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## Self-Enhancement in Relation to PTSD Stigma

Corina Klein  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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# Self-Enhancement in Relation to PTSD Stigma

Corina E. Klein, Seth A. Brown  
University of Northern Iowa



## Introduction

The fact that the majority of the population experiences a potentially traumatic event (PTE) in their lifetime (Breslau et al., 2004) may contribute to an assumption of a lack of stigma toward PTSD, as the general population should be sympathetic to the after effects of a PTE. Yet, it may be that the stigma exhibited for people with PTSD is more nuanced than what is seen in stigma for other disorders (Yap et al., 2014). Resilience research has uncovered self-enhancement as a protective factor against PTSD (Bonanno et al., 2002), and has demonstrated that self-enhancers often have a detrimental effect on the people around them (Epley & Whitchurch, 2008). As such, self-enhancement may be a key variable in understanding the nature of PTSD stigma.

### Hypotheses:

- 1) Self-enhancement will moderate the relationship between PTEs experienced and resilience.
- 2) Self-enhancement will be positively related to personal stigma and social distance.
- 3) Perceived controllability will moderate the relationship between self-enhancement and personal stigma toward PTSD.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

114 undergraduate students in an introductory psychology course participated in this study (age:  $M = 19.72$ ,  $SD = 4.47$ ). Participants were mostly female (56.1%), freshmen (65.8%) and identified as Caucasian (74.6%), Asian American (7.0%), African American (6.1%), Hispanic (2.6%), or Other (8.8%). Participants completed a statement of informed consent and were randomly assigned to read 1 of 2 vignettes: controllable or inevitable PTE. Participants then completed measures of demographics, trauma history, PTSD symptoms, self-enhancement, resilience, personal stigma, and social distance.

### Instruments

Concept	Measure
Resilience	Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale-Revised
Self-Enhancement	Egoistic Self-Enhancement Scale
Trauma History	Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire
PTSD Symptoms	Short PTSD Rating Interview
Personal Stigma	Personal Stigma Scale
Social Distance	Social Distance Scale

