Stereotype Threat–Based Diversity Programming: Helping Students while Empowering and Respecting Faculty

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Abstract

As college student populations grow increasingly diverse, centers for teaching and learning are often charged with promoting inclusive teaching practices. Yet faculty cite many affective barriers to diversity training, and we often preach to the choir. These challenges led us to seek alternate routes for diversity programming, and stereotype threat has become the centerpiece of our endeavors. This chapter describes stereotype threat and related interventions, outlines our efforts, and offers evidence of its surprising impact. It also identifies the features of stereotype threat that appealed to faculty, led them to make pedagogical changes, and inspired them to spread the word.

Keywords: Stereotype threat, Diversity training, Inclusive teaching, Multicultural faculty development, Teaching minority students

The data are unequivocal: College students are more diverse than ever, in terms of race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, family income, nationality, and parental levels of education (Renn & Reason, 2013). Projections indicate that increasing numbers of college students will be Hispanic and Asian American (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). At the same time, we are seeing disturbing evidence that the college experience maintains inequalities, rather than flinging wide the door to opportunity (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Samson, 2013), and the professorate itself is diversifying far more slowly than our student populations. Faculty may be uncomfortable serving as role models for students from different cultural backgrounds, and our lack of training in cultural issues can manifest itself without our knowing. As Fine and Handelsman (2006) affirm:

> We all like to think that we are objective scholars who judge people on merit, the quality of their work, and the nature of their achievements, [yet] copious research shows that a lifetime of experience and cultural history shapes every one of us and our judgments of others. (p. 7)

Even faculty with sincere passion for teaching and goodwill toward students may have been trained at relatively homogeneous institutions, and may not realize how their inherited teaching approaches may

subtly exclude or disadvantage certain students.

Institutions often rely on Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) to promote culturally responsive practices, and many CTLs offer varied forms of "diversity training" (Stanley, 2010). When Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2006) asked the educational development community what they consider the major challenges we face, "the issue of multiculturalism as it relates to teaching and learning" arose as "one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed through faculty development services" (Sorcinelli, 2007, p. 6). Yet Sorcinelli (2007) points out the "great disparity between perceptions of the need to address these issues and the extent of relevant faculty development services being offered" (p. 6)— a gap that may reflect awareness that diversity training is fraught with challenges. Faculty must "take a critical look at teaching, moving [away] from traditional modes" (Stanley, 2010, p. 203) and recognize "the importance and the connection between culture, teaching, and learning" (McPhail & Costner, 2004, p.1). Faculty themselves cite barriers to implementing inclusive practices, including a sense of incompetence and fear of the unknown (Salazar, Norton & Tuitt, 2009). This reminds us that they may feel heightened vulnerability when issues of diversity are broached, and that our diversity efforts may strike over extended faculty not just as impinging on their scarce time but as potentially threatening.

Indeed, one of the trickiest aspects of diversity "training" is steering clear of our very human sensitivity to what we may perceive as accusations of bias or discrimination (Salazar et al., 2009). Most of us want to be egalitarian and free of bias or discriminatory beliefs, even if our actions may reveal implicit prejudices (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). The developer's task can be intimidating: We want to involve faculty in the process of constructing more supportive learning environments for students from underrepresented groups but avoid triggering the dissonance and pushback that can occur in discussions of privilege or systematic discrimination. If we ourselves are white, we may be as fearful about stepping wrong as the faculty Salazar et al. (2009) surveyed. We may feel uncomfortable about appropriating issues or perspectives to which we have no right of experience.

