



SMART IS SEXY
Presented by the Aparecio Foundation

STEREOTYPE THREAT: A FACT SHEET FOR MENTORS AND PARENTS

WHAT IS STEREOTYPE THREAT?

Stereotype threat is feeling at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about a group that one belongs to.¹

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF STEREOTYPE THREAT?

Experiencing stereotype threat reduces the performance of students who belong to negatively stereotyped groups. For example, in many circumstances, male and female students perform equally well on math tests. However, when female students are reminded of negative stereotypes about their ability in math, their performance suffers. Over time, experiencing stereotype threat may also lead to lower self-confidence in the stereotyped areas, and a loss of interest or efforts to avoid the subject area altogether.²

HOW DOES STEREOTYPE THREAT HURT PERFORMANCE?

Research suggests that stereotype threat harms performance because students experience increased physiological stress, arousal, and anxiety³, coupled with negative thoughts and worries about their performance, which can interfere with their ability to perform⁴. These worries also lower students' expectations for success, lead to a withdrawal of effort, and interfere with the ability to focus on information that is important for good task performance.⁵

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

Male students continue to outperform female students on standardized math tests.^{6,7} For instance, scores on the ACT show that females are not as well-prepared as males for quantitative college-level coursework.⁷ This performance gap has a lasting impact: less than half of women who enroll in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) graduate programs actually obtain their doctoral degree.⁸

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT STEREOTYPE THREAT FROM IMPACTING YOUNG WOMEN?

An abundance of research suggests a clear benefit to pairing young female students with female role models. Seeing someone from one's own group succeed in a position of power and authority can undermine negative stereotypes about one's group in that field of study.⁹ Mentoring relationships can also challenge students to improve their academic potential above social and personal expectations of success.¹⁰

WHAT IS THE APARECIO FOUNDATION DOING ABOUT STEREOTYPE THREAT?

Aparecio's mentorship program acts to inoculate young women against stereotype threat by pairing young female scholars with mentors. As living examples, these mentors disproving the myths about what women cannot accomplish and help bring out the true potential in young aspiring scholars. Aparecio seeks to create these mentoring opportunities among highly talented but low income female students who may get the most benefit from a strong academic role model.



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