## Figures

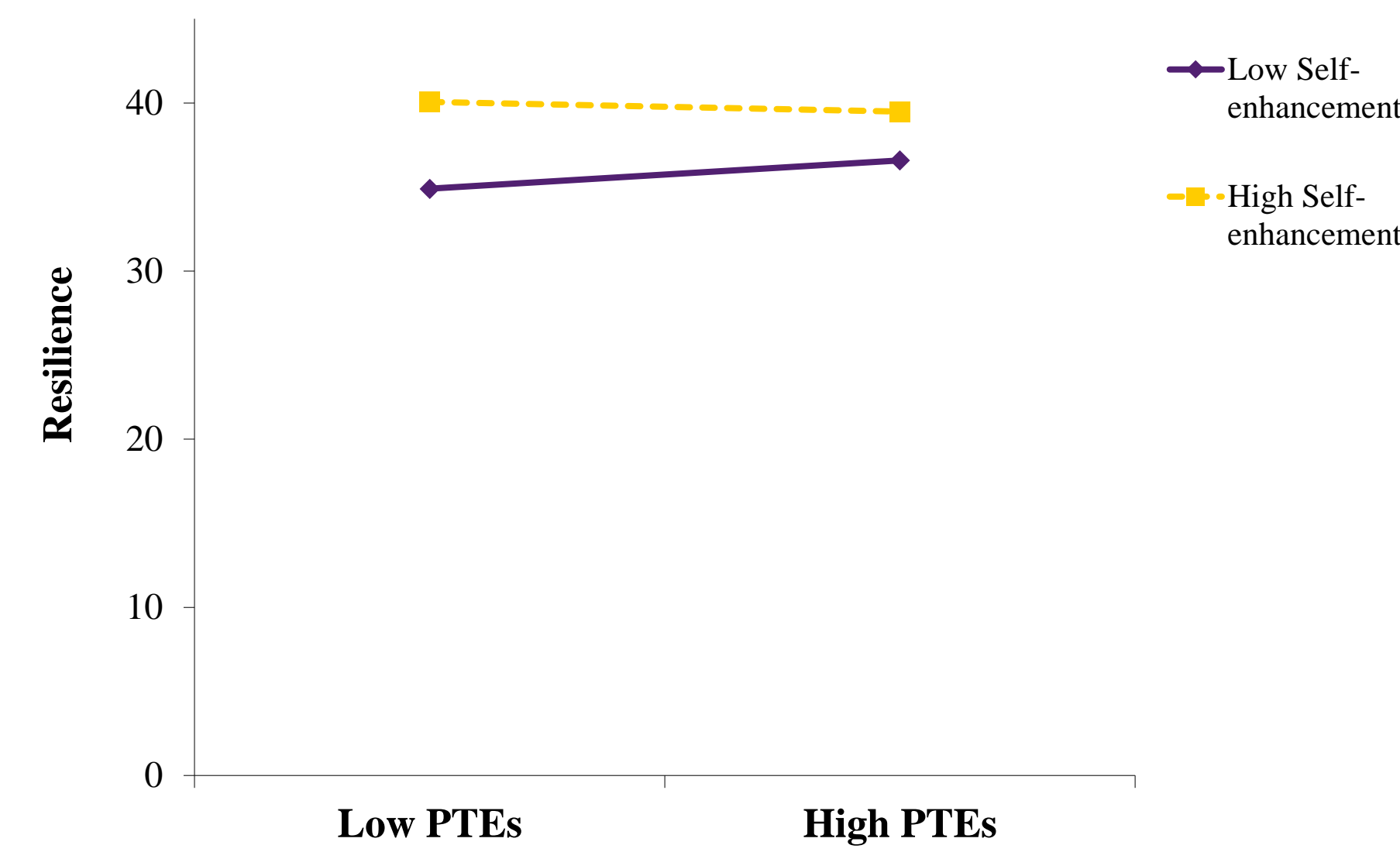


Figure 1. Moderating effect of self-enhancement on the relationship between PTEs experienced and resilience.

