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Social Class is Dead. Long Live Social Class! Stereotype Threat among Low Socioeconomic Status Individuals

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Abstract Stereotype threat effects occur when members of a stigmatized group perform poorly on a task because they fear confirming a negative stereotype that is associated with their ingroup. The present study investigates whether the observed achievement gap in standardized testing between high- and low-socioeconomic status (SES) American students can be due, in part, to this phenomenon. Participants were placed in one of four conditions that varied in level of "threat" related to socioeconomic status. Results show that when socioeconomic identity is made salient before taking a test, or when the test is presented as diagnostic of intelligence, low-SES students perform significantly worse, and report much lower self-confidence, than low-SES participants in the non-threatening conditions. When threatening conditions converge, performance of low-SES students is at its worst level. These results help us better understand the role stereotyping plays in the academic performance of low-SES students, and may partly explain the disparity on standardized test scores between low- and high-SES students.

Keywords Stereotype threat · Social class · Socioeconomic status · GRE · Standardized testing

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In a classic episode of *The Simpsons*,[1] Cletus the Slack Jaw Yokel finds a shirt at the Bargain Barn for his girlfriend Brandine. He holds it up, the beaded tassels swaying, and tells her, "It says 'Classy Lassy', just like you." In the same episode Marge buys a Chanel suit at the Bargain Barn and continuously wears and alters the outfit in order to gain membership to an exclusive country club. This episode portrays two realities of social class in America. One, there are stereotypes about low-SES individuals, and two, low-SES people are aware of the stereotypes and worry about being judged accordingly.

Stereotypes about low-SES people are quite pervasive in American culture. Television shows with "blue collar" humor depict the ways in which poor people are dirty and talk funny. Gag gifts include "trailer trash" dolls that have a cigarette dangling from their lips and multiple babies in tow. Numerous films, commercials, and songs portray poor people as stupid yokels who spend all day drinking beer and shooting guns. These stereotypical images are widely held, and accepted; Jeff Foxworthy's "You might be a redneck if…" stand-up series has been nominated for multiple Grammy awards, and is the largest selling comedy album of all time. Based on such portraits, we can draw the conclusion that the American poor are dirty, violent, inbred, lazy, unkempt, carefree hillbillies. And, perhaps most damaging, that they are stupid.

When examining the success rate of low-SES students, statistics support these stereotypes. According to the College Board, a high-school senior whose parents did not complete high school themselves, scores, on average, 100 points lower on the SAT than the national average (Sacks, 2003). These test scores, with a confluence of mediating factors, contribute to college acceptance and enrollment rates. The College Board has also reported that out of the college bound seniors who took the SAT in 2005, only 8% had parents whose income was $20,000 or less. Additionally, among students of the most selective colleges, only 3% are from low-SES backgrounds (Sacks, 2004).

Educational Testing Service (ETS), the organization that administers standardized tests such as the GRE and SAT, notes that first generation college students generally do not perform as well on standardized tests as students whose parents completed college. They explain this gap by stating that, "parents with college degrees may be more inclined to motivate their children," "parents with college degrees may have a higher standard of living which enables their children to attend better quality schools," and, "parents with college degrees may provide extra educational resources in their home or in their recreational activities" (Educational Testing Service, 2003, p. 8).

This line of reasoning has lead to a number of theories explaining the achievement gap between low- and high-SES students. While some believe it is a matter of resources, pre-college training, parental support, or lack of role models (see Haycock, 2001; McGee, 2004; Rothsten, 2004; Simpson & Schnitzer, 2005 for a review), others believe that this underperformance is due to low-SES individuals' characteristics, rather than to contextual factors. When low-SES students do not perform well they confirm the stereotype held by society; a belief stated, for one, in

[1] "The Simpsons" is a popular American animated television show.

the Georgia General Assembly "that the poor do exhibit behaviors that…perpetuates their poverty. These behaviors include a lack of effort, ambition, thrift, talent and morals" (Beck, Whitley, & Wolk, 1999, p. 98; see Lott, 2002). Almost half of the country would agree; 43% of polled Americans believe that people are poor due to "lack of effort," while 53% believed that people became wealthy due to "strong effort" (Gallup Poll Social Audit, 1998[2]). Bill Cosby, in reference to high-school drop out rates, stated that, "the lower economic people are not holding up their end in this deal." Cosby blamed the failure of low-SES African-Americans on negligent parenting, improper grammar, and other personal traits (Dyson, 2005).

