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BROWN UNIVERSITY Learning This Branks after the co-ed revolution, togetherness has dramatically charged college life.

Study finds women test better in math without men

recent report from Brown University shows that women perform as much as 12 percent better on math problems when tested in a setting without men.

Researchers tested 164 male and female Brown students, who all had similar SAT math scores, in groups of three. They varied the groups, having only MATH TEST women take the test together, only men, and different combinations of both men and women.

What they found was that when women were tested in single-sex groups, they got 70 percent of the math questions correct. But when they were outnumbered by men, their accuracy rate dropped to 58 percent. Even when women in the groups out-

numbered men 2 to 1, they still underperformed on the math exams in comparison to women in all-female settings - achieving only a 64 percent accuracy rate.

The results show that some women may be sensitive to a so-called "stereotype threat." It's a theoretical phenomenon that occurs when targets of a stereotype - in this case, the belief that women do not perform as well as men in math - are reminded of that stereotype, says Michael Inzlicht, an author of the study.

He adds that the presence of men could interfere with women's problem-solving performance because possible nervousness (caused by the fact that women have been told they may not perform as well at math) can distract women while they take an exam.

Students were tested using math and verbal questions from the Graduate Records Examination (GRE) test guide and were told their performance would be reported to other group members.

> Different male-female ratios never resulted in changes in men's test performance. Students were also given verbal exams, on which scores showed no gender differences.

The data suggest that

women may benefit from single-sex math classes and point to the dangers of stereotyping people, Mr. Inzlicht says.

He characterizes the students in the study as highly motivated, intelligent, and deeply concerned with their academic performance.

They could therefore be especially sensitive to the implications of poor performance, he adds.



101

- Stephanie Cook