

Protecting Yourself from Stereotype Threat

What is Stereotype (Identity) Threat?

Stereotype threat is a (often unconscious) response to a negative group stereotype. Studies have shown when something in a situation calls attention to one or more of a person's group identities (e.g., woman, black, elderly, white male) and cues awareness of a stereotype associated with that group (e.g., bad at math, unintelligent, feeble, racially biased) people are at risk of experiencing the negative effects of stereotype threat. These negative effects may include de-skilling in performance, anxiety, stress, reduced motivation, disengagement and disidentification.

Description:

Since we all belong to at least one group that has a stereotype relevant to at least some situations, we are all at risk for experiencing stereotype threat. Identify groups you belong to and reflect on situations where you may have experienced negative effects of stereotype threat. Review the strategies for protecting yourself from stereotype threat and reflect on how you could have used one or more of the strategies in the past and what you will do in the future.

Strategies for Protecting Yourself from Stereotype Threat

- ✓ Identify the situations and people that are most likely to trigger stereotype threat for you.
- ✓ Think about your unique characteristics, skills, values, or roles- things you value- that are important to you. If possible, jot them down and state why they are important.
- ✓ Remember that even if you are triggered- you can bring yourself back.
- ✓ Remember that the anxiety and "de-skilling" caused by stereotype threat is not relevant to your actual abilities.
- ✓ Focus on your unique deep values.
- ✓ Everyone belongs to different groups. Focus on an identity that does not have negative stereotypes relevant to the situation.
- ✓ Recall a time you felt competent, powerful, strong (whatever is relevant). Focus on that experience.

Protecting Yourself from Stereotype Threat Worksheet

1. Has there ever been a time when, looking back on it now, you might have been experiencing stereotype threat? As you recall that experience think about what happened? What was the setting? Who was there? What was the trigger? How did it affect you? Reflect on what was important to you at the time and what made that situation important to you?

2. Knowing what you know now which of the strategies for protecting yourself from Stereotype Threat could you have used to protect yourself from Stereotype Threat?

3. Describe a realistic situation in which you will use one or more of these strategies in the future. Be as specific as possible.

Protecting Others from Stereotype Threat

"It is indiscriminate in cursing any group for which a negative stereotype applies, and it does so across a range of domains. What is also so striking and debilitating about the phenomenon is how seemingly easily stereotype threat can be activated."

- H. Rothgerber, & K. Wolsiefer

Description:

Review the strategies for protecting others from stereotype threat and recall a situation when you believe someone may have been exposed to the negative effects of stereotype threat. Reflect on that situation, describe what happened and identify what you can do differently in the future when others are experiencing stereotype threat.

Strategies for Protecting Others from Stereotype Threat

- ✓ **Share what you've learned.** Teach others about stereotype threat and how it can affect performance and self-esteem. Just being aware that we might be affected by stereotype threat can reduce its impact on others.
- ✓ **Remind people** that lower-than-expected performance could be the result of stereotype threat and is not a reflection of their actual abilities.
- ✓ **Promote and role model a growth mindset.** Help others see mistakes as learning opportunities, and low performance as malleable and situational- NOT as evidence of inherent shortcomings or failures.
- ✓ **Encourage self-affirmation.** Ask people to reflect on the characteristics, skills, values, or roles that are most important to them.
- ✓ **Consistently affirm the belief that everyone has the same potential to succeed.** Be careful to avoid statements that explicitly or implicitly convey that one group is better at something than another.
- ✓ **Create a sense of belonging.** Feelings of belonging promotes psychological safety and reduces anxiety and threat. Emphasize things people have in common to create a "common in-group identity," while valuing and acknowledging differences.
- ✓ **Use strategies that protect you from implicit bias because they also protect others from stereotype threat.** Create a genuine connection with the person as someone who, like you, has hopes, dreams, and needs. Focus on your common goals and use perspective-taking, partnership-building, and emotional-shifting skills.

Protecting Others from Stereotype Threat Worksheet

Think about conversations and meetings you've had in the past month or two. Recall a time when someone's performance or confidence seemed lower than usual, and that you now suspect was the result of being exposed to stereotype threat.

1. Describe the situation, conversation, or meeting. What happened? What was the setting? Who was there?

2. Thinking back to the situation you recalled. What might have triggered stereotype threat for this person? What were the effects of stereotype threat for this person?

3. How did you react to this situation? Given what you know now, is there anything you would have done differently?