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## Getting by with a Little Help from My Friends: Mental Rotation Ability after Tacit Peer Encouragement

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### ABSTRACT

We examined how Mental Rotation (MR) ability was improved by presenting information that the task was one that could be accomplished. This information purportedly came from either peers or the experimenter. Men and women students completed 10 MR items from the Purdue Visualization of Rotations Test (Bodner & Guay, 1997) and provided self-reports about their confidence in their abilities to perform rotations, background skills and experiences, and effort with the task. The peer-presentation technique improved performance on MR, as both men and women who read that other students had previously managed the tasks performed better than those who merely heard about the tasks, leaving an implied difficulty unaddressed or "in the air." When self-reported confidence in MR ability was held constant there were no gender differences in MR performance. The results suggest that appropriate peer models may improve performance on cognitive tasks, perhaps by increasing confidence in ability.

### KEYWORDS

Mental Rotation, Stereotype Threat, Gender Effects

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