

Stereotype Threat

Fear of confirming negative stereotype about one's group.

Examples

- College transfer student
- Female science student
- High school brain
- Buffalo Bills

Stereotype threat can cause anxiety, undermine performance.

“For some reason I didn’t score well on tests. Maybe I was just nervous. There’s a lot of pressure on you, knowing that if you fail, you fail your race.”

-Rodney Ellis, African-American
State Senator (Texas), 1997

Stereotype Threat Experiment

Black and White students

Took difficult GRE test

Test described as either:

“Ability-diagnostic”
=stereotype relevant

“Ability-nondiagnostic”
=stereotype irrelevant

Figure 3

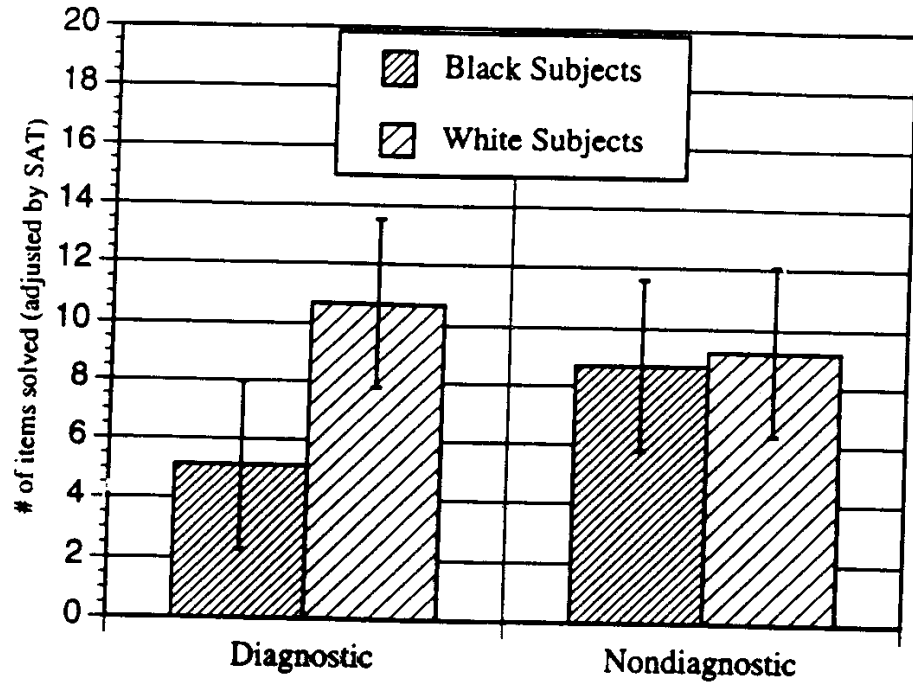
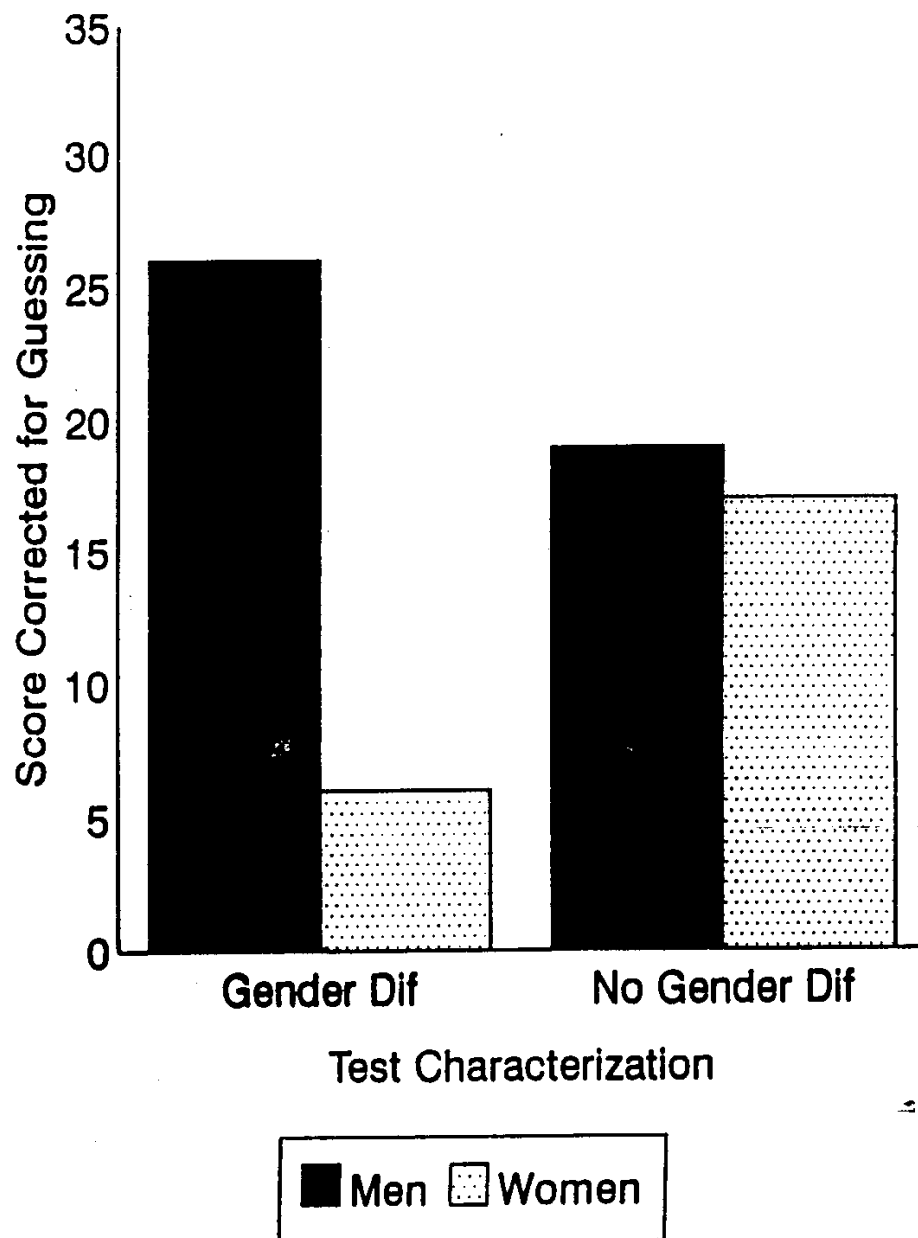


