

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN
ANNOUNCEMENT**

Florida International University
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Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Abstract

Stereotype Threat and the Standardized Testing Experiences of
African American Children at an Urban Elementary School

by

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Stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) refers to the risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one's group in a particular performance domain. The theory assumes that performance in the stereotyped domain is most negatively affected when individuals more highly identify with the domain in question. As federal law has increased the importance of standardized testing at the elementary level, it can be reasonably hypothesized that the standardized test performance of African American children will be depressed when they are aware of negative societal stereotypes about the academic competence of African Americans.

This sequential mixed-methods study investigated whether the standardized testing experiences of African American children in an urban elementary school are related to their level of stereotype awareness. The quantitative phase utilized data from 198 African American children at an urban elementary school. Both ex-post facto and experimental designs were employed. Experimental conditions were diagnostic and non-diagnostic testing experiences. The qualitative phase utilized data from a series of six focus group interviews conducted with a purposefully selected group of 4 African American children. The interview data were supplemented with data from 30 hours of classroom observations.

Quantitative findings indicated that the stereotype threat condition evoked by diagnostic testing depresses the reading test performance of stereotype-aware African American children ($F[1, 194] = 2.21, p < .01$). This was particularly true of students who are most highly domain-identified with reading ($F[1, 91] = 19.18, p < .01$). Moreover, findings indicated that only stereotype-aware African American children who were highly domain-identified were more likely to experience anxiety in the diagnostic condition ($F[1, 91] = 5.97, p < .025$).

Qualitative findings revealed 4 themes regarding how African American children perceive and experience the factors related to stereotype threat: (1) a narrow perception of education as strictly test preparation, (2) feelings of stress and anxiety related to the state test, (3) concern with what "others" think (racial salience), and (4) stereotypes. A new conceptual model for stereotype threat is presented, and future directions including implications for practice and policy are discussed.

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Place: University Park, ZEB 325

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