



Stereotype threat

Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand the concept of stereotype threat
- Identify some stereotypes that have the potential to pose a threat for them

Resources needed

- *Stereotype threat* slides
- Copies of the *Stereotype threat* worksheet for each student

Suggested structure and timings

5 mins

Riddle



Ask students to read the riddle on the first slide. After a few minutes, share the solution: the surgeon is the boy's mother.

(Another possible solution is that the surgeon is a gay man and his partner was also the boy's father.)

10 mins

Stereotypes and assumptions



Explain that many people find the riddle difficult because we make assumptions based on stereotypes. In this case, people assume that the surgeon is a (heterosexual) man.



Give out the worksheets and ask students to complete the *Stereotypes and assumptions* section. They should complete the quiz individually and then discuss in pairs/small groups.

15 mins

What is stereotype threat?



Use the slides to introduce the concept of stereotype threat and findings of studies by psychologists into maths, academic and sporting ability. Explain that when people are aware of a negative stereotype about a group that they belong to, they may unconsciously conform to that stereotype. As a consequence, they may perform less well in tasks.



Lead a class discussion. Some questions might be:

- Are they surprised by the information?
- Why do they think stereotype threat affects people?

15 mins

Overcoming stereotype threat



Show the example on the slide of a situation in which there is a risk of stereotype threat (a female student taking a physics exam).

Show the examples on the next slide of how to overcome the risk of stereotype threat, using methods recommended by psychologists and discuss (see additional guidance overleaf).



Working in small groups, students should discuss how stereotype threat might affect them personally. They should then choose a scenario in which they might be affected and explain how they would overcome it on the *Overcoming stereotype threat* section of the worksheet.

Additional guidance

When discussing stereotype threat, you may want to also discuss that psychologists have found that:

1. An individual does not have to believe in the stereotype to be vulnerable to it. They just have to be aware of the stereotyped opinions.
2. The reason that stereotype threat affects performance is unclear. Possible reasons include:
 - The effort/emotions in trying to suppress an unconscious thought may distract from the task.
 - Feeling that one isn't 'supposed' to be good at something reduces the likelihood of persevering with a task.
 - Stereotype threat reduces self-efficacy (an individual's self-belief on how well they think they can do in a task, which is one of the best predictors of performance in a task).

For further reading see:

- 'Women perform worse on maths tests...' - Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, "Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* **35**, 4–28, 1999
- 'White men perform worse on math tests...' - Aronson et al., "Reducing the Effects of Stereotype Threat on African American College Students by Shaping Theories of Intelligence", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* **38**, 113–125, 1999
- 'Black American students perform worse...' - Steele and Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 69, No. 5, 797-811, 1995
- 'Black athletes do worse than white...' - Stone et al., "Stereotype Threat Effects on Black and White Athletic Performance", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 77, No. 6, 1213-1227, 1999