



## Stereotype Threat Fact Sheet

### What Is Stereotype Threat? Stereotype Threat Is:

- A situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group.
- Likely to encourage those under stereotype threat to become anxious about their performance.
  - A potential contributing factor to long-standing racial and gender gaps in academic performance.

### Fast Facts:

- Stereotype threat reduces the performance of individuals who belong to negatively stereotyped groups.
  - To be activated, an individual does not need to subscribe to the stereotype for it to be activated.
  - Decreases performance by depleting working memory.
  - Since most people have at least one social identity, which is negatively stereotyped, most people are vulnerable to stereotype threat if they encounter a situation in which the stereotype is relevant.
  - Situational factors that increase stereotype threat can include:
    - The difficulty of the task.
    - The belief that the task measures their abilities.
    - The relevance of the stereotype to the task. Individuals show higher degrees of stereotype threat on tasks they wish to perform well on and when they identify strongly with the stereotyped group.
  - Stereotype effects are also increased when they expect discrimination due to their identification with negatively stereotyped group.

### What Are the Consequences of Stereotype Threat?

- Decreased performance
- Diminished confidence
- Internal attributions for failure
- Self-handicapping
- Task discounting--questioning the validity of the task or even the importance of the trait being tested.
- Distancing the self from the stereotyped group
- Disengagement and dis-identification
- Altered professional identities and aspirations

### What Are the Mechanisms Behind Stereotype Threat?

- Anxiety
- Negative cognition
- Lowered performance expectations
- Physiological arousal
- Reduced effort
- Reduced self-control
- Reduced creativity, flexibility and speed.
- Excess effort or attention

### Who Is Most Vulnerable to Stereotype Threat?

- Group membership--Everyone belongs to at least one group that is characterized by some sort of stereotype, and any salient social identity can affect performance on a task that offers the possibility that a stereotype might be confirmed.
- Domain identification--The degree to which one personally values achievement in a given domain. The higher the domain identification, the more one is bothered by implications of inferiority in that domain.
- Group identification--Some individuals appear to be more chronically vulnerable to stereotype threat because the identities tied to negative stereotypes are highly salient to them in almost any situation.
- Stigma consciousness and group-based rejection sensitivity--The chronic awareness and expectation of one's stigmatized status. For some individuals, past experience with

prejudice can breed a persistent vigilance, a cross-situational tendency to be on the lookout for bias.

### How Do We Reduce Stereotype Threat?

- Deemphasize threatened social identities.
- Use a method that increased the sense of self-complexity.
- Encourage self-affirmation.
- Encourage people to think about their characteristics, skills, values, or roles that they value or view as important.
- Provide constructive feedback to affect perceived bias, individual motivation, and domain identification.
- Constructive feedback appears most effective when it communicates high standards for performance but also assurances that the student is capable of meeting those high standards.
- Providing external attributions for difficulty--providing individuals with explanations regarding why anxiety and distraction are occurring that do not implicate the self or validate the stereotype.
- Emphasize an incremental view of intelligence.