Rather than investigating why achievement gaps have been observed between low- and high-SES students, people may be inclined to see inequality as justified (Jost, 2001). Indeed, as argued by System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), members of both high and low status groups are motivated to maintain the status quo and legitimize the existing social structures through the use of stereotypes, whether positive (i.e., "salt of the earth") or negative (i.e., "white trash") (Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). Consistent with a system justification perspective, people tend to blame the poor for their poverty (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001).

Perceptions of High versus Low SES Individuals

Social psychological research has aimed to verify that the beliefs Americans hold toward low-SES individuals are in fact stereotypes and not reality. In a study of hypothesis-confirming bias, Darley and Gross (1983) found that when rating the academic ability of children, participants who viewed a child that they perceived to be of high-SES background rated the child to be performing *above* grade level. However, when participants believed that the same child was of low-SES background, they rated the child to be performing *below* grade level.

Miller, McLaughlin, Haddon, and Chansky (1968) examined class bias in teacher evaluations. Their findings also suggest that teachers display classism when estimating their students' abilities. When a student was perceived to be from a low-SES background, their academic ability, "classroom citizenship," and overall life attainment were believed to be lower than their high-SES counterparts.

Further research on social class has generally included SES as an additional variable in studies of stereotyping and prejudice. SES has been examined in relation to other social categories, such as race and ethnicity (Brezina & Winder, 2003; Niemann, O'Connor, & McClorie, 1998; Weeks & Lupfer, 2004), gender (Dasgupta, 2005; Willis & Carlson, 1993), sexuality (Cortese, 1989), eating disorders (Gard & Freeman, 1996), physical disabilities (Banks & Marshall, 2005), or some combination of the above (Jussim & Eccles, 1995; Madon et al., 1998; Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996; Murray, 1996; Triandis & Triandis, 1987).

Lott and Saxon (2002) examined the impressions that participants' formed when rating a woman who was running for the vice president of her children's Parent

[2] This study is based on a survey of 5,001 American adults, conducted between April 23 and May 31, 1998.

Teacher Organization (PTO). The target woman was perceived to be Latina, Jewish, or Anglo-Saxon, as well as working-class or middle-class. Across ethnicities, the working-class target was rated as significantly less strident, less perfectionist, more unemotional, meeker, cruder, more irresponsible, and more unsuitable than a middle-class target. The target's ethnicity did not lead to as much stereotyping as her class background.

Another study showed effects of both race and class in the perception of women. African American women were judged to be less emotional and passive then the White women, and the working-class women were judged as more hostile, dirty, inconsiderate, and irresponsible than the middle-class women (Landrine, 1999). Furthermore, research on stereotype content shows that welfare recipients are the only social group that is universally perceived as low in warmth and competence, as well as being disliked and disrespected (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999).

Such a dislike for low-SES individuals is, curiously, not confined to conservatives, who tend to show greater prejudice against, for instance, ethnic minorities (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). Professor of Education Ellen Brantlinger conducted an ethnography of affluent families and the ways in which they navigate the educational system. In her insightful interviews, Brantlinger asked the self-reported liberal parents about their class privilege. Adopting the American viewpoint that we are a "classless" society, unhindered by economic inequality, the high-income parents described their own children as ambitious, whereas working-class children were "low-ability," and "angry and at risk" (Brantlinger, 2003). Given that the families interviewed were highly educated, these attitudes are consistent with Jackman and Muha's (1984) findings that higher levels of education are associated with more negative attitudes toward low-SES individuals.

While, as the above examples show, low-SES Americans are stereotyped and stigmatized, there has been little psychological research that focuses on the effect of this from the low-SES victim's perspective. This gap in the psychological literature parallels the invisibility and exclusion that low-SES individuals already face in their interpersonal and institutional relations. The reason may be that psychologists generally base their theories on people who are similar to themselves, that is, middle-class, and thereby add to, and perpetuate, classism (Lott, 2002). Alternatively, this may be the consequence of the widely held concept of American exceptionalism: the longstanding belief that Americans, unlike their European counterparts, are not hindered by a class structure (Hartz, 1955), and that if people simply "work hard," they can rise above their class standing, thereby overcoming the stereotyping that is associated with their ingroup (Lipset, 1996).