An additional challenge for CTLs is that we frequently "preach to the choir," facilitating diversity events for faculty with relatively high levels of multicultural competence. Reaching a broader audience of faculty in a way that bridges discomfort associated with discussions of diversity seems to require alternate routes. And finding an alternate "diversity training" route was precisely our challenge two and a half years ago at our large, public research university in the southeast. We were charged with increasing faculty "cultural sensitivity" as part of a Title V grant awarded to assist with student retention. Two fortuitous occurrences led us to the social psychological phenomenon known as stereotype threat: First, our CTL director met Joshua Aronson, a leading stereotype threat scholar, while teaching at Xavier, a Historically Black University; and second, we found Ken Sagendorf's description on the POD listserv of how well faculty responded to Claude Steele's book *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* while he was Director of Faculty Development at the US Air Force Academy. When our faculty responded with similar zeal, we sought to discover why stereotype threat is such a strong and versatile framework for multicultural development. We begin the chapter by briefly describing stereotype threat and interventions for minimizing its harm, as well as our stereotype threat–based initiative and evidence of its considerable impact. Using survey and interview data, we identify the features of stereotype threat that appealed to faculty, led them to make pedagogical changes, and compelled them to spread the word. We argue that stereotype threat is perhaps most effective as a vehicle for diversity programming because it offers faculty a way to visualize cultural inequality without seeming accusatory, and we close with recommendations for educational developers.

What is Stereotype Threat?

Steele and Aronson (1998) first developed the language for stereotype threat while trying to reconcile the persistent achievement gap between white and black students. Rather than looking for deficits in students, they posited that social factors might be involved and began to examine *identity contingencies*—"the things you have to deal with in a situation because you have a given social identity, because you are old, young, gay, a white man, a woman, black, Latino, politically conservative ... and so on" (Steele, 2010, p.3).

Stereotype threat is a particular kind of identity contingency, one that Steele described in a PBS Frontline (1999) interview:

> By the term "stereotype threat" [we mean] being in a situation where a negative stereotype about your group could apply. [When] that's the case, you know you could be judged in terms of that stereotype ... or you might inadvertently do something that would confirm the stereotype. And if you care very much about doing well in that situation, the prospect of being treated stereotypically there is going to be upsetting and disturbing to you. And if you're a member of a group whose intellectual abilities are negatively stereotyped, this threat might occur. That negative stereotype will be applicable to you right in the middle of an important standardized test [for example]. And our general reasoning was that this threat, this prospect of confirming a stereotype or of being seen that way would be distracting enough, upsetting enough, to undermine a person's performance.

Steele, Aronson and their colleagues established that this threat imposes a cognitive load that impairs cognitive functioning, short term memory, and even motor dexterity, depending on the context.

Although their first foci were African American students answering difficult verbal questions (Steele & Aronson, 1995), the phenomenon has been documented in a range of academic and nonacademic circumstances—such as women driving or playing chess, or even white male engineering students underperforming when told they were taking part in a study on the supposed mathematical superiority of Asian students (Aronson et al., 1999). When stress conditions were removed—for instance, when subjects were told they were participating in a problem solving strategies study, not a test of verbal ability— performance improved dramatically. Another striking study involved the AP Calculus test. Educational Testing Service (ETS) suspected that the impacts of stereotype threat identified in the "lab" would not manifest themselves in real, high stakes moments, so they replicated one of the interventions: asking half of test takers to provide demographic information (including gender) *prior* to completing the exam (standard protocol), and asking the other half to do so *after* they completed the test. This would mean that, for the latter group, the stereotype of males' mathematical superiority would not be primed. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the results were astonishing. Typically, males outperform females on this test, but when the gender stereotype threat was neutralized, this gender gap disappeared: women outperformed men.
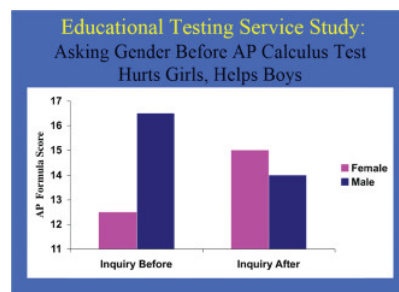
[/t/tia/images/17063888.0033.102-00000001.jpg]

Figure 1. Graph depicting the impact of asking gender after the AP Calculus exam. Reprinted with permission.