Figure 3.
Performance on a Difficult Math Test as a
Function of Gender and Test Characterization



Mentor's Dilemma

How to provide critical feedback without undermining recipient's motivation

Dilemma may prove acute when providing feedback across lines of difference

Some Examples of Positive Buffers

- "Fine work, nice progress... But halfway through your essay rambles off in a vague, shapeless way... With some more work and polishing this could be a very interesting paper."
- "This paper has some interesting, and perhaps testable ideas.... But it's discursive, long-winded, and circular.... Overall, nice work."

SUCCESSFUL MENTORS AND INTERVENTIONS

Invocation of high standards

Assurance of students' capacity to reach those standards

Examples:

- Treisman's Calculus Workshops
- Xavier University
- Kay Tolliver
- Jaime Escalante
- Lepper's Expert Tutors
- Levin's Accelerated Schools
- Georgia Tech's Engineering Curriculum
- Comer's School Development Program
- Steele's 21st Century Program

were not in evidence
enough as verse
to warrant
it

The typist home at teatime, who begins
~~to~~ clear ~~the~~ ~~table~~ ~~away~~ her ~~(broken)~~ breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out squalid food ~~in time~~;
Prepares the room and sets the room to rights.

Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations meet the sun's last rays,
And on the divan ~~pled~~, (at night her bed),
Are stockings, dirty camisoles, and stays.

A ~~(bright)~~ kimono wraps her as she ~~arrives~~
In nervous ~~torpor~~ on the window seat;
A touch of art is given by the false
Japanese print, ~~purchased in Oxford Street~~

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dug, ^{not in hand ledging?}
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest,
~~Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs,~~
I too awaited the expected guest.