Stereotype Threat

Despite the pervasiveness of stereotypes and prejudice about low-SES individuals, there has been virtually no research on the effect that it may have on the target. Traditional stereotyping and prejudice literature has focused on issues of race and gender (see Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981; Fiske, 1998; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995 for a review), with more recent research focusing on the many ways

stereotyping can affect the target of the prejudice (see Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991; Fredrickson et al., 1998; Major & O'Brien, 2005 for a review). One such line of research, known as "stereotype threat," has addressed the manner in which stereotyping can lead to decreased academic achievement for students who are highly identified with school in spite of the fact that society holds negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual capacities.

Stereotype threat occurs when members of a stigmatized group perform poorly on a task because they fear confirming negative stereotypes that are associated with their ingroup. While this effect has largely been studied with respect to African-Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and women taking math tests (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999), in the past several years a number of studies have appeared that have produced similar findings with Latinos (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002), gay men (Bosson, Haymovitz, & Pinel, 2004), athletes (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999), and White men (Leyens, Desert, Croizet, & Darcis, 2000; for a recent review, see Maass & Cadinu, 2003). In each study, participants were primed to think of their particular stereotyped demographic group (based on age, ethnicity, occupation, etc.) and were placed in conditions that did or did not evoke the stereotypes associated with the primed identity. For example, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) found that Asian-American women performed better on a math test, as compared to the control group, when first primed to think of their ethnicity (given that there is a positive stereotype about Asians and mathematical ability), but worse when primed to think of their gender (since there is a negative stereotype about women and mathematical ability).

Since the emergence of stereotype threat theory, psychologists, educators, and workplace researchers have examined the many ways that people are either hindered or helped by stereotypic associations with their ingroup. In the past decade of research, a number of studies have further explained the mediating factors of stereotype threat (e.g., Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005; Croizet et al., 2004; Schmader & Johns, 2003), as well as methods for combating stereotype threat (e.g., Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Ford, Ferguson, Brooks, & Hagadone, 2004; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005).

While stereotype threat has been shown to occur on dimensions such as memory among the elderly (Hess, Auman, Colcombe, & Rahhal, 2003) and athletic abilities amongst European Americans and African Americans (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999), its effect on academic performance is arguably the most detrimental. In the United States and elsewhere, the criteria and measurement of academic achievement is standardized testing. Is it possible, then, that the achievement gap between high- and low-SES students can be partly related to the negative stereotypes associated with low-SES individuals?

Some empirical evidence from a French sample suggests that this may indeed be the case. Croizet and Claire (1998) conducted a classic stereotype threat study in France on individuals of both high- and low-socioeconomic status, and asked them to complete a test that was either presented as a measure of intelligence or of memory. They found that low-SES students performed significantly worse in the intelligence condition as compared to the memory condition. Low-SES students in the latter condition, however, performed as well as their more affluent peers. In this

study, a further manipulation of the salience of socioeconomic status did not affect the results. Croizet and Claire interpreted this result as following from the very high awareness among the French low-SES students of their class standing. Paired with the fact that issues of class are widely discussed in France (Bourdieu, 2002), it is possible that for the low-SES French students, identity salience did not induce any further stereotype-based stress or anxiety that could have contributed to the typical stereotype threat effect.

While this study supports the idea that low-SES students do suffer from stereotyping, it is unclear whether the same effect could be replicated in the US, where the dominant ideology often denies the existence of social classes, and at best suggests that low-SES people can transcend their class standing more easily than low-SES people in other countries (Hartz, 1955). In fact, Croizet and Claire's findings have been critiqued on the basis that they are specific to France, a country that has a history of dialogue and revolution based on social class, and would not replicate in the US, a country that supposedly does not have distinct social classes (J. C. Croizet, personal communication, 2004).

In contrast to France, because socioeconomic status is not a widely discussed topic in America it is possible that for an American population, identity salience may play a larger role in inducing stereotype threat. That is, by revealing an identity that is both stigmatized and generally hidden, low-SES American students should feel more threatened than high-SES students, for whom no dominant stereotypes about intelligence exist. They should also feel more threatened than low-SES French students, for whom identifying socioeconomic status may not be as atypical as it is for low-SES Americans.

