Experiments that make you think

Stereotype Threat

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In this experiment the researchers had African American and white college students take a very challenging standardized test. There were two conditions in which the test was presented:

1. The control condition: in this condition the test was presented as these tests are always presented - as a measure of intellectual ability and preparation.

2. The experimental condition: in this condition the test was presented in a non-evaluative way. The test takers was told that the researchers were not interested in measuring their ability with the test but that they just wanted to use the test to examine the psychology of verbal problem solving.

Results:

1. In the control condition the African American test takers, on average, scored much lower than the white test takers

2. For the white test takers there was no difference in their scores between the control condition and the experimental condition.

3. For the African American test takers there was a big difference between the control condition and the experimental condition. They solved about twice as many problems on the test in the experimental condition. Moreover, there was no difference between the performance of the black test takers and the white test takers.
Experiment 2: Steele and Aronson (1995)

In this experiment the researchers administered tests to African American and white test takers in a non-evaluative way. All of the test takers were assured that their intelligence would not be evaluated. There were two conditions:

1. The tests were administered normally but in a non-evaluative way.

2. The tests were administered in the same way but with one additional feature: they included an item on the cover of the test booklet that asked them to indicate their race.

Results:

1. In condition 1 African Americans performed just as well as whites

2. In condition 2 the test performance of the African Americans plummeted. They solved about half as many items as their counterparts who were not asked to indicate their race.
Experiment 3: Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, Stelle & Brown (1999)

In this experiment, the researcher asked highly competent white males to take a difficult math test. There were two conditions:

1. In this the test was taken normally

2. In this condition the following extra information was added: the researchers told the test takers that one of their reasons for doing the research was to understand why Asians seemed to perform better on these tests.

Results: In condition 2 the test takers solved significantly fewer of the problems on the test and felt less confident about their performance.

Experiment 4: Aronson (1999)

In this experiment, a difficult verbal test was presented to African Americans and whites in two ways:

1. In this condition the test was presented as a test measuring an ability that was malleable (developable)

2. In this condition the test was presented as a test measuring an ability that was fixed (unchangeable)

Results: Both African Americans and whites performed much better and reported lower performance anxiety in condition 1
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Experiment 5: Shih, Pittinsky & Ambady (1999)

In this experiment, a difficult math test was given to Asian women. There were three conditions. In condition one they were subtly reminded of their Asian identity, in condition 2 they were subtly reminded of their female identity. In the control condition they were not reminded of their identity. The women reminded of their Asianness performed better than the control group, whereas those reminded of their female identity performed worse than the control group.