Practice reducing stereotype threat:

1. How do you define "stereotype threat?"

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    _____

2. What causes of stereotype threat surprised/interested you?

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    _____

3. What are some situations you encounter that may cause stereotype threat?

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4. Identify two methods for reducing and/or avoiding stereotype threat (see pages 2-4 of this

    handout) and provide a detailed intervention that addresses one of the causes.

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Approaches To Dealing with Stereotype Threat

1. Changing the stereotype

Role models

Provide role models that challenge prevailing stereotypes. This is best achieved through direct exposure to the actual people—i.e., bring them into the classroom. However, giving time and attention to the work and value of a role model through instruction is also helpful.

Risks: Role models who are too far removed are difficult to identify with and may demotivate. Role models need *not* be identical to the subject. Rather it is more important that the role model not conform to set stereotypes (of the profession, for example). Role models are only successful when they can be internalized. Sharing the same group membership is one way, but other interests and attributes can also cue a sense of similarity.

Stereotype retraining

Change the automatic association held for a stereotyped group. This is a perfect opportunity to point to a role model as not only an explicit contradiction to a stereotype, but as a replacement for the negative stereotype by suggesting that the role model debunks or inverts the stereotype.

Risks: Positive association training in isolation tends only to affect motivation and not performance. Stereotype retraining should therefore me applied in combination with provided role models, etc.

2. Buffering the threat to identity (Shifting the stereotype's impact on identity)

Shift to a positive group identity

Individuals bring a number of social identities. Because stereotype threat is triggered by making a devalued identity salient, other aspects of the environment can offset these identity threats by either shifting attention to a more positively perceived identity—or deemphasizing group identity altogether.

Rather than allowing students to focus on their gender or racial identities, promote positive group identities associated with the discipline or profession they are in, e.g. "As engineers, who have earned your spot in this program, you already possess the skills to be successful."

Emphasize personal identity or downplay group identity

Shift attention away from group identity altogether by focusing on individual traits or elements. Ask the individual to identify things that make them unique or to provide individual preferences prior to performing a task. You might give students a strengths survey to help them identify what they bring to a group or teamwork setting. Ask them to share how they prefer to contribute to a project.

Affirming the self

Ask students to reflect on their core values. Remind them that their sense of self is contingent not just on their performance on a test but also on broader, more abstract values that maintain a sense of integrity to the self-concept. Help them to identify their own virtues, e.g. honesty, compassion, etc.

Distancing or disengaging identity from the stereotyped group

Unlinking one's sense of self from the group. Provide for anonymous performance. Allow students to submit work with a secret PIN.

Risk: Could backfire for those who feel that the threat is to their social rather than personal identity. Could lead to feelings of inauthenticity.

3. Coping With the Threat

Reappraisal of the situation

Reframe a test not as a diagnostic measure of ability but as a simple problem-solving task. Alternatively, frame a test as part of a learning experience. Shift focus from performance to mastery and learning. Remind students that failure and mistakes are an integral and necessary component of learning and growth.

Reappraisal of emotion

Reframe anxiety as a normal experience or as otherwise benign, e.g. help them to see academic setbacks and the resulting stress as normal parts of the learning process. Suggest that anxiety has no negative effect on performance. Teach students directly about stereotype threat—that the anxiety they experience in a testing situation is a function of cultural stereotypes and not a signal of underperformance.

4. Changing Policies to Create Stereotype-Safe Environments

Affirmative action

First, in the short term, affirmative action can mitigate the emphasis on grades and test scores for college admissions, employment, and fellowships. Although critics suggest that affirmative action might increase the stigmatization that women and minorities feel, these harms are eliminated when merit is emphasized as part of selection procedures. The long-term benefit of such programs comes from increasing representation of people from diverse backgrounds who then act as role models for the next generation of students or employees.

Test administration

Eliminate demographic questions on standardized tests that trigger stereotype threats, e.g. gender and ethnicity, etc., or move them to the end of the test. Instructions that emphasize an assessment of current progress are likely to evoke learning rather than performance goals. Make frequent use of formative and iterative assessment tools.

Education policies

Educate the public about how negative stereotypes can impair performance. In educating stigmatized individuals about the experience of stereotype threat, researchers should aim to provide constructive appraisals designed to help them cope with threatening performance situations. Such education efforts would also help to ensure that others are sensitive to the ways in which cultural and contextual factors implicitly stigmatize people.

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