Cultural blog post is up!  To sum it up, I think self-doubt is at the root of the stereotype threat and a growth mindset is one way to combat it.

If you&#39ve read Malcolm Gladwell&#39s book *Blink*, you might remember the part where he talks about the experiment in which the group of black students who were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire before taking a standardized test performed worse than a the group that did not fill out the questionnaire &#45 a phenomenon Reading *Blink* was my first introduction to the stereotype threat. Or, should I say that it was my first conscious introduction to it – the first time that something I had experienced had been labeled and explained to me as such.

<p>Researchers Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson, whose research Gladwell discusses, identified this phenomenon and assigned it the term “stereotype threat”. In paper “Sterotype Threat and Women&#39s Math Performance”, Spencer, Steele, and Quinn define the threat as:</p>

<p><em>“…when a stereotype about one&#39s group indicts an important ability, one&#39s performance in situations where that ability can be judged comes under an extra pressure &#45 that of possibly being judged by or self-fulﬁlling the stereotype &#45 and this extra pressure may interfere with performance.”</em></p>

<p>So, for example, if I am about to take a math test, if someone in some way reminds me of the fact that women typically perform less well than men in math, I am likely to do worse on the test than if someone didn&#39t remind me of this.</p>

<p>This concept seems curious to me because, as a female, whether someone reminds me or not, I think I am always somewhat aware of the gender stereotype that men outperform women in math and science. As a female who got an advanced degree in science, it is all around me, all the time. So, this research is surprising to me as I would not think that a group would need to be reminded of the stereotype against them, as they are constantly experiencing it. Nonetheless, the research does seem convincing that an overt reminder significantly alters performance on tests.</p>

<p>The story < a href=<http://www.npr.org/2012/07/12/156664337/stereotype-threat-why-women-quit-science-jobs>>”How Stereotypes Can Drive Women to Quit Science”</a> from NPR highlights the research of Mehl and Schmader on work performance by female researches and shows the subtlety of how the stereotype threat is at play without an overt reminder to females, and this research resonated with me the most. Mehl and Schmader have found that when women discuss their research with male colleagues, they sound more disengaged, but when they discuss research with female colleagues or engage socially with males or females, they sound more engaged.</p>

<p>I think we have all experienced this in some way. When you feel like someone might be smarter than you or better at something than you, it makes you less confident in your own abilities and actually makes you perform worse than you might if you felt like the dominant person in a group.<p>

<p>I experienced this in my previous job. As a Data Strategist, I was the “data expert” supporting the high school where I worked 4 days a week. As the resident expert, I really did feel confident in my ability to speak about and explain data to my coworkers. But, when I got together with Data Strategists working at other schools one day per week, no longer was I the sole expert. I felt intimidated by the knowledge and abilities of my fellow (male and female) strategists. I doubted myself.</p>

<p>I think <span class = “emphasis”>self-doubt</span> is the main way the stereotype threat manifests itself. When we are with people who we feel are better than us at something, we tend to doubt our own abilities, we second-guess ourselves, and we perform our work with less confidence. We faulter. This can happen with people even in our group (race, gender, socioeconomic, etc), but can magnified, though subtly, with people with which we think a stereotype is at play. </p>

<p>I am sure at DevBootcamp I will experience a lot of self-doubt, both working alone and in groups. Anytime you are learning something new, you wouldn&#39t be learning if you didn&#39t second-guess or question along the way. I also expect that I will feel more confident (or is it comfortable) pairing with females than males. I wonder if this is due to a math & science gender stereotype, or just that I feel more comfortable showing weakness to someone of the same gender.</p>

<p>It is undeniable that there are more men than women working in technology. In our cohort alone, we started with x% females and have already gone down to x%. When I saw that some of my female peers had moved out of the cohort, it definitely made me wonder if I would make it &#45 and I asked this question specifically because of my gender and not necessarily my abilities. This was stereotype threat at work. I have also already seen from viewing the submissions of members of my cohort that there are both female and male students with strong abilities.</p>

<p>Walking in to DBC the first day, the imbalance of representation between genders will be evident. To combat the gender stereotype, I will need to combat self-doubt and gender-doubt by <span class=”emphasis”>recognizing strength</span> &#45 strength in myself, in my female peers, and in my male peers. We all have strengths and we all have ways in which we can improve. </p>

<p>This is another way in which adopting a <span class=”emphasis”>growth mindset</span> is important. We will all be challenging ourselves to grow during DBC and we will all be at different places on the growth – I wouldn&#39t really call in it a continuum, but maybe a web or one of those web-like things you climb on at a playground. We all have something to share and we all have a lot to learn. That&#39s why I think giving both affirming and constructive feedback is important to let people know what they are doing well and also where they can improve.</p>

<p>Going back to strength, I think it will be important for me to be reflective on my strengths and areas of growth. In thinking about both my personal strengths and what I can bring to a group, I can try to cultivate these, so that I have even more to offer in pairing sessions. I will obviously work on areas where I am struggling, but instead of just doubting myself, I will recognize what it is I am actually struggling with and ask people who exhibit strength in those areas to help me. In general, the <span class=”emphasis”>reflection and feedback</span> processes are enormously helpful for facilitating this growth as a group.</p>