

# Understanding and Strategizing for Stereotype Threat

Compiled from:

*Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How  
Stereotypes Affect Us*

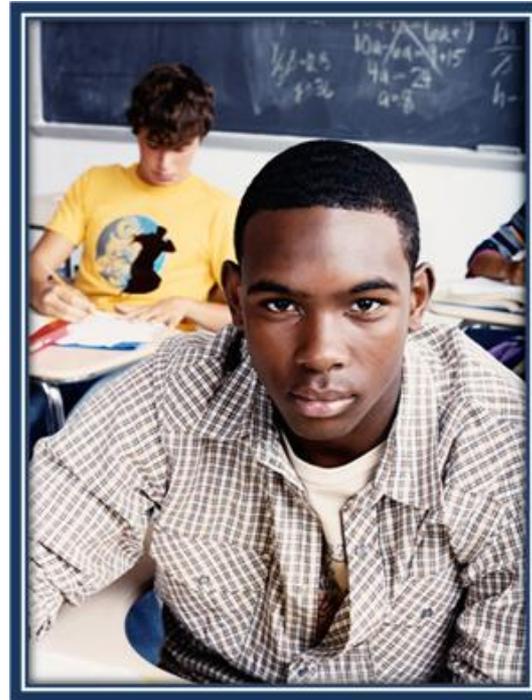
By Claude Steele

# What is Stereotype Threat?

- “The threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype.” (Steele, 1999)

# What it means....

The simple threat you may be stereotyped can depress your academic performance.



Stereotype threat can be triggered by your general awareness of the stereotype.

*Bad at  
math*

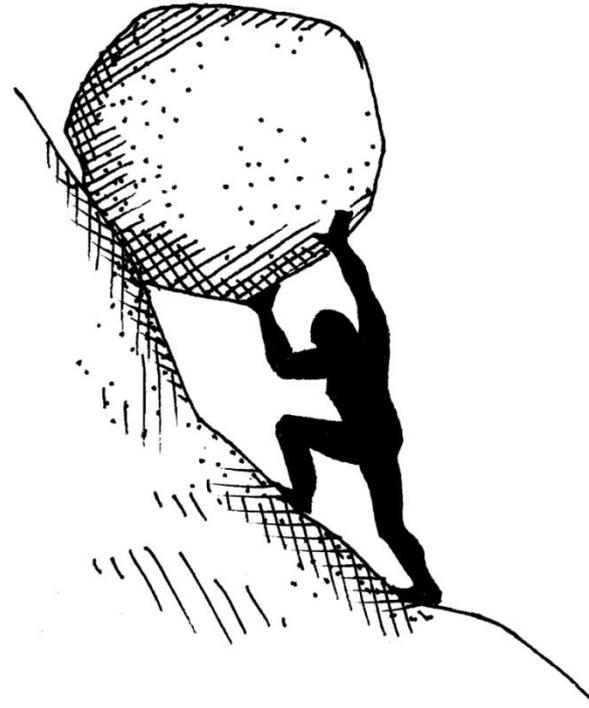
*Doesn't value  
education*



*Lazy*

You don't have to believe the stereotype for it to affect you...

In fact, the more you care, the more likely you are to be affected



I'm the only Asian on the basketball team.

Why don't we talk about disability in this diversity class?

Stereotype threat can happen to anyone who is affected by or aware of a stereotype about their group in any given situation.

I don't want to talk about sexual orientation because I might be seen as homophobic.

Why won't anyone sit next to me on the first day of class?



Environmental cues can trigger stereotype threat; these cues can be features integrated into the situation (institutionalized).

# CUES:

- Critical mass
- People in authority
- Curriculum
- Physical layout/signs/art
- How diversity is handled or treated by institution

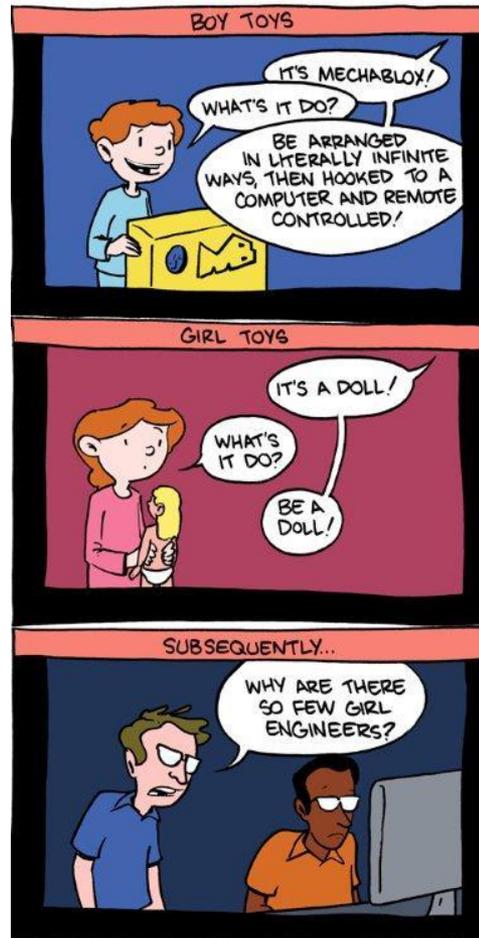
Stereotype threat can cause you to behave in ways that hinder you

- Over-efforting
- Self-suppression
- Avoidance of help-seeking
  - Disengagement
- Avoidance of challenge

# What can we do?

- **Institution:**
  - **Pay attention to cues:** efforts toward diversity of faculty / staff; campus appearance and climate, public statements affirming diversity as a value
  - **Handle bias effectively**
  - **Validate students' experiences**

# Pay attention to cues!



# What can we do?

- Commit to improving your cultural competency
- Openly demonstrate your value for diversity
- Challenge stereotypes
- Evaluate your curriculum for representation and bias
- Structure seating arrangements and group work formation
- Facilitate and teach the value of study groups; help study groups form

# What can we do?

Teach and reinforce these messages:

- Intelligence is malleable and grows over time.
- Effort is more important than perceived “natural” talent. (bust myth of “smart” and “not smart.”)

# What can we do?

- Teach that academic struggles are normal and happen to everyone (help structure diverse and supportive study groups)
  - Encourage participation in out of class events with diverse participants
  - Help students find academic support networks
  - Mentor

# What can we do?

- Teach self-affirmation
  - Revisit and reflect on values statements, strengths and goals as a regular practice
- Practice “wise schooling” (Beverly Daniel Tatum)
  - High expectations, high help
  - Feedback that validates potential, not empty praise
- Build relationships.

