How Racial Stereotypes Color Self-Perceptions of Ability and Why it Matters

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Stereotype Threat:

- Apprehension that one’s performance, behavior, or appearance may confirm a negative stereotype about one’s social identity group.

- This concern divides attention between task at hand and self-evaluative concerns.

- Triggered by situational cues but consequences depend importantly on person’s beliefs and attitudes and self-concepts.
Performance

- Whites solved more items under no stereotype threat than under stereotype threat.
- Blacks solved fewer items under no stereotype threat than under stereotype threat.
Additional Studies Finding Performance Effects

- Women taking math tests
- Latinos taking verbal tests
- Elderly taking short-term memory tests
- Low SES Students taking verbal tests
- Blacks and Miniature Golf
- Women taking tests of political knowledge
- White males taking tests of social sensitivity
- White Males Taking Math Tests
Stereotype Vulnerability: Risk Factors for Underperformance

– Acceptance of the stereotype
– Expectations of prejudice
– Belief that tests are biased against minorities
  mistrust
– academic engagement--caring about success
Laboratory Experiment on Stereotype Threat

Steele & Aronson (1995)

- Method: Reducing Evaluative Scrutiny
- Measure: Blacks’ and Whites’ GRE Test Performance
Diary Study
Academic efficacy over time for typical high or low Stereotype Vulnerable student
Performance Boosting Interventions Based on Assumptions of ST Theory
Affirming Students’ Self Concepts Against Threat

Cohen et al, 2006

Method:
At beginning of school year, Students wrote essays about important personal values
– Own values (experimental group)
– Other people’s values (control group)
End-of-quarter course grade: Replication
(After 2 treatments)
(Adjusted for baseline performance within-race)

Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006, *Science*
Implicit Theories of Intelligence

Create *situations and encourage mindsets* that stress the expandable nature of intellectual competence, the learning orientation

- Stereotypes validate a fixed view of intelligence, *an-IQ-is-everything* way of thinking about ability among both targets and perceivers.

- It creates a mindset where *looking* and *feeling* smart become more important than *getting* smart, and this creates problems of its own. It makes evaluation stressful and problematic; it makes poor performance demoralizing.
Question:
What if you believed ability is malleable? Would it reduce effects of stereotype threat?

Method: Framing test as a measure of a fixed or a malleable ability

Measure: Blacks’ and Whites’ Test Performance
Conceptions of Ability and Test Performance

# of items solved

Non-improvable Ability

Like SAT Verbal

Improvable Skill
Conceptions of Ability and Test Performance

- Non-improvable Ability
- Like SAT Verbal
- Improvable Skill

# of items solved
Conceptions of Ability and Test Performance

- "Non-improvable Ability"
- "Like SAT Verbal" (control)
- "Improvable Skill"

African Americans vs. Whites

# of items solved

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

African Americans
Whites
Middle School Intervention

Question: Can psychological intervention raise test scores of minority students?

• Method: mentoring study; attitude change
• Conditions:
  – Malleability of intelligence
  – Role Models: senior students who stress the normality of early difficulty
  – Control (drug abuse message)
• Measure: Texas statewide test (TAAS)
7th Grade Reading TAAS--Latinos

Malleability Intervention

Role Model

Control
7th Grade Girls’ Math TAAS

Math TAAS SCORE

Malleability Intervention

Role Model

Control

GIRLS

BOYS
Conclusions

• Human Intelligence is more fragile than we have customarily thought
• This is a function of both the person and the situation--the situation and the way the individual responds to it.
• Thus, there are multiple ways to help students perform better--change the situation and teach adaptive attitudes