Overview of the Study

The current study expands upon Croizet and Claire's research to examine whether performance on a standardized test (GRE) among low-SES American students is affected by stereotype threat. The threat was manipulated by varying the presentation of the test (diagnostic versus nondiagnostic) and the salience of one's socioeconomic standing (SES salient vs. SES non-salient). Given that low-SES students have less confidence than visibly stigmatized or non-stigmatized groups (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998), the study also included two exploratory measures to gauge self-assurance. Participants completed a proofreading test that had grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors and were instructed to correct them to the best of their ability. The purpose of this measure was to determine whether stereotype threat impedes performance on easier tasks that have to do with confidence in subjective judgment in addition to traditional, objective standardized test measures. It was predicted that under threatening conditions, low-SES students would feel less secure in their own judgments on a task that requires strong verbal competence and agency. Lastly, participants completed a self-report measure that gauged how confident they felt about their performance on the GRE and proofreading tasks. This measure was included to assess whether low-SES participants would feel less confident about their performance and general verbal ability under the threatening conditions.

We predicted that low-SES students' performance and confidence on the standardized test would be worse when it was presented as diagnostic of intelligence, than when it was presented as a perceptual task. We also expected that low-SES students would underperform and be less confident (relative to high-SES students) when their socioeconomic status was made salient, due to the fact that, unlike in France, low-SES in America is a highly stigmatized yet concealed stigma. Previous research has shown that revealing a concealable, stereotyped social stigma can result in heightened stereotype threat (Quinn, Kahng, & Crocker, 2004). An additive effect of these two factors may also emerge, such that low-SES students' performance and confidence would be most affected when there is a convergence of high-SES salience and the test is presented as diagnostic of intelligence.

Method

Design and Participants

This experiment took the form of a 2 × 2 factorial design. The factors were test conditions, in which participants were told that they were taking a test of verbal intelligence (diagnostic condition) or verbal perception (non-diagnostic condition), and SES salience, manipulated by asking participants to report parents' income and occupation before taking the test (SES salient condition) or after taking the test (non-salient condition). Therefore, participants were assigned to one of four conditions: Diagnostic/Salient, Diagnostic/Non-Salient, Non-Diagnostic/Salient, Non-Diagnostic/Non-Salient. The impact of these factors was expected to be further moderated by income level.

Test performance and self-reported confidence were the primary dependent variables. Forty-six students constituted our sample, with a mean age of 23.2 years (SD = 5.9), ranging from 19 to 53 years, with various ethnicities represented (61% White, 15% Asian, 6% Latino, 6% African American, 6% multi-racial, and 6% who chose not to identify). The average reported parents' income was $65,000–$80,000.

Measures

The objective task consisted of 15 difficult questions from the verbal section of the GRE; five sentence completion problems, five antonym problems, and five analogy problems. The questions had previously been answered correctly by approximately 15–30% of GRE test takers (Educational Testing Service, 2002).

The subjective task was comprised of a two-page proofreading test in which participants were instructed to correct for grammar, spelling, and general style. Following the measures, participants then completed a Likert-scale questionnaire that assessed how confident they had felt (e.g., "How confident you were in choosing answers for the sentence completion task?"), as well as their self-reported identification and competency in the domain (e.g., "How important is it to you to

have good verbal skills?"; "How proficient are your individual verbal skills compared to other students?").

A demographic form that asked for parents' income and occupation was attached to the materials. Therefore, the participants either filled out the form before or after completing the test. Income was measured in dollars according to the following scale: less than 20, 20–35, 35–50, 50–65, 65–80, 80–95, and 95 K and above (recoded as 1–7). Participants also completed additional demographic information about race and gender.

Procedure

Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis at several local colleges. The materials were distributed in packet form and participants filled them out individually, monitored and timed by a research assistant. On half of the packets the instructions stated that the participants were going to take a *test of verbal intelligence* (diagnostic condition), whereas on the other half the instructions stated that the participants were going to engage in a *task of attention and perception* (nondiagnostic condition). In the nondiagnostic condition, in order to foster our cover story that the test was a measure of perception, participants also completed a bogus pre-test that determined whether they were "over-estimators" or "under-estimators." The participants never received feedback for this measure, so that it would not affect subsequent tasks. In half of the packets the demographic form that probed about SES came before the test measures (SES salient condition) and in half the demographic form came after all the measures (SES non-salient condition).

Participants were informed that the GRE and proofreading tasks were timed, and were given 15 min to complete the GRE, and 10 min to complete the proofreading task. Following the GRE and proofreading measures, participants were given as much time as needed to complete a brief questionnaire that asked about how confident they felt on all of the previous tasks, their verbal ability in general, and how personally important it was for them to have good verbal skills. Finally, all participants completed the remaining demographic questions for age, ethnicity, gender, and SAT scores.