The effect has been probed in a range of contexts and by a variety of researchers. Of particular interest to those in academic settings, studies have examined stereotype threat for women doing difficult math problems (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999); the differential effects of stereotype threat on women's performance on easy compared to hard math problems (O'Brien & Crandall, 2003); and the mediation of the stereotype threat effect by level of gender identification (Schmader, 2002). Others examine the complexity of multiple identities, for example by priming a favorably stereotyped Asian identity versus gender identity in the same test group (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999), or the interaction of stereotype threat with "double minority" status in Latino women (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002). The

interplay of socioeconomic status has also been examined, as in a study of French university students by Croizet and Claire (1998).

The necessary conditions for stereotype threat are awareness of a (usually negative) stereotype, priming of that awareness (often implicit in the environment for students from marginalized groups), and a fear of confirming the negative image. This last factor can seem counterintuitive. Faculty may reasonably think the best students will exert effort to "rise above" distractions (as they have presumably already done, to reach this level of education). But for threatened students, investment in good performance actually raises the stakes, intensifying the negative effect (Aronson et al., 1999). As Aronson (2012) explains, the tragic cost of stereotype threat is the loss of human potential, since poor performance can lead to self doubt and undermine motivation to risk further confirmations of the negative stereotype. And as we know from recent work on cognition, this in turn diminishes learning, and the cycle is reinscribed. A woman who hesitates to ask a question in a science class may later resolve her confusion by consulting a textbook or a peer. However, persistent exposure to stereotype threat can cause long term disidentification with an entire field of study—as students turn to subjects or pursuits where they perceive their performance is less likely to be negatively judged. Thus, awareness of stereotype threat is not just of interest to a subset of faculty with heavy investment in equity concerns; it is of concern to all educators, as it contributes to the attrition of talented students from our disciplines and institutions.

Our Stereotype Threat–based Programming

We launched our stereotype threat initiative with a presentation by Joshua Aronson in March 2012, thanks to generous Title V funds. Titled "Stereotypes and the Nature and Nurture of Intelligence," Aronson's talk drew 108 participants, a larger crowd than any prior CTL event, and to harness this momentum, we invited participants to a reading group using Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi*. The initial reading group of 10 consisted of faculty and one doctoral student, from a range of academic disciplines; it met three times during the fall 2012 semester. The discussion encouraged participants to make connections between the book and our unique institution; in particular, we asked them to consider the specific stereotypes that might be most salient for our students. During the second meeting, we shared handouts with strategies for reducing stereotype threat and asked participants to generate plans for diminishing its effects in their own classrooms. These plans became the focus of discussion during the 3rd and last meeting, providing a valuable reflective conclusion to the group. We reprised the group in fall 2013. Facilitated by a participant of the first version, this iteration focused on exploring the identity contingencies that affected participants themselves.

Our dissemination of stereotype threat research has gained traction beyond and within our CTL. We were invited to conduct a brown bag discussion for English and Writing faculty, a talk for Writing Center tutors, and a presentation for a campus wide Title V conference attended by senior administration. The ideas have proved similarly viral within the CTL. The issue has shaped not only our diversity offerings, like workshops for TAs on working with diverse students, but almost all of our work: even our Test Design Institute asks faculty to consider stereotype threat factors in testing situations. In the two years since Aronson's visit, we have played excerpts of his talk at several high impact events: new faculty orientations, a full day adjunct pedagogy session, and workshops for faculty teaching college algebra. When we stop the recording before the end, we invariably meet with protest. His data and presentation have never failed to capture faculty's attention, and we use them to start discussion of issues like student demographics, knowing our learners, and affective teaching issues.