A youth of ~~twentysans~~, spotted about the face,
One of those simple loiterers whom we say
We may have seen in any public place
At almost any hour of night or day.

Pride has not ~~fringed~~ his ~~with ambitious rage~~,
His hair is thick with grease, and thick with scurf,
~~perhaps~~ his inclinations touch the stage -
Not sharp enough to associate with the turf.

He, ^{is} the young man caruncular, ~~will stare~~
Boldly about, in "London's one cafe",
And he will tell her, ~~with a casual air~~,
Brandily "I have been with Nevinson today".

all around
night

~~Perhaps a cheap house agent's clerk, who flits
Daily, from flat to flat, with one bold stare;
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.~~

He munches with the same persistent stare,
He knows his way with women (and that's that!)
Impertinently tilting back his chair
And dropping cigarette ash on the mat.

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired;
Endeavours to engage her in caresses,
Which still are unreprieved, if undesired.

the
dona
les
30th
de
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inversions
not warranted
by any real
evidence
not
too
easy

Personal

Perhaps
be damn

92
+ 92
not
just

Procedure

Black students and White students recruited for journal competition to recognize favorite teachers.

At 1st session, wrote letter of commendation for favorite teacher.

Photo appended to letter.

1 week later, received constructive criticism from White evaluator.

Completed questionnaire.

CONDITIONS

- Unbuffered Criticism
- Criticism +
Positive Buffer
- Criticism +
High Standards and Assurance
("Wise Criticism")

CRITICISM + POSITIVE BUFFER CONDITION

**In this condition, criticism prefaced
by following comments:**

Overall, nice job. Your enthusiasm for your teacher really shows through, and it's clear that you must have valued her a great deal. You have some interesting ideas in your letter, and make some good points. In the pages that follow, I've provided some more specific feedback and suggested several areas that could be improved.

CRITICISM + HIGH STANDARDS + ASSURANCE CONDITION

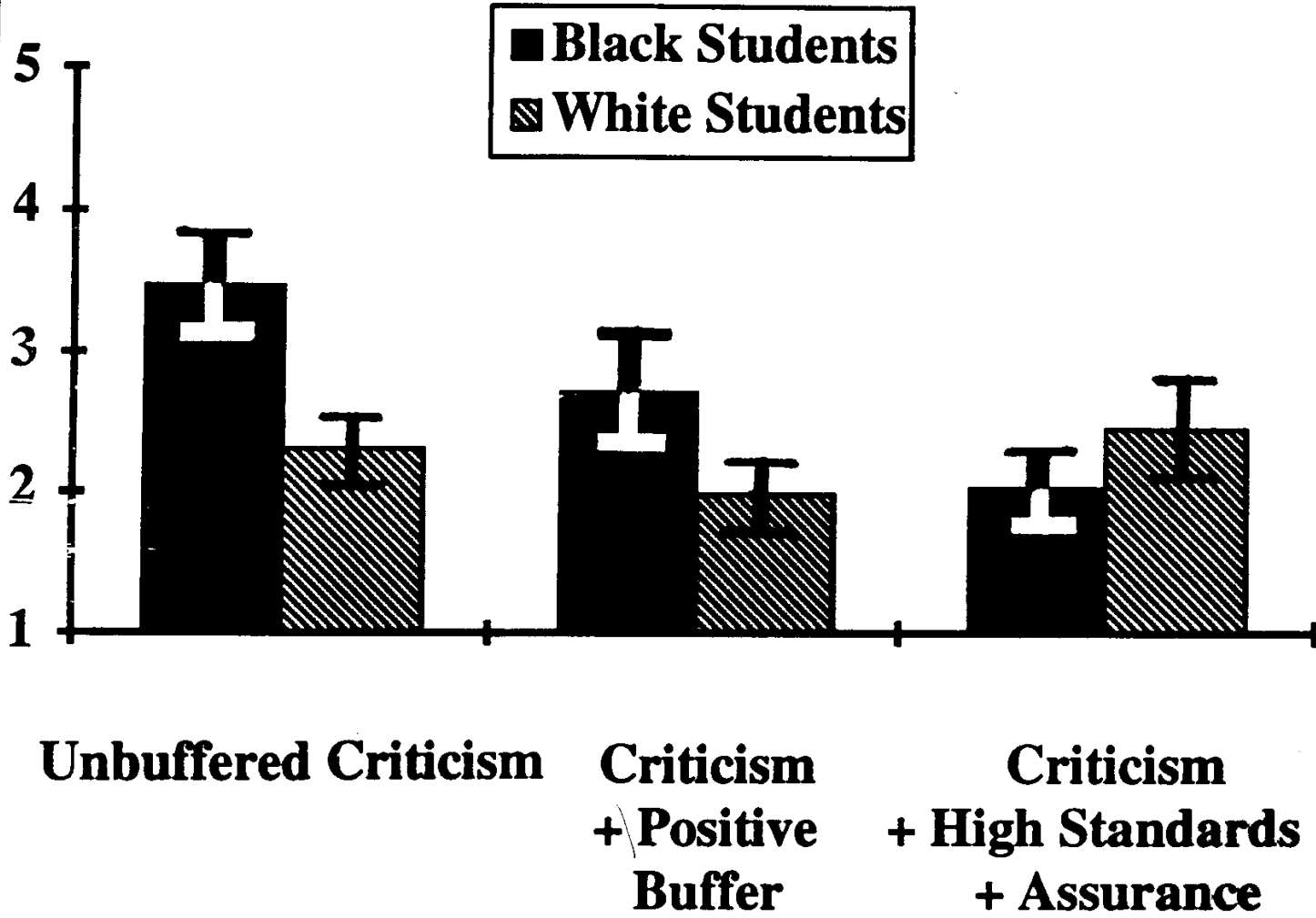
In this condition, criticism prefaced by following comments:

It's obvious to me that you've taken your task seriously and I'm going to do likewise by giving you some straightforward, honest feedback. The letter itself is okay as far as it goes--you've followed the instruction, listed your teacher's merits, given evidence in support of them, and, importantly, produced an articulate letter. On the other hand, judged by a higher standard, the one that really counts, that is, whether your letter will be publishable in our journal, I have serious reservations. The comments I provide in the following pages are quite critical, but I hope helpful. Remember, I wouldn't go to the trouble of giving you this feedback if I didn't think, based on what I've read in your letter, that you are capable of meeting the higher standard I mentioned.

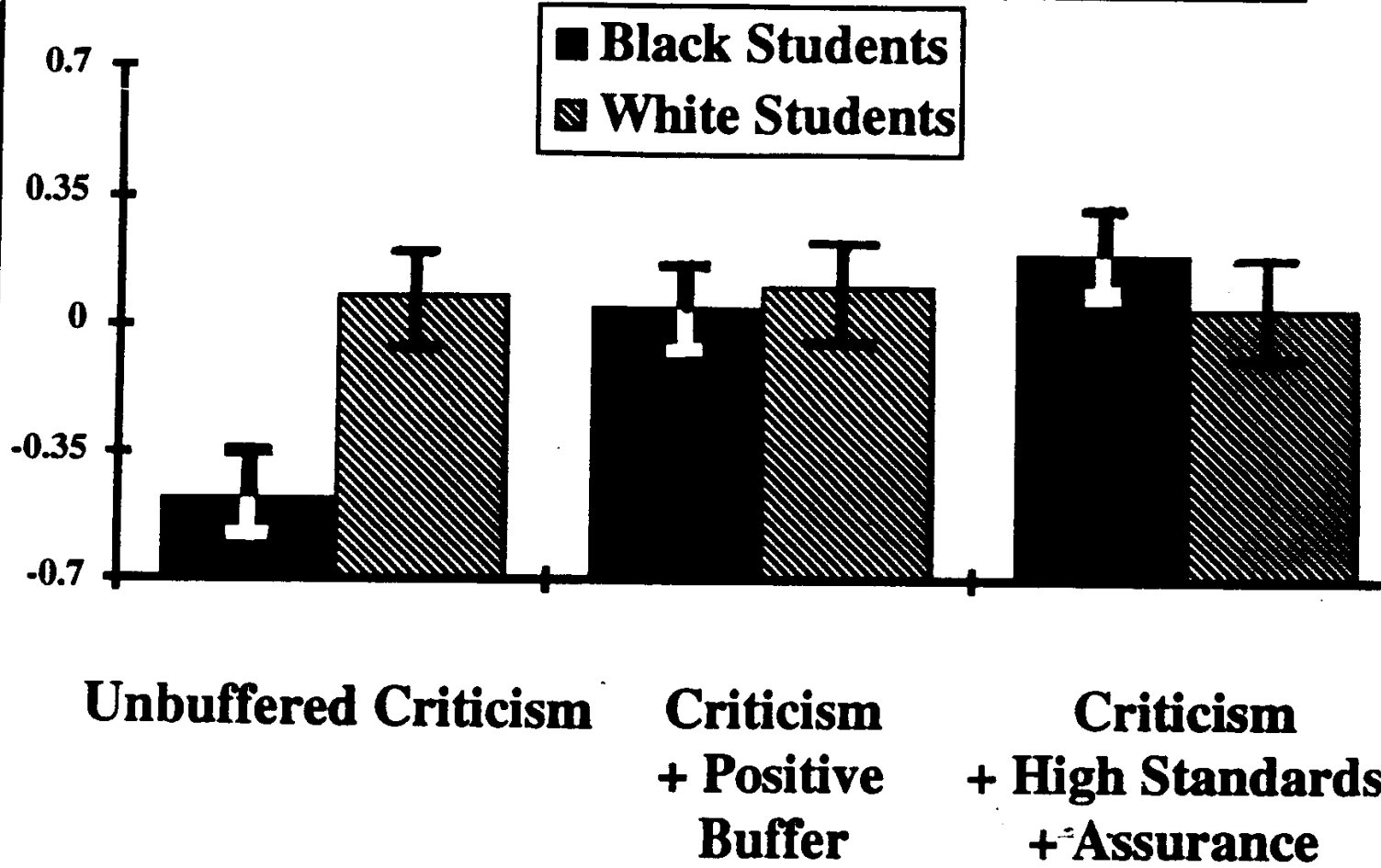
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Figure 1: RATINGS OF BIAS



**Figure 2: TASK MOTIVATION
(Adjusted Means)**



Wise Institutional Intervention

- 21st Century Program
- 250 students per year
- Multi-racial living/learning co-op
- Random assignment

WISE INGREDIENTS

1. Honorific recruitment
2. Emphasis on challenge
3. Rap sessions
4. Group study

21st Century Program Effects

Drop-Out Rates by Sophomore Year

	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Whites</u>
<u>Control</u>	37%	2%
<u>21st Century</u>	2%	1%

Professor Geoffrey Cohen
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Yale University

Bibliography to accompany overheads and presentation from AALS Conference
on New Ideas for Experienced Teachers, Calgary, June 9-13, 2001

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Stereotype threat and socioeconomic status:

Croizet, J., & Clair, T. (1998). Extending the concept of stereotype threat to social class: The intellectual underperformance of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 588-594.

Stereotype threat and basketball among white men:

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Stereotype threat and women in math:

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Stereotype threat and whites exposed to asian stereotype of math inferiority:

Aronson, J., Lustina, M., Keough, K., Brown, J. L., & Steele, C. M. (1999). When White men can't do math: Necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 29-46.

Aronson, J., Quinn, D. M., & Spencer, S. J. (1998). Stereotype threat and the academic underperformance of minorities and women. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 83-103). San Diego: Academic Press.

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Steele, C. M. (August 1999). Thin ice: "Stereotype threat" and Black college students. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 284, 44-54.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 797-811.

For the work on feedback by Steele, Ross, and myself, see:

Cohen, G. L., Steele, C. M., & Ross, L. D. The mentor's dilemma: Providing critical feedback across the racial divide. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 1302-1318.

For a neat study showing how whites usually give feedback to blacks (they give lots of positive feedback), see

Harber, K. (1998). Feedback to minorities: Evidence of a positive bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 622-628.