

## Reducing the impact of stereotype threat for academically at-risk students

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### Biography

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### ABSTRACT

Under laboratory conditions, researchers have demonstrated that raising the salience of negative stereotypes about group membership can depress intellectual and academic performance. Termed stereotype threat by Steele and Aronson (1995), this phenomenon has been observed across a wide-range of characteristics including ethnic-racial, gender, socioeconomic and disability statuses. The impacts of stereotype threat on standardized test performance are considered to be significant contributors to ethnic-racial and other forms of achievement gaps. Prior studies have shown that interventions designed to address specific forms of stereotype threat can help reduce their influence. Translating interventions from the lab to real-world settings, where students may be subject to multiple forms of stereotype threat simultaneously, can be operationally too complex for wide-range implementation. Testing students in academically heterogeneous groups also raises testing anxiety for mid- and low-performing students and can negatively affect their performance. Our study attempted to mitigate the impact of negative stereotypes these students may have about themselves based on their academic status relative to their higher-achieving peers. We used the Academic Support Index to identify a pool of low performing students ( $n = 62$ ) and randomly assigned them to the intervention or control. We confirmed between-group homogeneity using historical academic performance and several psychosocial constructs including academic self-perception and motivation. The intervention group tested with academically similar students in order to minimize the impact of peer comparison while the control took the test with their academically heterogeneous classmates. Students assigned to the treatment group had higher rates of proficiency (64%;  $n = 28$ ) compared to the control group (28%;  $n = 32$ ). Results were statistically significant ( $p = 0.004$ ), and the effect size was substantial ( $d = 0.74$ ). Post-assessment surveys provided further insight into how students experienced the testing environments.