

Subtle cues can influence stereotypes

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Seemingly innocent questions, subliminal messaging and placement of common items could cue stereotypes, two studies by U.S. and Canadian researchers said.

Researchers said their studies don't explain all differences in test scores or academic preferences. But, they said, subtle cues may influence a question or two on a standardized test, the Washington Post said Monday.

Psychologists Jennifer Steele of York University in Toronto and Nalini Ambady of Tufts University in Boston asked women questions about telephone service and co-ed housing. The study said women asked about co-ed housing expressed a greater preference for the arts, potentially reaffirming a feminine stereotype.

The researchers also asked two groups to look at a plus sign on a computer screen. Occasionally something flashed on the screen. Those unreadable flashes of less than 0.1 second were words. Researchers found subjects exposed to feminine words expressed a preference for the arts over math than those who were flashed masculine words.

At Florida State University, a psychology graduate student found displaying the American flag when students were asked to solve math problems or anagrams can influence performance. He found white students, but not minorities, did better.

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