Results

GRE

We first computed a composite score for the GRE questions by simply counting the number of correct answers. Thus, this score had a theoretical range of 0–15. The actual range was 0–11 ($M = 4.17$; $SD = 2.64$). Prior to using this as the dependent variable, we transformed the score to normalize the distribution.[3] This score (tGRE)

[3] Following Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) a log transformation was used, which resulted in a significant reduction in skewness and kurtosis and eliminated the deviation from normality (Shapiro-Wilk $W = .96$, $p < .20$).

was entered as the dependent variable with Diagnosticity (high vs. low), SES Salience (salient vs. non-salient), income, and their products, as predictors. Because income was a continuous variable, it was centered before it was entered into the model. As in previous studies (e.g., Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Steele & Aronson, 1995), and following recent discussions on covariance models (Yzerbyt, Muller, & Judd, 2004), we entered as a covariate the SAT score as well as its product with Diagnosticity and Income.[4]

This analysis revealed a significant main effect of income, $F(1,35) = 4.85$, $p < .03$. The higher the income, the better the performance on the tGRE score ($\beta = .55$). The two-way interaction between SES Salience and income also came out significant, $F(1,35) = 6.78$, $p < .01$. Further tests revealed that at low levels of income (1 SD below the mean), SES Salience did impact performance significantly, $t(35) = 3.03$, $p < .01$. As expected, low-SES students performed more poorly in the salient condition ($M = .24$) than in the non-salient condition ($M = .72$). At high income levels, the students in the non-salient condition ($M = .68$) performed just as well as those in the salient condition ($M = .74$), $t(35) = -.58$, n.s.

The interaction between diagnosticity and income also reached significance, $F(1,35) = 4.01$, $p < .05$, revealing a pattern that was consistent with the hypothesis. High-SES students performed better in the diagnostic than in the non-diagnostic condition ($Ms = .82$ and .60, respectively; $t[35] = -2.53$, $p < .01$), whereas low-SES students showed a non-significant trend in the opposite, expected direction ($Ms = .39$ and .57, respectively). Importantly, the three-way interaction was significant, $F(1,35) = 5.31$, $p < .02$. As can be seen by looking at the estimated means plotted in Fig. 1, low-SES students performed worse in the Diagnostic/SES salient condition than in all other conditions (ps $< .03$, with the exception of the non-diagnostic/SES salient condition, $p < .15$). The same condition was, however, the most profitable to high-SES students (ps $< .06$ or less). Accordingly, income was a significant predictor of performance only in the Diagnostic/SES Salient condition ($p < .02$).

Confidence Ratings[5]

The same analytical strategy was used to assess the impact of the various factors on the degree of confidence participants had in their ability to perform on the GRE test. The main effect of income was significant, $F(1,34) = 6.26$, $p < .01$, indicating that the higher the income, the higher the confidence ($\beta = .53$). This effect was, however, moderated by both Diagnosticity, $F(1,34) = 11.03$, $p < .002$, and SES Salience, $F(1,34) = 7.91$, $p < .01$. At high levels of income, higher confidence scores were obtained in the diagnostic than in the non-diagnostic condition ($M = 4.33$ and 2.96, respectively; $p < .01$), and in the high salience compared to the

[4] We are grateful to Vincent Yzerbyt for his suggestions regarding these analyses.

[5] This variable did not show significant skewness, so it was not transformed. Due to one missing value on this variable, the sample size for these analyses is 45.

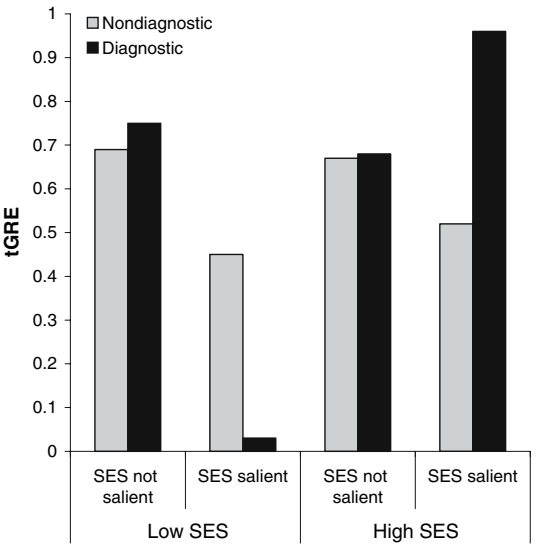

Fig. 1 Estimated means for tGRE as a function of experimental condition and SES level

low salience condition ($M = 4.39$ and 2.90, respectively; $p < .02$). At low levels of income, the reverse pattern emerged, with less confidence in the diagnostic than the non-diagnostic condition ($M = 1.00$ and 3.35, respectively; $p < .02$), and in the high salience condition than the low salience condition ($M = -3.09$ and 1.21, respectively; $p < .05$). The 3-way interaction did not reach significance.

