**Identity/stereotype reflection exercise**

* Due in class or by email (classdiscourse@yahoo.com) April 16
* 10 points
* We will work together in groups on parts 1 and 4
* Parts 2 and 3 should be worked on individually

*(Information about stereotype and identity threat is available from the class lecture power point notes, the NPR interview link, and notes taken from Steele’s book that are included in the week 2 wiki folder.*

**Part 1,** briefly summarize some of Claude Steele’s main points from the lecture and notes on *Whistling Vivaldi*. What are the circumstances that influence identity or stereotype threat? What are the possible influences of stereotypes and identity threat on the performance of those who know they are stereotyped, according to Steele and his associates? As part of your summary, describe the details of at least one of the examples discussed in class (women and higher math, white and black men and sports ability, white and black students and intelligence tests) as a way to help illustrate Steele’s findings.

**Part 2**, consider and apply features A, B, and C (see below) of stereotype/identity threat to a time when you felt stereotyped and the stereotype affected your performance in something that was challenging and important to you. Specifically explain how the example includes each of the features A, B, and C.

**Part 3,** consider and describe the assumptions that you make (or used to make) about people in a group that you stereotype(d). Speculate about the types of performance fears that someone in the group might experience if they knew your assumptions about them and knew that other people shared those assumptions. Invent or project a situation in which features A, B, and C might apply to the people in your example because of the stigma. (Utilize the empathetic knowledge you gained from describing your own identity threat experience to assist you in critical thinking about this circumstance.)

**Part 4,** what did Steel discuss as a solution to stereotype and identity threat in stressful performance situations like you described in parts two and three of the assignment? How would you creatively apply his solution to your two examples in the second and third parts of this exercise?

* **This takes creativity and critical thinking.**
* **What do you tell people involved to make the stereotype invalid for the task ahead?**
* **This requires more than telling someone that the stereotype is false.**
* **It involves particularizing the solution to the specific situation as in the women and math example.**

**Stereotype or identity threat features**

**A. The element of stigma** (knowing that you are part of a group that is stigmatized, even though you probably don’t believe in the stereotype). While you may not believe in the stereotype, you know that others may believe in it and may attribute your performance to that stereotype. Knowing that others believe in the stigma is enough to cause stress because you fear your performance will strengthen their conviction.

*plus …*

**B. A situation where you feel frustration**, such as a difficult exam. The task is difficult and challenging so you feel stressed. If you know that you are part of a group that is stereotyped in relation to the task you are doing, you may expend energy worrying that your stress and frustration might be linked to that stereotype. Those who don’t have to worry about a stigma simply see their stress and frustration as related to the difficulty of the exam or task and nothing more.

*plus …*

**C. A desire to do well.** You care about the task or performance expectations on an individual level. Plus, you don’t want your performance to confirm other people’s beliefs about the stereotyped group they may think you represent. If you did not care about doing well, you would not feel as stressed and you would not need to be concerned that your stress might be *proof* of someone else’s stereotype of you.

*often equals underperformance*

***Stigma + a test or challenge leading to frustration and stress + a desire to do well = underperformance (often)***

**About culture, identity, and differences:**

“**Culture** refers to the customs, practices, languages, values and world views that define social groups such as those based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests. **Cultural identity** is important for people’s sense of self and how they relate to others. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people’s overall wellbeing. …

Identifying with a particular culture helps people feel they belong and gives them a sense of security. An established cultural identity has also been linked with positive outcomes in areas such as health and education. It provides access to social networks, which provide support and shared values and aspirations. Social networks can help to break down barriers and build a sense of trust between people, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as social capital.

However, strong cultural identity expressed in the wrong way can contribute to barriers between groups. And members of smaller cultural groups can feel excluded from society if others obstruct, or are intolerant of, their cultural practices.” <http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/cultural-identity/>

**Intolerance or judgment of others, then, is likely the root of terrorism, genocide and war.**

According to French essayist Amin Maalof and psychologist Claude Steele, our identities are multi-faceted and linked to the many culture groups to which we belong. Some parts of our identities are ascribed to us with culturally-assigned meanings. For example, what does it mean to others around us in our various culture groups that we are older or younger, lighter skinned or darker skinned, shorter or taller, feminine or masculine etc. etc. We don’t usually notice these parts of our identities except when we are in situations that draw greater attention to them.

When some part of a person’s identity is threatened in a social circumstance, then that characteristic becomes prominent in a person’s feeling and thinking. This threat makes the identity to which it is directed, of all a person’s social identities, the one that dominates emotion, thinking … the one that, for that time “invades the person’s whole identity.” (Steele 2010: 73, Whistling Vivaldi)

As French essayist Amin Mallof writes:

**“People see themselves in terms of whichever one of their allegiances [identities] is most under attack.** And sometimes, when a person doesn’t have the strength to defend that allegiance, he hides it. Then it remains buried deep down in the dark, awaiting its revenge. But whether he accepts or conceals it, proclaims it discreetly or flaunts it, it is with that allegiance that the person concerned identifies. And then, whether it relates to colour, religion, language or class, it invades the person’s whole identity. Other people who share the same allegiance sympathize; they all gather together, join forces, encourage one another, challenge ‘the other side.’” (In the Name of Identity p. 26)

**If Mallof and Steele are correct, then what does this tell us about how to improve our methods of preventing war, terrorism, genocide, and other kinds of conflict?**