



Reducing stereotype threat in classrooms: a review of social-psychological intervention studies on improving the achievement of Black students



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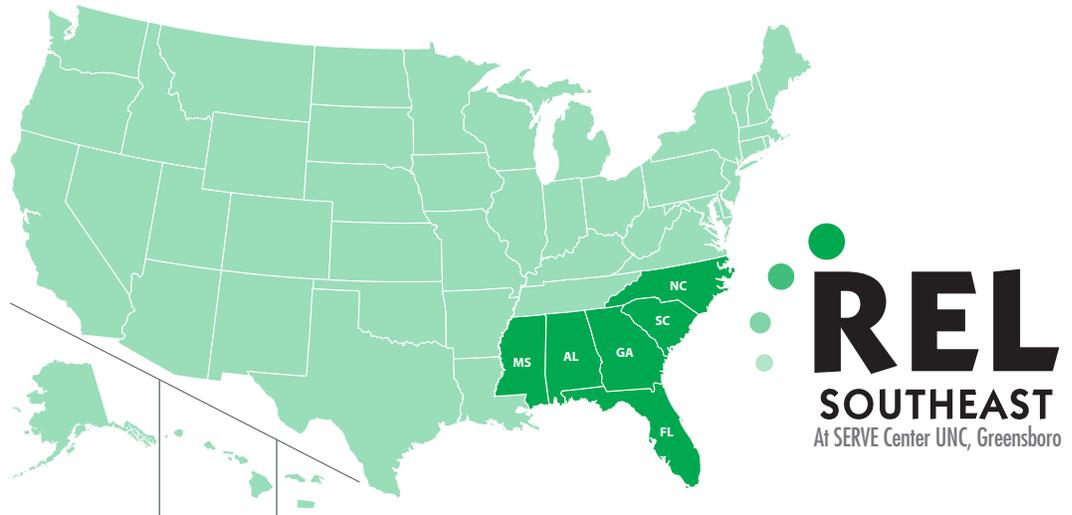
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Stereotype threat arises from a fear among members of a group of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the intellectual ability of the group. The report identifies three randomized controlled trial studies that use classroom-based strategies to reduce stereotype threat and improve the academic performance of Black students, narrowing their achievement gap with White students.

This review located and summarized the findings of randomized controlled trial studies on classroom-based social-psychological interventions aimed at reducing the experience of stereotype threat that might otherwise lead some Black students to underperform on difficult academic tasks or tests. Reducing the achievement gap between Black and White students is a critical goal for states, districts, and schools. Experimental research on both inducing and reducing stereotype threat can inform discussions of strategies.

Some students may perform below their potential because of the stress of being under constant evaluation in the classroom. Black students, however, may experience another source of stress in addition to this general one (which they share with their nonminority

peers). This second source of stress is specific to negatively stereotyped groups. It arises from a fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the intellectual ability of their racial group. Because Black students must contend with two sources of stress rather than one, their performance may be suppressed relative to that of their nonminority peers.

A systematic search was conducted for empirical studies of classroom-based social-psychological interventions designed to reduce stereotype threat and thus improve the academic performance of Black students. Search term combinations, such as “stereotype threat” and “intervention,” and “achievement gap” and “intervention,” were used to search a number of bibliographic databases. In addition, a web site on this topic with an extensive reference list was also reviewed. This initial search identified 289 references. After applying relevant inclusion criteria for topical and sample relevance, three experimental studies were identified. The three studies found positive impacts on the academic performance of Black students for the following social-psychological strategies:

- Reinforce for students the idea that intelligence is expandable and, like a muscle, grows stronger when worked.

- Teach students that their difficulties in school are often part of a normal learning curve or adjustment process, rather than something unique to them or their racial group.
- Help students reflect on other values in their lives beyond school that are sources of self-worth for them.

These three experiments are not an exhaustive list of the interventions to consider in reducing the racial achievement gap, nor are they silver bullets for improving the academic

performance of Black students. Rather, they present scientific evidence suggesting that such strategies might reduce the level of social-psychological threat that some Black students might otherwise feel in academic performance situations. It is important to note that while the strategies use established procedures that can be emulated by teachers and administrators, they also require thought and care on the part of schools and teachers in applying them in their particular situations.

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