



Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do (*Issues of Our Time*) by Claude M. Steele, 2011

The goal of this book, as Claude M. Steele states, is to “Show how, as an unrecognized factor in our lives, it [stereotypes] can contribute to some of our most vexing personal and societal problems... [and to suggest] quite feasible things to reduce this threat [which] can lead to dramatic improvements in those problems.”

Stereotype Threat is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group. If negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group, group members are likely to become anxious about their performance, which may hinder their ability to perform at their maximum level.

Through research projects, Claude M. Steele demonstrates several situations where certain groups of people have experienced stereotype threat and the effect it has had on their performance.

Some suggestions made to reduce stereotype threat are:

- Discussions – particularly integrated, that everyone has similar problems.
- Self-Affirmation – to give the person a chance to step back, breathe and affirm a larger valued sense of self; to develop a self-affirming narrative of 2-3 most important values to that person.
- Teaching about expandable intelligence, that it comes in incremental steps. It is not only who you are at one moment in time.
- Fostering identity by providing safe and positive relationships with students; more child-centered teaching; use of diversity as a classroom resource not color-blindedness; teacher skills in warmth and availability

This book is a must read for every teacher and administrator. It is written in a purely clinical way that recognizes that everyone has biases, and challenges us to recognize them, understand how some assumptions can affect the performance of groups, and gives suggestions to help stereotyped groups to deal with their situations.