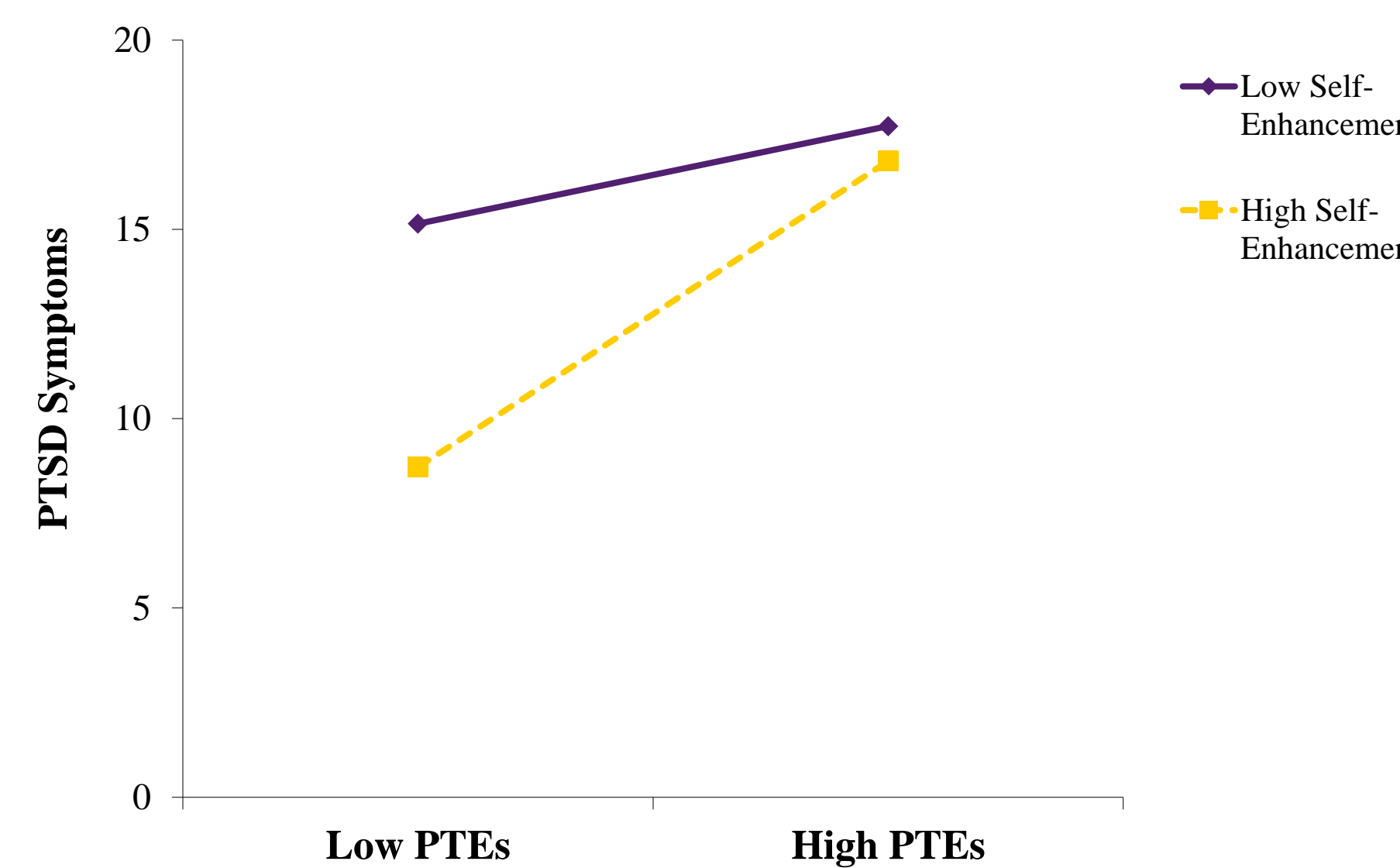


Figure 2. Moderating effect of self-enhancement on the relationship between PTEs experienced and PTSD.

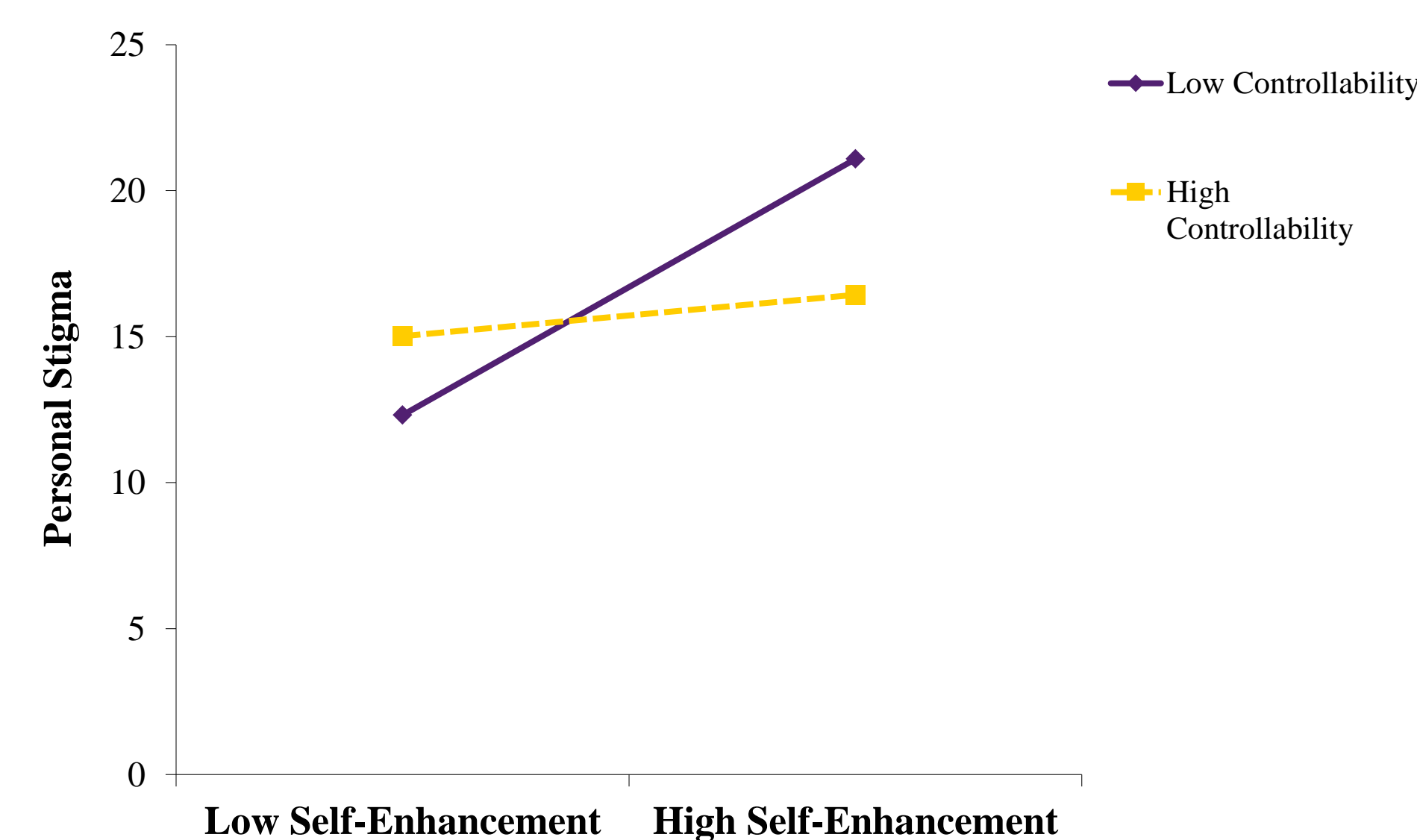


Figure 3. Moderating effect of controllability on the relationship between self-enhancement and personal stigma.