Dimensions of Effectiveness

Anecdotally, then, we have ample evidence that faculty respond well to discussions of stereotype threat. Yet increasing demands for accountability and fiscal responsibility make documenting the impact of our work more critical than ever (Kalish & Plank, 2010). Kreber and Brook (2001) provide a framework for evaluating the impact of educational development programs, delineating six levels on which we can examine our work: (1) participants' perceptions/satisfaction, (2) participants' beliefs about teaching and learning, (3) participants' teaching performance, (4) students' perceptions of teaching performance, (5)

student learning, and (6) effects on the culture of the institution. We have collected evidence for four of the six levels, suggesting that our stereotype threat based efforts have been effective in enhancing faculty's multicultural competence. To provide more robust verification, we identified two other institutions of varying profiles that have used stereotype threat–based faculty development, and secured permission to share their findings below.

Perhaps predictably (given his expertise and presentation ability), 100% of those who attended Aronson's talk and completed our survey indicated that they were satisfied with his presentation. Although we did not ask *Whistling Vivaldi* participants about their satisfaction with the book, we conducted follow up interviews with five of the initial participants to learn more about how the group influenced them. They described reading the book as "pleasurable," "enjoyable," "transformational," and "a very positive experience … occasionally and unexpectedly emotional." Another CTL at a private liberal arts university in the South also used Steele's book for faculty and staff discussion groups. The CTL director indicates that they began with two reading groups of about eight members. "Those participants found the book's treatment of stereotype threat so compelling and so relevant to [the] university's work that they recommended we try to find a way to get more people to read it," she shared. And they were quite successful: More than 190 faculty and staff participated in the follow up groups—which were rated almost unanimously as either good or great.

Moving to Kreber and Brook's (2001) 2nd level of evaluation: participants' beliefs about teaching and learning, it seems one belief challenged by stereotype threat research is the pervasive, problematic notion that students' performance mirrors their innate intelligence or ability. One of our Aronson attendees wrote in the anonymous post event survey that the presentation demonstrated that "social factors (outside of students' skills, preparedness, comprehension, etc.) impact their success in measurable ways." Whether the additional factors are social or psychological in nature, this realization is critical to inclusive teaching, as it counters the student deficit model and reminds us that our teaching practices can considerably enhance student success (McPhail & Costner, 2004).

We also administered a brief pre and post questionnaire to participants of the *Whistling Vivaldi* group. As expected, the changes were modest; however, responses varied for two notable questions: There was considerably more agreement after the book group with the statement "Faculty members should spend more time getting to know their students." We were pleased with this improvement since knowing one's students is a key tenet of effective multicultural teaching (Stanley, 2010). There was also more and stronger post group agreement with the statement "A racially, ethnically diverse student body enhances the educational experience of all students" (3 vs. 7 "strongly agree"). This too was a positive change since, as McPhail and Costner (2004) have written, culturally responsive teaching requires that we "build on the knowledge, beliefs, and experiences that students bring with them to the classroom."

To evaluate the 3rd level of development impact: participants' teaching performance, we asked book group participants how likely they were to make pedagogical adjustments or changes as a result of the book group. All indicated that they would (67% very likely, 33% somewhat likely). Among the changes they planned to make: discussing the nature of intelligence with students; discussing stereotype threat with students; implementing interventions similar to the ones Steele describes; monitoring their speech to try to prevent comments that could heighten negative identity contingencies; and trying to learn more about parents to get to know students more fully.

Participant interviewees' actual changes in their teaching practices took many forms. First, they implemented several of the intervention strategies described in the book. One strategy involves *reframing the task*. Steele (2010) demonstrated the harmful power of framing an intellectual task as diagnostic of ability or intelligence. Three interviewees took steps to avoid this charged circumstance. One, a linguistics professor, said during the interview, "When I do individual tests I now always remind them, 'This is *not* a test of your intelligence.'" A participant interviewee from the epidemiology department described, "When I tell my students how to prepare for an exam, I try to state it in neutral terms, and not so much as a test of quantitative skills." A third, a biology doctoral student, took the time to meet with each of his students to

discern the specific identity contingency that seemed to consume them. When he found that most of them dream of becoming physicians, he reworded the instructions of a diagnostic exam to discourage the belief that the exam would predict their success in future studies. Although his sample size was small, he found improved test performance.

