Overcoming Stereotype Threat in the Classroom

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Identity Construction

- To which groups do we belong?
  - Racial, ethnic, gender, national, regional, religious
Activity 1: Self Identity

- I am a (list as many as you can)
  - ______________________
  - ______________________
  - ______________________
  - ______________________
  - ______________________
  - ______________________
Identity

- What do you remember about your own identity formation?
- What forces shape our identity?
  - Communication with others
  - Societal forces: economic, historical, political
Identification

- How and why do people identify with some groups and not others?
- “We are all pigeon holed into some identities before we are born”
- Involuntary identities
  - Rooted in ethnicity, gender, physical ability
- Identity contingencies—things we have to deal with because of our identities.
Group Exercise—Stereotypes

- In small groups, with a piece of newsprint, brainstorm as many **group stereotypes** as you can in 5 minutes.
- **(group)** **are** **(stereotype)** (you don’t have to believe it or agree with it)

  Example: **Men** are **incompetent around the house.**
Stereotypes—what are they?

- **What are they?**
  - “standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment....” Merriam Webster

- **Why do we stereotype?**
  - Psychological mechanism that humans use to organize the world.

- **Are stereotypes always negative?**
Stereotypes

- People are aware of and react to stereotypes as early as age 5. (“Where Bias Begins: The truth about stereotypes” Psychology Today, 1998).

- Students are often aware of stereotypes that exist about them and that can affect student achievement.
Stereotype Threat

Social Psychology in action

Claude Steele on identity and Stereotype Threat:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2bAIUKtvMk
Media’s Role in Stereotyping

Some Prevalent Images

- Incompetent, unserious or angry Black men
- Strong, no nonsense, highly sexual or angry Black women
- Effective female home managers (often White women)
- Women as purely sexual
- Enforcement of gender roles for children
- Very few Asians or Native Americans
- Whites in a variety of portrayals, usually overwhelmingly positive
- Bumbling, incompetent husbands (men, in general)
- Men as sexual predators and meat lovers
What stereotypes exist about one or more of the groups to which you belong?

Do you ever adjust your behavior as a result of these stereotypes?

If so, explain how?

How does this impact you?
How does stereotype threat effect our students?

What are some of the stereotypes about our students?

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Socio-economic class
- Region of origin
Academic Stereotypes

- What academic stereotypes exist about our students?
- According to stereotypes, what groups are good at --
  - Math?
  - Engineering?
  - Theatre?
  - Computer Science?
  - English?
  - Sports?
More on student behavior

More from Claude Steele’s work

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY9ESojSw7Y
Students’ reactions to stereotype threat

- Try extra-hard NOT to validate the stereotype.
  - But, this produces stress that interferes with performance.

- Experience increased anxiety
  - Even though well-prepared and fully capable “Choke”

- Reject the importance of the larger societies’ view of them
  - Attitude “I don’t need school” “I won’t play that game”.

- Reinforce the stereotypical behavior
  - Become a parody of the stereotype
Group Discussion

• In what ways might students in your classes experience stereotype threat?
• Examples?
What can we do?

- Classroom applications
- Brainstorm
Some Suggestions…

to address stereotype threat in the classroom:

- Define it
- Encourage empathy. Have students share personal stories so that students may experience life via their peers’ experiences and culture
- Have students write a paper about how they feel stereotyped
Suggestions continued…

- Never judge a student by her/his appearance. Assume all students have the exact same chance of success.

- Review and assess the materials you use in class. How may some of these materials reinforce unconscious bias?

- Take the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and give it your students. Assess your own unconscious bias and work against it.
What is the IAT?

One way to judge our own prejudgments of people is to take Harvard’s Implicit Association Test.

This tool was developed by Anthony G. Greenwald, Mahzarin Banaji and Brian Nosek. The tool looks at bias based on race, gender, sexual orientation and works at the level of the unconscious. It is available at www.implicit.harvard.edu.
Thoughts, questions?
Stereotype Threat

- Claude Steele’s audio clip from NPR
  http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=125859207&m=125859195

- Stereotype threat is “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype”

Resources

Claude Steele & Stereotype Threat
Claude Steele on identity and Stereotype Threat:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY9ESojSw7Y

Claude Steele discusses *Whistling Vivaldi* on NPR’s Talk of the Nation:
http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=125859207&m=125859195

*Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* by Claude Steele, 2010.
Claude M. Steele, “Stereotype Threat and Black College Students,” *Atlantic*, August 1999

Radiolab Discussion of the Obama Effect & Stereotype Threat

Steele on Stereotype Threat and the SAT
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/sats/interviews/steele.html

Identity
*Experiencing Intercultural Communication* (4th edition) by Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama,
2011.

Recommended Teaching Practices