AP Psychology
Experiment on Social Influence on Self
Concept of Abilities
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Abstract:
The purpose of this experiment was to test the influences of outside opinion on self reflection of abilities. This was tested by prompting people to draw circles and then giving them predetermined feedback (in the form of comments on the circles) after each was drawn. The feedback was given without the participant's knowledge of its value. Thirty participants, fifteen boys and fifteen girls, all randomly selected from different grades at Penncrest High School were engaged. Ten were given positive feedback, ten were given negative, and another ten were the control group, receiving no feedback. The test was designed in such manner to discover whether positive or negative feedback had influence on a person’s own viewpoint of their abilities (recorded in the form or a score from one to five, one being low, and five being high). The hypothesis was that positive feedback would produce higher self ability ratings than the control group and that negative feedback would produce lower self ability ratings than the control group.

Introduction:
People tend to receive various kinds of feedback pertaining to their different skill sets as they live their life. Some of this feedback will be positive, and some of it will be negative.

Research on groupthink by Irving Janis has revealed that when no one speaks strongly against an idea, the idea tends to be accepted. This comes to play in the experiment when, although only one speaker of opinion is provided, the opinion goes unfreted throughout the duration of each participant's process. Another experiment completed in 2013 suggested that "in many social and biological systems, individuals rely on the observation of others to adapt their behaviors, revise their judgments, or make decisions" (Myers 775)

An experiment in 2013 also investigated how people reformed their answers to factual statements after hearing a confident answer that differs from what they answered. The experiment mentions both the “expert effect, induced by the presence of a highly confident individual in the group, and the majority effect, caused by the presence of a critical mass of laypeople sharing similar opinions” (Moussaïd). The ideas discussed relate the idea a person’s beliefs can be changed by a confident other source.

These ideas interact with this experiment as a consistent, unfreted opinion that depicts itself as confident has been shown to have strong influence on the way people think.

Experiment:
There were thirty participants in the experiment in total. Fifteen boys and fifteen girls were stopped in the halls of Penncrest High School and asked to participate. There were five boys and five girls in the group receiving positive feedback, five boys and five girls in the group receiving
negative feedback and five boys and five girls in the group receiving no feedback. The type of feedback given was rotated as each new participant received a different feedback than the prior.

The materials necessary for this experiment are blank sheet paper, for drawing the circles, pens, for drawing the circles, a timer, to keep track of the specific times for the pulse and each circle, and questionnaire sheets will the following questions:
On a scale of one to five, one being lowest, five being highest, answer the following questions:
How would you rate your fine motor skills?
How easy was this for you?
How bright is the room?
How easy was the pen to use?
What is your dominant hand?
Rate the quality of your circles.

The following procedure was enacted.
Participants will be told they are participating in a motor skills test.
Participants will be asked to take their pulse for fifteen seconds. Result will be recorded on questionnaire sheet.
Participant will be asked to draw a circle in the time limit of 5 seconds.
Partner of experimenter will give either negative, positive, or no feedback of the circle, based on prior prompting.
Participant will then be asked to draw a circle in the time limit of 10 seconds.
Partner of experimenter will give the same criticism as the prior circle.
Participant will then be asked to draw a circle in the time limit of 15 seconds.
Partner of experimenter will give the same criticism as the prior circle.
Participant will then be asked to take their pulse for 15 seconds. Result will be recorded.
Participant will then be given the questionnaire sheet and asked to answer the questions honestly giving answers in the scale of 1-5, one being low, five being high.

The variable that was changed by the experimenter was the type of feedback. The dependent variable was the size of rating the participant gave. It is possible that those in the positive feedback group had higher self esteem than those in the negative or control feedback group, contributing to higher ratings. It is also possible that those in the negative feedback group had lower self esteem than those in the positive or control feedback group, contributing to lower ratings. As the experiment was conducted in public, some of the participants were surrounded by others beyond the experimenter, who also echoed the comments of the experimenter’s partner. It is possible that the words of the friends had influence on the participant, while the partner had little to no influence.
Results and Discussion:
The results of the experiment suggested that there is a positive correlation between positive feedback and positive self-ability ratings and negative feedback and negative self-ability ratings. The positive feedback group produced ratings higher than the control group and the negative feedback group produced ratings lower than the control group. This is consistent with the finding of others, that a consistent, unrefuted opinion will have influence on a person's way of thought.

Ethical Issues:
This experiment did employ the usage of deception as participants thought they were doing a motor skills test when it was actually a test of self-ability reflection. All participants were asked whether they wished to participate and were given the option to deny the chance. All subjects were debriefed after their test, being told the type of feedback they were given and that it was predetermined. They were also told that experiment was truly a self-ability rating test dealing with outside criticism and not a motor skills test.
References

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