Preventing Stereotype Threat Through Values Affirmation

WHAT IS STEREOTYPE THREAT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER FOR STUDENT SUCCESS?

Stereotype threat is the fear that we will be viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype about our social group. It doesn't take much to trigger it – a comment, an image – and most often we aren't aware it is even happening. We can all be affected by stereotype threat, but it has a disproportionate impact on women and people of color.

Stereotype threat has serious consequences for student performance and success. In fact, stereotype threat contributes significantly to achievement gaps in STEM. For example, in a 2008 study,[1] stereotype threat resulted in a 33% decrease in high school girls' performance on an AP calculus test. Reducing students' exposure to stereotype threat is one of the most effective ways to support student success and reduce achievement gaps in STEM.

VALUES AFFIRMATION: A POWERFUL SHIELD AGAINST STEREOTYPE THREAT

As humans, our core values are our source of personal integrity and self-worth. When we are grounded in our values, we are better able to cope with stressful or psychologically threatening situations. This is why **values affirmation** – a simple exercise that can be easily implemented in classrooms of any size – is one of the most effective shields against stereotype threat. For example, in a 2010 study, a values affirmation intervention reduced the performance gap between men and women in a freshman physics class.[2] Another study from 2017 similarly found that values affirmation reduced the performance gap between white students and students of color in an undergraduate biology course.[3]

In addition to improving performance, values affirmations can[4]:

1. Boost our ability to cope with stressful or negative events
2. Broaden our perspectives and help us be open to new ideas
3. Encourage a growth mindset, helping us learn from mistakes

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[1] Danaher, K., & Crandall, C. S. (2008). Stereotype threat in applied settings re-examined. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 38, 1639–1655.
[2] Miyake A, Kost-Smith LE, Finkelstein ND, Pollock SJ, Cohen GL, Ito TA. Reducing the gender achievement gap in college science: A classroom study of values affirmation. Science. 2010 Nov 26;330(6008):1234-7.
[3] Jordt H, Eddy SL, Brazil R, et al. Values Affirmation Intervention Reduces Achievement Gap between Underrepresented Minority and White Students in Introductory Biology Classes. CBE Life Sci Educ. 2017;16(3):ar41.
[4] Sherman DK. Self-affirmation: Understanding the effects. Social and Personality Psychology Compass. 2013 Nov;7(11):834-45.

VALUES AFFIRMATION ACTIVITY

Adapted from Miyake (2010)

Write down 2-3 core values that are the most important to you:

_____

_____

_____

In a few sentences, reflect on why these values important to you personally

Don't worry about spelling or grammar, just focus on your feelings and thoughts.

Examples of core values:

Integrity	*Kindness*	*Respect*
Fairness	*Joy*	*Learning*
Responsibility	*Community*	*Justice*
Courage	*Family*	*Growth*
Service	*Creativity*	*Honesty*

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How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

These values have influenced my life.

Disagree ⟵————————————⟶ **Agree**

In general, I try to live up to this value these values.

Disagree ⟵————————————⟶ **Agree**

These values are an important part of who I am.

Disagree ⟵————————————⟶ **Agree**

I care about these values.

Disagree ⟵————————————⟶ **Agree**