

Stereotype Threat: Defying Stereotypes and Defining Yourself

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What is a Stereotype?

- **An oversimplification**
- **Can be positive or negative**
- **Stereotypes serve a function**
- **We all use them!**
- **Different types of stereotypes**
- **Can become part of our implicit attitudes**

But where do they come from?

Exercise

- Answer questions relating to your own learning experiences over time that led to the beliefs you have about yourself and your capabilities as a student and a professional.
- Think about how different people/experiences/messages/cultural ideas throughout your life have influenced these beliefs
- Think of it as a timeline
- Identify some of the stereotypes or labels that you or others have made about you

What is Stereotype Threat?

- **Steele and Aronson (1995) suggested that academic settings are full of subtle reminders of stereotypes that presume the incompetence of certain groups. This “threat in the air” can lead to a fear of confirming those stereotypes that can then impair the ability and performance of members from that group.**

Effects of Stereotype Threat

- Can affect people's beliefs about their abilities and create anxiety
- Expend a lot of cognitive effort to avoid confirming stereotype
-> poorer performance
- Can affect those most invested
- Increases vigilance for evidence of stereotype
- Effort to push thoughts out of mind
- Schmader, T. (2010), Stereotype Threat Deconstructed

Stereotype Threat and Your Body

- **Stereotype threat can bring about physiological symptoms associated with anxiety:**
 - **Heart rate increases**
 - **Difficulty focusing**
 - **Shallow breathing**
 - **Tenseness**
 - **Upset stomach**
 - **Headaches**
 - **Sweaty palms**
 - **Fight or Flight**

How it Shows Up Academically and Professionally

- Induced in beginning of certain classes
- Professors' comments
- Feeling as part of the out-group
- Feeling pressure
- Questioning of profession
- Reluctance to ask for help
- Behaviors that may be misinterpreted or affect success

Impostor Syndrome

- Feeling like a fraud
- Not feeling smart enough, competent enough
- Attributing success to luck, deceit, flying under the radar
- Fear of being “found out”
- Unrealistic notions
- Focus on one’s errors and not others’
- Holds us back
- Can be triggered by change

Small Group Discussion

- What are some of the stereotypes that people may have about you?
- How do these affect how you have seen your Academic capabilities?
- Have you ever been worried about doing poorly because you don't want to confirm a stereotype?
- Has this been motivating or unmotivating for you and why?

So What Can We Do About It???

- Mistakes and anxiety as a normal part of the learning process
- Reappraise the situation
 - **Anxiety as Excitement**
- Learning about stereotype threat itself helps!
- Intelligence is expandable
- Focus on other values beyond school

Even More We Can Do!

- Reframe tests as a challenge
- Look for evidence/Find a role model
- Don't suppress- reframe and replace
- Talk to others about it
- Feeling incompetent and being incompetent are 2 different things
- Accurate self-assessment
- Keep track of compliments

Activities- Define Yourself

- On a piece of paper, write down at least 5 of your strengths
 - When you're done choose the three that feel the most energizing and motivating for you
 - Make these into an "I Am" statement- write this on one of your notecards
- Next identify at least three things (skills, strengths, past accomplishments) that confirm that you do belong in college and that can help you be academically and professionally successful- write these on a second note card

Counseling and Psych Services

- Individual counseling, groups, drop-in workshops
- Free
- Confidential
- Walk-in hours 10-4 M-F
- At the new C4C building Room S440

Remember

Stereotypes are out there but they do not define who you are. Only you get to decide that. So get in touch with your core values, your strengths, and your passions and allow these to guide you