and a situation of social threat, unlike in a situation of intellectual threat when they declared higher motivation to present instrumental features. Men with high self-esteem declared higher motivation to express instrumental than social features in a situation of threat – regardless of its type, while in neutral conditions – they declared a similar intensity of both types of motivation. Generally speaking, it can be said that men with low self-esteem were more likely to care about more attractive self-presentation in the social than the instrumental sphere, opposite than men with high self-esteem.

Table 3

*Motivation to Express Instrumental and Social features in a Situation of Threat and a Neutral Situation in Men with Low and High Self-Esteem*

| Men with low self-esteem |       |               |       |               |       | Men with high self-esteem |       |               |       |               |       |
|--------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| Intellectual threat      |       | Social threat |       | Control group |       | Intellectual threat       |       | Social threat |       | Control group |       |
| Instr.                   | Soc.  | Instr.        | Soc.  | Instr.        | Soc.  | Instr.                    | Soc.  | Instr.        | Soc.  | Instr.        | Soc.  |
| 27.20                    | 24.40 | 23.80         | 26.90 | 26.60         | 29.20 | 32.20                     | 29.10 | 31.90         | 29.40 | 30.20         | 29.50 |
| 4.04                     | 4.37  | 5.51          | 2.60  | 4.40          | 3.40  | 3.12                      | 2.51  | 2.33          | 3.43  | 3.70          | 4.76  |

Note. Instr = Instrumental features; Soc. = Social features. Mean scores are given in the upper row and the standard deviations are given in the lower row.

#### 4.4 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE MOTIVATION TO EXPRESS SOCIAL AND INSTRUMENTAL FEATURES

Differences between the sexes were analysed separately for each type of features and survey conditions in the two-way analysis of variance scheme: sex x self-esteem. There was only one result indicating significant differences between the sexes: the interaction effect of self-esteem and the sex of the subjects in a situation of intellectual threat:  $F(3, 36) = 5.22$ ;  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.13$ . In the conditions of intellectual threat, men with low self-esteem declared a greater effort to express instrumental features ( $M = 27.20$ ,  $SD = 4.10$ ) than women with low self-esteem ( $M = 20.40$ ,  $SD = 6.90$ ). Apart from this result, no significant differences between the sexes were found in the motivation to present instrumental or social features.

### 5. DISCUSSION

Different relationships between self-esteem and attractiveness of self-presentation across between gender were obtained. In the social sphere, low self-esteem in women was more evidently conducive to attractive self-presentation than in men because women with low self-esteem in each survey situation were more attractive to their audience in this sphere than women with high self-esteem, and men with low self-esteem were assessed higher in the social sphere than men with high self-esteem only in two situations: in a neutral situation and a situation of social threat. In the instrumental sphere, on the other hand, only in men was high self-esteem related to a more attractive self-presentation. This result indicates greater importance of the intellectual sphere for men than for women among people with high self-esteem and greater concern for social correctness in women than men among people with low self-esteem. Although participants with high self-esteem of both sexes declared greater effort in the presentation of both social and instrumental features (compared to individuals with low self-esteem), the declared motivation, assessed ex-post, did not necessarily have to reflect the real motivation, but the participants' convictions about the effectiveness of their self-presentation. Stronger situational anxiety in participants with low self-esteem probably led to a lower assessment of the attractiveness of their self-presentation, to the level of which they could match the declared amount of effort. The described psychological mechanism, although it concerns ex-post assessments, is analogical to a mechanism observed in self-handicapping self-presentation occurring in a situation of anticipated failure when an individual deliberately underrates their effort to protect their positive image in the eyes of others in the case of failure (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982; Szmajke, 1996).

In the group of women, individuals with high self-esteem, although they declared a higher level of motivation to present both types of features, did not gain an advantage over individuals with low self-esteem in any of the spheres. This result shows how groundless the beliefs and fears of people with low self-esteem can be and how beneficial can be the illusions of individuals with high self-esteem for their mental comfort. The positive aspect of this result is that the increased level of anxiety in individuals with low self-esteem does not prevent them from the effective creation of the image of an attractive person, especially in the social sphere.

On the other hand, in the group of men, stronger motivation to present instrumental features, although it correlated with greater attractiveness in this sphere, was not its

determinant. This means that the attractiveness of self-presentation is hardly related to the conscious motivation in a particular situation, and it probably results from the skills that are practiced every day due to the chronic motivation to create one's image of either a trustworthy person having social attributes, or an independent, effective and competent person. This result may also suggest that in the group of men, not only in a situation of intellectual threat but also in neutral situations, individuals with high self-esteem concentrate more on the independent Self than individuals with low self-esteem. However, the presented studies did not control the intensity of the independent Self and the interdependent Self of the participants, which is why the significance of kind of self-construal for the obtained diverse attractiveness of self-presentation is hypothetical.

The type of threat had little impact on the attractiveness of self-presentation in the intellectual and social sphere in individuals with different self-esteem: only men with low self-esteem presented themselves more attractively in the threatened than in the non-threatened sphere when the threat concerned both intellectual and social functioning. In the remaining subgroups, the occurrence and type of threat did not affect self-presentation: women with low self-esteem always presented themselves more attractively in the social sphere than in the efficiency sphere, and no less attractively than in neutral conditions; similarly, men with high self-esteem were more attractive in the efficiency sphere than in the social sphere, and women with high self-esteem were assessed at a similar level in both spheres. This result suggests that self-presentation is to a greater extent controlled by relatively constant skills of an individual than by the current situation or the experienced anxiety, provided that it does not reach a very high level.

The interpretation of the obtained regularities is limited to the specific situation of the survey: the threat to the Self was known only to the participant, and not to their partner to whom they presented themselves, which is why there were probably no compensatory behaviours favouring the sphere which was not at risk (cf. Baumeister & Jones, 1978).

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