Figure 4. Moderating effect of controllability on the relationship between self-enhancement and personal stigma in females.

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$\Delta F$
Step 1		0.050	0.002		0.278	
PTEs	0.052					
Step 2		0.363	0.132	0.130	8.443***	16.569***
PTEs	0.085					
ESE	0.432***					
Step 3		0.379	0.144	0.012	6.156**	1.506
PTEs	0.041					
ESE	0.428**					
PTEs x ESE	-0.023					

Table 1. Note:  $N = 114$ . PTEs = Potentially Traumatic Events, ESE = Egoistic Self-Enhancement, PTEs x ESE = the interaction of PTEs and ESE.  $\beta$  is the unstandardized Beta coefficient. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$\Delta F$
Step 1		0.349	0.122		15.560***	
PTEs	0.502***					
Step 2		0.424	0.180	0.068	12.145***	7.788**
PTEs	0.472***					
ESE	-0.394**					
Step 3		0.465	0.216	0.037	10.125***	5.171*
PTEs	0.579***					
ESE	-0.386**					
PTEs x ESE	0.056*					

Table 2. Note:  $N = 114$ . PTEs = Potentially Traumatic Events, ESE = Egoistic Self-Enhancement, PTEs x ESE = the interaction of PTEs and ESE.  $\beta$  is the unstandardized Beta coefficient. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$\Delta F$
Step 1		0.286	0.082	0.050	3.255*	5.929*
ESE	0.550*					
Step 2		0.289	0.084	0.002	2.492	0.286
ESE	0.558*					
Condition	-0.493					
Step 3		0.338	0.114	0.030	2.785*	<b>3.706</b>
ESE	0.552*					
Condition	-0.486					
ESE x Condition	<b>-0.392</b>					

Table 3. Note:  $N = 114$ . ESE = Egoistic Self-Enhancement. Marginally significant ( $p = .057$ ) results are in boldface.  $\beta$  is the unstandardized Beta coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

Predictor Variable	$\beta$	$R$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$\Delta F$
Step 1		0.180	0.033	0.015	0.650	0.907
ESE	0.230					
Step 2		0.189	0.036	0.003	0.530	0.196
ESE	0.250					
Condition	-0.445					
Step 3		0.348	0.121	0.085	1.543*	5.430*
ESE	0.249					
Condition	-0.535					
ESE x Condition	-0.538*					

Table 4. Note:  $N = 62$ . ESE = Egoistic Self-Enhancement.  $\beta$  is the unstandardized Beta coefficient. \* $p < .05$ .

## Results

### ESE as a Moderator of PTEs and Resilience

- ESE significantly predicted resilience, and explained 13% of the variance in the model. See Table 1.
- PTEs and the interaction of PTEs x ESE did not have a significant relationship with resilience.
- PTEs significantly predicted PTSD, and explained 12.2% of variance in PTSD symptoms. See Table 2.
- ESE significantly predicted PTSD and explained 5.8% of variance in the model.
- PTEs x ESE significantly predicted PTSD, and accounted for an additional 3.7% of the variance in PTSD scores.

### Self-Enhancement in Relation to Stigma

- ESE was positively related to personal stigma,  $r(113) = .28$ ,  $p < .01$
- ESE was positively related to social distance  $r(113) = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### Controllability as a Moderator of ESE and Stigma

- ESE significantly predicted personal stigma and explained 5% of the variance in the model. See Table 3.
- Controllability was not a significant predictor of stigma.
- ESE x Controllability was marginally predictive of stigma and explained 3.0% of variance in stigma.

## Discussion

### Conclusions

- Self-enhancement seems to play a critical role as a buffer against PTSD when PTEs are low, but its effects fall away at high levels of PTEs
- Self-enhancement may contribute to nuanced stigma toward PTSD (Yap et al., 2014)
- Perhaps, for high self-enhancer females, perceived control is considered a strength, even when it leads to negative outcomes.

### Implications

- Basis for anti-stigma initiatives aimed at self-enhancers
- Increase social support
- Reduce impact of PTSD symptoms