

Steele, Spencer, and Aronson showed that “Depicting social groups as intellectually inferior can disrupt academic achievement.” called *stereotype threat*.

Higher risk of academic underachievement: African Americans, low socio-economic groups, girls in math, Hispanics. Performance < when purpose is evaluation of intellect; performance > when not presented as such.

Marion Dutrevis & Jean-Claude Croizet wanted to investigate if phenomenon occurred with a basic component of academic achievement: memorization.

Hypothesis: for a difficult task, people told they were inferior have lower performance due to fear of confirming stereotype. For easy task, threat would increase performance (as found by Spencer, Steele, and Quinn in 1999).

77 undergrads; 62 female, 15 males all psych majors
psych has reputation as lower intellectual capability than med students

Told they would learn verbal material. For half, task was portrayed as a test of learning ability to find out why psych majors had less achievement than med school majors.

Other half: told that task was for fine-tuning software for researching psychology of memory

Given 6 pairs of letter and two-digit numbers (like C 27, N 52) to memorize in phase 1.

Phase 2: Presented with pairs like N 35 and indicate if it was one of memorized pairs.

In easy condition, 20 sec. to memorize pairs. Hard condition: 10 sec.

Total of 162 pairs; # of pairs correct = performance measure.

After test, took questionnaire modeled after Steel and Aronson(1995) about

* hrs of sleep

* stress

* personal worries

* current physiological state

Detect differences in apprehension about performance. Expected more “self-handicapping” among the “learning ability” group for difficult task.

Also asked if they were afraid of making mistakes or felt pressured. Same expectation.

As expected, people in both conditions performed better in easy task than in difficult.

Hypothesis supported; difficult: diagnostic performed worse than non-diagnostic.

easy task: diagnostic performed better than non-diagnostic. Supports stereotype threat; for difficult tasks such as in school, memory efficiency is impaired.

Unlike prediction, diagnostic/difficult didn't self-handicap by claiming more excuses for their performance. For both groups, the difficult task reported being more worried and worse physiological state.

Also, contrary to prediction, the diagnostic group given the difficult task didn't have significantly greater concern over errors or pressure of being evaluated than any other participants. By showing that a skill as basic as memorization can be affected adversely, their research “suggests that students' attention and immediate retention during a class can be affected impaired because of stereotype threat.”