

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat “refers to being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group”¹.

Stereotype threat predicts that if...

- You care about success in a particular domain, and
- One of your identities is associated with a negative stereotype about success in that same domain, and
- Elements of the environment make that particular identity salient

...then:

- The cognitive energy spent worrying (however unconsciously) that you might fulfill the negative stereotype causes you to underperform in that very setting.

Counteracting stereotype threat through your teaching

Research shows that these **instructors’ strategies** can effectively combat achievement gaps in performance on tests and assignments:

- Refer to successful experts who are from groups who are underrepresented in the field.
- Emphasize that achievement on tests and assignments reflects effort and commitment, not intrinsic ability.
- Communicate high expectations and offer clear paths for everyone to meet them.
- Remind all students that success can involve struggle. Normalize and discuss frustrations or challenges and ways to overcome them.
- Provide a range of assignments and assessment opportunities, from low-stakes to higher-stakes.
- Advertise and promote support resources around campus to all students (e.g., Sweetland Center for Writing or the Science Learning Center).
- Build in opportunities for self-affirmation. Studies have shown that the effects of stereotype threat are reduced when students have spent some time writing or talking about their personal values, qualities, or skills.

Some Resources:

Reducing Stereotype Threat: <http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/>

Steele, Claude M. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010. Print.

¹Steele, C.M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test-performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69 (5): 797-811.