Deemphasizing threatened social identities

For students in threatened groups, avoiding further priming of stereotypes lessens the effect (as in the ETS study described above), and our participants turned this into an active strategy. "I ask them to put their name at the end of the exam rather than the start of the exam," shared one interviewee, "because I don't want to prime any particular racial stereotype."

Encouraging self affirmation

These interventions take several forms, such as short writing exercises to reflect on values that are important to students (Miyake et al., 2010). The postdoctoral participant, for instance, administered a previously successful values affirmation task in gateway mathematics courses. This effort required coordination with seven other instructors, affecting fourteen class sections totaling almost 1600 students! "Even though the preliminary results from that work show no benefit for the treatment group, I'm not discouraged," she shared during her interview. "It's instead caused me to think more about what interventions might be more appropriate for [our] students, given their particular identity contingencies."

Providing external attributions for difficulty

For students in threatened groups, explanations for setbacks that are external to themselves can be critical in neutralizing the effect of stereotype threat. The linguistics professor now "constantly reminds" students in his grammar course that their performance in his class could reflect their prior schooling, and perhaps also how closely the rules of standard written English reflect their home dialect—in contrast to many students' notion that some peers are simply geniuses. Providing external attributions for difficulty can also mean explicitly discussing stereotype threat. One participant who teaches both psychology and computer science told us during her interview that she now discusses stereotypes and stereotype threat in all courses. Faculty at the private liberal arts university adopted this approach, assigning some or all of *Whistling Vivaldi* as class reading.

Emphasizing an incremental view of ability

Students' perception of intelligence as malleable and changeable, rather than fixed, can strongly influence their response to academic adversity (Steele, 2010). Faculty adopted this tactic explicitly. One asks students to respond to clicker questions about intelligence, leading to a discussion of fixed versus growth mindsets. Another is planning follow up work to the values affirmation exercise, "talking with a colleague about a grant proposal to pilot and study a mindset related intervention."

In a review of the theory and processes behind social psychological interventions, Stano (2012) reiterates several of the above categories and discusses other features that were important to our participants: belongingness and self regulation. A sense of integration into the academic community has value for many students, but plays heavily into the isolation that often affects those from traditionally underserved groups. Participants now tout the potential benefits of community. One noted during his interview, "I encourage students to study together and let them know that others are probably feeling insecure about the material too." Another used the research as a lever in this conversation, telling students, "There is educational research that shows that ... pulling at resources [might be] advantageous for you.... You haven't earned the grade more by going it alone." Reflective, purposeful behavior from students—i.e., self regulation—is another way to regain control from harmful stereotypes. Participants support these behaviors in their classes: One gives students a chance to devise a study plan for exams, and another meets with students who are not doing well in the class and encourages them to consider studying with others.

Two broader themes emerged from the interviews: awareness and leadership. All interview participants discussed *knowledge of self* in the form of heightened awareness of their own behaviors and possible unintended effects of those behaviors. As one noted, "I do think about how I pose questions, and how I

might ask for an assignment or describe a problem." Complementary to these reflections was greater *knowledge of students*, as participants described having their eyes opened to previously unseen identity contingencies. This shows the other side of a strategy to mitigate stereotype threat—just as students benefit from knowing how to attribute their difficulties to external factors, instructors' ability to make those same attributions deepens awareness. Overall, we find faculty enacting many of Stanley's (2010) recommendations, by internalizing awareness rather than referencing an external checklist.

