Debriefing Advice

Undergraduates’ Engagement with Society

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Thank you for participating in our research! Across our life, most of us take on greater social responsibilities over time. We want to understand why some undergraduates form cross-racial friendships as they take on more responsibilities and others do not. You answered a wide range of questions about how you are approaching such changes. These included measures of your life goals, relationship formation, participation in society, and academic well-being. Existing research tells us that when individuals are reminded of their culture, such reminders can encourage them to study harder or to feel like they have experienced negative stereotypes.

Because our questions sometimes remind people of cultural stereotypes, we thought you might like to know some positive strategies that people use to prevent themselves from experiencing negative effects associated with stereotypes. We did not ask you about negative stereotypes, but these ideas are well-defended by research on motivation. We have included some articles you might enjoy reading as well.

Strategies to Try If You Feel Negatively Stereotyped

Reframe the task that you are being asked to do so that it seems beneficial in some way. Try to think less about who can and cannot do a task and more about why the task is interesting and important.

Deemphasize threat and social identities that make you feel afraid. Each of us is a bundle of different character qualities and abilities that cannot be simply reduced to a single, unchangeable factor. Reminding ourselves of how our complex we are can draw attention to our assets.

Encourage self-affirmation. We can sometimes get so busy that we forget to reward ourselves or otherwise give ourselves compliments for the amazingly good things we do in the world.

Emphasize high standards and remind ourselves that we can meet these standards. Optimal motivation is generated when we choose tasks that are of moderate difficulty rather than overly challenging or overly easy, yet we tend to seek simple tasks when we are nervous about our abilities. Aim high.

Find role models and mentors. Everyone benefits from finding people who understand and share their struggles. Role models are people who we see as successful at doing the things we value. Mentors are people who will take time to help us learn the things we find challenging.

When facing very difficult tasks, look for ways to break them down into simpler steps. Task difficulty is a relative thing that influences motivation and is not something that effort alone can address. Looking for ways to break down a difficult task into smaller steps can increase feelings of success when each step is mastered.

Blame anxiety and worry about failure to temporary sources that are outside ourselves. It is a problem to assume that we are not responsible for anything that happens to us, but there are times when it is helpful and useful to remember that we cannot control everything.

Remember that abilities and intelligence can be improved with effort. We are all life-long learners, even if we may not see the many ways in which we are always learning new things. Being intentional about seeking new abilities can improve confidence.

Thank you for helping us as we explore how undergraduates participate in society! If you have any additional questions, or would like to see a summary of our findings, you may contact Dr. Theresa Thorkildsen, Professor of Education and Psychology. You can call 312-996-8138 or email Dr. Thorkildsen at thork@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it. Our findings will also be posted on: https://thork.people.uic.edu/intentions/

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions you agreed to, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including thoughts, concerns, complaints, or to offer other types of input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or email OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.
Suggested Readings


