Author Version

Teaching & Learning Guide for *Asymmetric Explanations of Group Differences: Experimental Evidence of Foucault's Disciplinary Power*

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Author's Introduction

"How come someone like you is still single?"
"Why are you a vegetarian?"
"How do people feel about this in the Black community?"
"When did you first realize that you were gay?"
"Will this political candidate capture the women's vote?"
"What do Jews do during Christmas?"
"Why didn't you take your husband's name when you married him?"
"What happened to you that you needed to access state benefits?"

Do questions like these sound familiar to you? Now consider the following ones.

"How come a person like you is in a relationship?"
"Why do you eat meat?"
"How do people feel about this in the White community?"
"When did you first realize that you were straight?"
"Will this political candidate capture the men's vote?"
"What do Christians do during Hannukah?"
"Why didn't you take your wife's name when you married her?"
"What happened to you that you needed to earn a six-figure salary?"

We wrote our article to capture the psychology behind the sense that the first set of question feel much more familiar and much less odd than the second set of questions, even though the two sets seem to be asking about the same sorts of things (or even the identical things). We summarized work on how people explain differences between groups by focusing on how *lower status groups* are taken as the "effect to be explained." We discuss historical, cultural and cognitive factors that affect the ways that people focus attention when they explain group differences. We also described why it matters that we explain some sorts of groups more than others; these explanations cue stereotypes and can affect our collective self-esteem.

Author Recommends:

1. Adams, G.E., Bruckmüller, S., & Decker, S.K. (2012). Self and agency in context: Ecologies of abundance and scarcity. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*, 1, 141-153.

A good account of how research on cultural differences can reify the standards of the cultural psychologist, to the disadvantage of other cultures that she studies.

2. Bruckmüller, S., & Abele, A.E. (2010). Comparison focus in intergroup comparisons: Who we compare to whom influences who we see as powerful and agentic. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, 1424-1435.

Experimental evidence that people infer that a group positioned linguistically as “the effected to be explained” is stereotyped as less powerful, less agentic and more communal.

3. Hegarty, & Buechel, C. (2006). Androcentric reporting of gender differences in APA journals: 1965-2004. *Review of General Psychology*, 10, 377-389.

A systematic content analysis showing that gender differences are explained by focusing on women and girls more than on men and boys in psychology.

4. Foucault, M. (1975/1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (Trans A. Sheridan). New York: Vintage.

A classic work on the history of the human sciences that locates the beginnings of psychological science in efforts to govern and control people.

5. Kashima, Y., Klein, O., & Clark, A. E. (2007). Grounding: Sharing information in social interaction. In K. Fiedler (Ed.), *Social Communication* (pp. 27-77). New York, NY, US: Psychology Press.

A detailed account of the cultural ‘grounding’ of knowledge and assumptions about knowledge that cultures require.

6. Kruschke, J. K. (2003). Attention in learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 171-175.

A review of cognitive research that helps to explain why the distinctive features of rare groups and unfamiliar groups might come to mind quickly during explanation.

7. Simon, B. & Oakes, P. (2006). Beyond dependence: An identity approach to social power and domination. *Human Relations*, 59, 105-139.

A social psychological perspective on power as the capacity to appropriate the efforts of others and to represent their interests.

8. Sloman, S. A. (1993). Feature-based induction. *Cognitive Psychology*, 25, 231–280.

A parallel distributed processing (PDP) model of induction that informed our assumption that people focus attention on the distinct attributes of yet-to-be-studied groups during induction.

Online Materials:

Part 1: Ironizing Habits of Thinking about Difference

Part of our argument is that differences are typically seen from a perspective that “others” lower status groups. Here is a list of resources in which familiar ways of describing lower status groups are applied to higher status groups. Do the experiences of irony, humour and discomfort that these resources create make you think differently about habits for describing groups that seem objective and neutral?

1. Body rituals among the Nacirema:

<https://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/miner.html?pagewanted=all>

2. The festival of the chicken:

Brief description: [http://www.uni-](http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/interculturalfilm/show_entry.php?fid=168&sid=0&cl=1)

[hildesheim.de/interculturalfilm/show_entry.php?fid=168&sid=0&cl=1](http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/interculturalfilm/show_entry.php?fid=168&sid=0&cl=1)

German Language version of the original film:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-IJS-JOMX0>

English Language translation of the sequel (lower quality):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e5mivkXmsc>

3. Radi-aid: Africa for Norway

<http://www.africafornorway.no/>

4. For a recent update on the sexual practices of young men of the Nacirema tribe, see Kimmel, M. (2006). Ritualized homosexuality in a Nacirema subculture. *Sexualities*, 9, 95-105.

Part 2: Questions that don't get asked.

Part of our argument is that questions about difference are assumed to be questions about the characteristics of lower status groups more than they are assumed to be questions about the characteristics higher status groups. Consequently some people feel “singled out” and have to explain themselves less than other people do. The following resources make similar points by “singling out” the attributes of higher status groups in atypical ways. We have organized them by domain:

1. Heterosexuality.

a. Homoworld.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uT-j_Jy3geA.

This short British film explores what the world would be like if you had to explain – and to hide – your heterosexuality.

b. Snark-Filled Checklist for Sexuality Research

<http://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/a-snark-filled-checklist-for-sexuality-research/>

Read this checklist and apply it to sexuality research in psychology to make clear the common assumptions in such research, which are not shared by many people who are participants in that research.

c. Gay scientists isolate Christian gene.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCzbNkyXO50>

this short ironic video calls into question some habitual ways of researching group differences that seem objective to many people much of the time.

2. Whiteness.

a. The White Privilege Checklist

<http://cgc-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/white-privilege.pdf>

If you think that being White does not privilege your experience of the world, then Peggy McIntosh's questions will raise your awareness of some ways that it might.

b. Stuff White people like.

<http://stuffwhitepeoplelike.com/>

This humorous site that pokes fun at invisible cultural norms to which White people often aspire.

3. Financial Security.

a. APA's resources for the inclusion of social class in psychology.

<http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/social-class-curricula.pdf>

b. Play Spent

<http://playspent.org/>

This interactive website makes clear the difficulty of living in poverty, no matter what choices you make.

4. Complexity.

Finally, look at Chimamanda Adichie's *The danger of a single story* for a really erudite and direct account about the way that talking about difference form a single perspective distorts understanding of self and others.

http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html

Focus Questions

Please add at least 5 focus questions to help readers spring-board into the wider subject matter.

1. What groups and social identities other than the ones mentioned in the article do you think become the figure rather than the background in explanations? Is there something that these groups have in common?
2. How are groups advantaged or disadvantaged when they are singled out for discussion and explanation on the basis of their distinct habits and features.
3. What do you think that Foucault meant by "disciplinary power." Is it relevant here?
4. What other habits in talk and writing about group differences might reinforce social inequality between groups?
5. What could be your ideal way of talking about group differences? What advice would you give to writers and researchers who want to write about a social group in which you are a member?

Seminar/Project Idea:

Individual Project: Discussion of Group Difference in the Media

Find a newspaper or magazine article that describes one or multiple group differences (e.g., a gender difference). Examine how the differences are talked about: Who is explained? Is one group referenced more often than the other? Does who is explained vary with context/ with the content of the described difference?

Now re-frame the differences to write two versions; each of which makes one group the figural group. (For example, write two versions of an article about gender difference to focus on men and to focus on women). Now read both versions. Does one sound better than the other? Do the two versions of the article seem to imply different things about the groups that are described?

Now ask different people to read one of the two versions of the article and ask them to draw conclusions about the two groups. Do reactions differ between the two different versions? How so?