Finally and perhaps most unexpected was the degree of leadership shown by participants, who not only adopted classroom changes, but took initiative to share what they had learned. Formal examples include:

- incorporating stereotype threat in TA training
- leading faculty brown bag luncheons and university roundtable discussions
- delivering stereotype threat presentations in workshops for high school teachers
- coordinating interventions in large, multi instructor classes, and proposing research grants to develop more

One participant who coordinates an institutional grant to reform STEM courses says stereotype threat has "become one of [her] favorite tools to try to talk to people about diversity and equity issues in education." She explains that:

> Especially for people from fairly privileged groups … it can be extremely frustrating to try to raise issues like privilege or systematic racism or workplace gender discrimination…. I've found a very striking contrast when I talk about stereotype threat. It's fairly easy to get people to admit that stereotypes EXIST…. They don't have to believe in [them] … to agree they're out there…. And from there it seems to be an easy step for them to imagine how those stereotypes might weigh on a person in one of those groups.

Most also reported one on one and group conversations, as well as talking to relatives, friends, and coworkers about stereotype threat. This degree of spontaneous dissemination is rare in faculty development efforts, perhaps especially in the area of diversity, where faculty often have a low comfort level.

Turning now to the 5th area of evaluation, student learning, we concede we have no direct measures. We do, however, think our stereotype threat programming was at least moderately influential in students' enhanced performance in college algebra, previously the most failed course at our institution. (Recall that we integrated stereotype threat into our college algebra workshops and that one of the *Whistling Vivaldi* participants administered a values affirmation exercise in 14 algebra sections.) In addition, nearly half of our book group participants teach in our institutions' most populated departments, biology and psychology, so they reach thousands of students.

Finally, in the case of Kreber and Brook's (2001) 6th evaluation vector: effects on the culture of the institution, our efforts have had considerable institution wide visibility. The invitation to present at a Title V conference led several high profile faculty and administrators to write us into three grants, and, as mentioned, we were asked to discuss stereotype threat with several faculty and staff groups. The military academy in the southwest that ran three FLC's simultaneously using *Whistling Vivaldi* also seems to have had institution wide impact. The director reported:

> One group [presented] to different components on our campus about stereotype threat. Another [created] videos highlighting different examples of stereotype threat and exploring how to best implement them. A third subset [was] changing the way that institutional student performance is looked at and what factors affect that performance.

In the private liberal arts university, the fact that 113 faculty and 50 staff participated in discussions of stereotype threat as part of an institutional diversity initiative suggests that there, too, the influence was

widespread. For us, it seems much of the effect on university culture is forthcoming: Fueled by our successes to date, we intend to engage varied stakeholders in an institution specific research project. This will allow us to explore the nature of the stereotype threats most affecting our mostly Hispanic students.

Why Do Faculty Respond So Powerfully?

As established above, stereotype threat struck a chord with faculty from several institutions and was a catalyst for a variety of concrete pedagogical changes. This, of course, begged the question: Why? What accounts for stereotype threat's effectiveness as a vehicle for diversity programming? One significant factor appears to be the dramatic nature of the stereotype threat study results. In fact, we heard (and admittedly, contributed to) collective gasps of sheer astonishment during Aronson's talk, and we have witnessed the same reaction every time we use his slides or play an excerpt of his presentation. Book group participants describe having had similar experiences while reading.

It also strikes us that much of the success we and our development colleagues have had using stereotype threat centers on specific characteristics of *Whistling Vivaldi* itself. Steele (2010) begins, for instance, with the words, "I have a memory of the first time I realized I was black" (p. 1), followed by a depiction of the incident that made him aware of a racial order. This poignant personal disclosure seems to prompt self reflection for readers, and as Steele begins to delineate the many categories to which we belong and the corresponding identity contingencies, readers identify with at least one of the examples and are nudged into self reflection. "I could … relate to my own experiences [as a female] working in computer science," shared one participant; another recalled her experiences as a woman studying science; and the biology doctoral student and TA was most struck by "the personal relevance a number of the themes had to [his] own life and the lives of [his] students."

