Empirically Validated Strategies to Reduce Stereotype Threat

Below is a brief list of empirically validated strategies to reduce stereotype threat (see bottom of page for further info):

1. Remove Cues That Trigger Worries About Stereotypes
   • Reduce prejudice (Logel et al., 2009); remove physical cues that make it seem that a school setting is defined by the majority group (Cheryan et al., 2009); don’t ask people to report a negatively stereotyped group identity immediately before taking a test (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Danaher & Crandall, 2008)

2. Convey That Diversity is Valued
   • For instance, communicate a multicultural ideology that explicitly values diversity (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008)

3. Create a Critical Mass
   • Increase the visibility and representation of people from minority groups in a field (Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), among test-takers (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000), and in positions of authority (e.g., among teachers; Carrell et al., 2010; Dee, 2004; Massey & Fischer, 2005)

4. Create Fair Tests, Present Them as Fair and as Serving a Learning Purpose
   • Use gender- and race-fair tests, communicate their fairness, convey that they are being used to facilitate learning, not to measure innate ability or reify stereotypes (Good et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995)

5. Value Students’ Individuality
   • Remind students of aspects of their individual identity (Ambady et al., 2005; Gresky et al., 2005)

6. Improve Cross-Group Interactions
   • Foster better intergroup relations (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008; Steele, 1997; Walton & Carr, 2012); remind students of similarities among groups (Rosenthal & Crisp, 2006); undo stereotypical associations through cognitive retraining (Forbes & Schmader, 2010); promote cooperative classrooms (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cohen, 1994)

7. Present and Recruit Positive Role Models from Diverse Groups
   • Expose students to successful role models from their group who refute negative stereotypes (Marx & Goff, 2005; Marx & Roman, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003)

8. Help Students Manage Feelings of Stress and Threat
   • Teach students about stereotype threat so that they attribute anxiety to stereotype threat rather than to the risk of failure (Johns et al., 2005); teach students to reappraise arousal as a potential facilitator of strong performance rather than barrier to it (Johns et al., 2008)

9. Support Students’ Sense of Belonging
   • Teach students that worries about belonging in school are normal, not unique to them or their group, and are transient rather than fixed (Walton & Cohen, 2007, 2011)

10. Convey High Standards and Assure Students of Their Ability to Meet These Standards
    • Frame critical feedback as reflective of high standards and one’s confidence in students’ ability to meet those standards (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Cohen et al., 1999); more generally, teach students to view critical feedback as reflective of feedback-givers’ high standards and confidence in their ability to meet the standards (Yeager et al., 2011)

11. Promote a Growth Mindset About Intelligence
    • Teach students that intelligence is like a muscle—that it is not fixed, but grows with effort (Aronson et al., 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007). Promote this conception of intelligence or ability as a norm.

12. Value-Affirmations to Reduce Stress and Threat
    • Have students write about, reflect on, and perhaps discuss core personal values (Cohen et al., 2006, 2009; Martens et al., 2006; Miyake et al., 2010)

For reviews of the above strategies, see:


This handout was compiled by Greg Walton, Geoff Cohen, and Claude Steele (all of Stanford University) in May 2012, who also thank Aldo Billingslea, Priyanka Carr, Paul Michael David, Pam Grossman, Shawn Nak-kyung Kim, Renee Lizcano, Christine Logel, and Holly Materman.