Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to use the concept of "critical mass" to understand stereotype threats. In this activity, they will analyze photos on a website to determine how that site may be including/excluding and reinforcing or challenging stereotypes.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Define the concept of "critical mass."

2. Analyze photos for critical mass, inclusion/exclusion, and stereotypes.

Background Information:

This activity was created by Annette Benson and Brittany Biesiada, CILMAR, based on a chapter in Claude M. Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (see citation below).

Note: The instructions are geared toward university/college students but can be adapted for different audiences.

Time:

35 minutes

Group Size:

Entire group

Materials:

The chapter from Steele's book, instructions (see [Downloads](#)), paper, writing utensils or computers/tablets.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Other Skills:

Diversity & Inclusion, Leadership

Activity instructions:

1. Read the chapter: "The Strength of Stereotype Threat: The Role of Cues" in Whistling Vivaldi

2. Explain the concept of "critical mass" with the class.

3. Ask the students/participants to examine a specific group (a website, a newsletter, a student group Facebook page, etc.). We suggest using the websites of your university's Colleges (College of Liberal Arts, College of Nursing, etc.) and individual majors. If your university's website does not use a lot of photos, we suggest selecting a different organization.

4. Ask students to write 250-500 words about the photos on their college's and major's website in response to the following questions. Ask students to write this in paragraph form.

   - Describe all the photos on the College and your major's websites.
   - Who is represented there?
   - Who is the majority?
   - Who is missing?
   - Based on the ideas of critical mass, who would feel excluded by looking at these photos? Why?
   - Consider the stereotypes associated with your College or major. Do the photos on the websites reinforce or challenge those stereotypes? How?
   - Did you look at these websites and photos before deciding on your college, major, etc.?
   - Have you ever felt excluded based on the photos that represent a group or organization? If so, when? If not, what conclusions can you draw?

5. Discuss the students' written responses.

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Ritual](#)
- [Tisouro (The Scissors Game)](#)