Readers also identify with stereotype threat because of the breadth of Steele's survey of the literature. "I remember that being one of the epiphanies—[realizing] that this is happening all around," the linguistics professor recalled, adding that "the breadth of the studies illustrates the breadth of the problem. [Steele and other scholars] kept pressing the research agenda in all these different spaces [and] directions, and everywhere they pressed, they found it." The epidemiology faculty member suggests that one of the book's key features is that "it provides data, which I think is helpful to certain groups of people who are less interested in 'trends in education,' but rather more responsive to measured examples." The vast literature and variety of examples Steele describes were also instrumental in that they appear to have empowered participants. They felt confident telling others about it and being able to support their points with data; the book gave them the language and details with which to advocate for more inclusive teaching practices.

Moreover, Steele (2010) describes a variety of strategies for minimizing the effects of stereotype threat, and many of them are quite simple. Few would require any significant investment of time or energy from faculty, and the assortment allows faculty to determine what seems most suitable to them. As many of us have realized, faculty tend to respond better to choice than prescription. In their study of STEM reform, Dancy and Henderson (2008) recommend giving faculty both principles and a range of tools, to minimize their resistance to change. The utility of providing faculty with a toolbox of strategies may be of particular interest to developers worried that diversity events will only appeal to the "choir." Even our "choir" was unfamiliar with specific inclusive strategies. A faculty developer from yet another institution (a selective research university in the northeast), echoes our sentiment, saying: "I really believe that many of the so called choir may believe strongly in inclusion but not know the strategies to use to help students."

The last aspect of *Whistling Vivaldi* that explains its effectiveness is Steele's tone. "Although the topic is depressing … I found the book uplifting and positive," acknowledged the epidemiology professor. Another said, "I was really struck by Steele's ability to talk about issues that have caused so much harm to so many people, but to do so with compassion and respect." Some perceived that Steele extends this same compassion and respect to his readers: "He was very good at inviting readers not to blame themselves for 'in' groups they may be part of," said one interviewee. The CTL director who coordinated the institution wide staff and faculty discussion groups synthesized these characteristics of the book in her extraordinarily successful email invitation. It read:

Steele ... describes exactly how "stereotype threat" affects people mentally, physically, and socially. He does so in readily accessible language, without finger pointing, with a nice blend of anecdotes and summaries of the results of years of psychology experiments. Best of all, Steele suggests concrete ways we can lessen the effects of stereotype threat and possibly help all our students meet their potential.

She recalls that when drafting this message, they "were trying to anticipate (especially faculty) objections to getting involved, and we thought of things like, 'Oh, this is another diversity event where angry _____ people complain' or 'this will be a touchy feeling discussion; I want hard evidence' 'I'm fully aware of the problems; I want solutions;' or 'I don't want to read a boring academic book.'" We too wanted to avoid associations with angry diversity events, and it seems to have worked. While diversity training often feels, in our participants' words, "bureaucratic," "forced and inauthentic," and/or "simplistic," discussing Steele's book was "a very applied and useful experience."

Ultimately, the discussion of stereotype threat offers faculty an accessible way to visualize cultural inequality. Our curiosity is piqued, since the research is recent and groundbreaking, but doesn't undermine our sense of our own expertise. The staggering data catch our attention, but the conversation does not tend to strike us as accusatory, nor does it provoke guilt about our own relative privilege. Steele (2010) reassures readers that "identity contingencies can affect a person—to the point of shaping her life— without her encountering a single prejudiced person along the way" (p. 212). As mentioned above, one of the "diversity training" minefields is sensitivity to accusations of bias or discrimination (Salazar et al., 2009)—such that developers are charged with helping faculty develop more inclusive practices without triggering the guilt or defensiveness that can result from discussions of privilege or discrimination. Steele's book explicitly grapples with this major obstacle. As the postdoctoral participant so astutely noted, "It's a way of opening the conversation about discrimination that doesn't require people to examine the ways they have benefited from it." We are helped to see that some of our students may be carrying invisible burdens, but instead of being asked to feel responsible for placing them, we are empowered to help remove them.

