Stereotype Threat

The study of stereotype threats typically involves situational problems in which people feel to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group. Personally, I have found myself to be in such a predicament coming from Asian decent. Asians often have a stereotype of being extremely successful when solving mathematical problems. Such a stereotype sometimes involves all different areas of curriculum, not just math. Though this poses to be a positive stereotype, it can also be viewed as a negative stereotype such that the pressure of living up to those expectations can be daunting and overwhelming.

Having grown up in an Asian-American community in the Silicon Valley at a high school that is demographically, 80% Asian and one of the top 20 schools in the state has its share of pressures. However, none like the pressure of being academically successful. There are many things that drive this pressure. It can come from parental stress of achievement, peer-to-peer academic accolades, or even the typical “Asians are smart” stereotype. Diving into the later as a negative stereotype, this can often cause unnecessary stress to live up to those expectations. Throughout the high school careers of my peers and myself, the path to academic success was more vital and greater than the norm. This in particularly affected levels of stress and ultimately leading a negative effect on my success.

Imagine a marathon race where the success factor doesn’t involve the fact if a particular runner finishes the race but how fast they finish. If it is within seconds of first place, are you successful and if it is within minutes, it is deemed unsuccessful. This is just an example of the typical feeling of the negative stereotype I have been able to experience first hand.

Circling around on the bigger issue is how to fix this. In a world where academic and social order revolves around how successful one is, whether that is money, smarts, or even rich personal growth, it’s vital to know whom you are comparing yourself to. It is inevitable that there will always be stereotypes that will have negative effects but how to conquer it can vary in many ways. In my personal experience, comparing myself with myself is a means of conquering the stereotype threat. Meaning this is a one-man race with the goal of personal growth and success having been established myself. Personal definitions of success will block out the unnecessary noise that is the stereotype threat.

The idea of a self-comparison mindset is essential to starting and growing my career as programmer.