Finally, we would be remiss not to provide a bit more context and reflect on the characteristics of our CTL and methodology that helped engender these successes. With a staff of only two full time developers, both of whom joined the institution within the last three to four years, we have taken great care to create an environment in which faculty feel safe, valued, and respected. From cozy armchairs and a warm color scheme to quilted student artwork on our walls, our space strives to be a peaceful, quiet oasis amidst a crowded, bustling campus. By deliberately keeping our faculty groups small, we expedite community building and give everyone a chance to share. When writing discussion questions and developing tasks for the *Whistling Vivaldi* groups, we used an informal backward design approach—that is, we thought about what we wanted these discussions to accomplish. For instance, we wanted to prompt participant introspection, so we said, during the first meeting, "Steele tells us about his 'encounter' with the existence of a racial order. If you feel comfortable sharing, can you recall a time in your childhood/life when you realized there was a racial order?" We also wanted participants to identify the most salient local identity contingencies and the ones most relevant to their fields and courses. To do so, we referred to a moment in the book when Steele describes an institution where non white students felt they did not belong and said, "Let's bring it back to FIU: How would you describe our campus culture? Do you think any groups feel marginalized? Which ones?" Then, as their "homework" between meetings, we asked participants to think about the specific identity contingencies that might be most pronounced/influential in the classes they teach, and for which students, so that we could collectively think about possible interventions during our next meeting. Yes, our first cohort was mostly composed of faculty who admitted to some concern about equity, and the working group experience empowered them beyond our expectations. The opportunities for reinforcement from like minded colleagues prompted them to try a range of interventions.

Further advantages of the stereotype threat conversation are its reach and flexibility. We have followed discussions of stereotype threat with productive work on Dweck's (2008) mindset material and Banaji and Greenwald's (2013) work on blind spots, finding that faculty are primed for these succeeding discussions.

Stereotype threat work also fits neatly into our programming for learner centered teaching. Even the dependence of many of the studies on high stakes tests for their data helps faculty to see that lower stakes assessments might be more egalitarian, as well as more conducive to learning. Because the material is easily integrated into other sessions, we have found that stereotype threat infiltrates all of our offerings. Thus, without seeming to be hectoring, we are able to send the message that diversity issues logically shape everything we do as developers and as faculty, rather than being relegated to discrete workshops.

Final Thoughts

As Stanley (2010) reminds us, "Conceptualizing, designing, and implementing multicultural faculty development activities is ultimately of value to everyone. When faculty developers embrace such call to action, we not only enrich the pool of educational resources at our institutions, but the entire academy" (p. 221). We are encouraged by our success (and that of our colleagues) with this thread of programming to suggest it as a useful avenue for others. We would strongly recommend the careful framing of the issue and resources used by our colleague, the CTL director discussed above, stipulating the avoidance of finger pointing and the promise to unlock *all* students' potential, since it diminishes much faculty skepticism. We have had excellent luck with collecting testimonials from pilot participants and using them to attract participants who might not have originally been part of the "choir."

The mix of large events and small groups has also proved useful: the higher profile events cultivated attention and interest, while the small groups fostered genuine transformation of attitudes and practices. Aronson's visit created a big splash, and we would encourage any CTLs with budgets for speakers to invite him to campus. Lastly, Steele's book, in its humanity and diplomacy, has been key to our efforts. All the while, we don't want to suggest that stereotype threat–based diversity programming is a panacea or magic bullet. As Steele (2010) himself stresses "the effectiveness of these strategies is not an argument for neglecting structural and other changes that would help unwind the disadvantages attached to racial, gender, class, and other identities in our society." Nonetheless, he points out, "We can make a good deal of progress by addressing identity threat in our lives. And doing so is a big part of unwinding the disadvantages of identity" (p. 216). Regretfully, these disadvantages are still pervasive. A recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article (Mangan, 2014) reminds us that colleges are still struggling to understand how to support minority students. Mangan (2014) invokes Steele when attempting to explain the persistently low completion rates of black and Latino men in community college. The distressing comments posted to this article reveal entrenched deficit model explanations for minority men's underperformance, lending urgency to the project of addressing invisible obstacles to student success.

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