Proofreading

We measured performance on the proofreading task by taking several variables into consideration. Coders scored the proofreading tests based on four measures: number of objective corrections (e.g., spelling and grammar); number of subjective corrections (e.g., rephrasings and style); number of extra notes written down regarding the content of the essay, and the total amount of the first three scores combined. No significant effects of SES were found for any of these measures.

Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to test whether American low-SES students would be affected by stereotype threat in a society that is often portrayed as "classless" yet maintains very strong SES stereotypes. The pattern of findings that emerged yields support for this idea, by showing that if their socioeconomic status was made salient prior to completing a GRE test, low-SES students performed significantly more poorly than they did when their socioeconomic status had not been made salient. The same pattern emerged with regard to the other factor that we manipulated, namely diagnosticity. When the task was presented as diagnostic,

low-SES students performed significantly worse than they did when the task had been presented as a perception-task. The worst performance appeared among low-SES students in the diagnostic/SES salient condition; in this condition, high-SES students performed best. In addition to the GRE task, our study also included a proofreading test. On this dependent variable, however, no effects of our manipulations emerged. This may be due in part to the fact that the proofreading test was not as difficult at the GRE task and, generally, stereotype threat emerges only in very difficult academic tasks.

Mirroring the results on actual performance was the pattern of findings for the confidence self-report. Income interacted with both diagnosticity and SES salience, and the estimated means showed that the least confidence arose in the diagnostic and high salience condition among low-SES students. This result, of course, could simply be the consequence of an accurate performance estimate and not necessarily a cause of the effect. Even in this case, however, it is interesting insofar as it suggests that students are aware of how they are performing. This may create a snowball effect, whereby the initial effect of the stereotype threat causes a lowering in confidence as a consequence of students' self-monitoring, and this, in turn, could further affect their performance.

These findings thus yield evidence that the same stereotype threat effects previously observed with stereotyped groups such as African-Americans and women occur for those in a low socioeconomic position. In addition to providing the first evidence for such class-based stereotype threat effects in the United States, our study confirms that stereotype threat affects a stigmatized group that is not as visible as ethnic minorities or females.

For the main variable of interest, namely, GRE performance, we found stronger effects for SES salience than for the diagnosticity of the task. This is consistent with the explanation given by Croziet and Claire (1998) in regards to their finding that identity salience did not produce stereotype threat effects. They suggest that, "class stereotypes…have a long history in French society" (p. 593) and that, "[low-SES] students carry knowledge of their SES level and its societal connotations, making it impossible to raise their current level of awareness" (p. 594). While there is also a long history of system-justifying class stereotypes in the United States, whether they are magnanimous such as "salt of the earth" or negative such as "white trash," American history and ideology suggest that the US is a relatively "classless" society. As a result of this belief, Americans may not be as aware of their class standing as were Croizet and Claire's French participants. Thus, an experimental manipulation of SES saliency may more easily bring about the expected effects. The fact that it was the effect of SES salience that was stronger is also of particular interest because of the implications for standardized testing practices. Indeed, students do report SES-related demographic information, such as parents' income and level of education when taking standardized tests. Additionally, low-SES students who file for fee waivers for standardized tests must go through a humiliating process of "proving" that their parents' are in fact poor enough to qualify for the waiver. After the students' school has verified that the parents are in fact low-SES, the student must then bring a large, yellow paper waiver to the test station and turn it in right before taking the test. Those who have pre-paid do not

have to exchange any money on the day of testing; all the transactions are done over the phone or online via credit card beforehand. These practices can certainly serve as identity primes, and probably as much stronger primes than what we used in this study. Our findings, therefore, are consistent with the idea that at least part of the large discrepancy regularly found between high and low income groups in American standardized testing (College Board, 2005) may be attributable to factors that have little to do with the actual intellectual skills of the individual taking the test.

This is not good news, particularly because of the virtual lack of institutional policies designed to rectify class inequality in the access to higher education. Policies that attempt to increase diversity usually target ethnic diversity, but this does not necessarily increase the number of low-SES students. Indeed, college students from traditionally underrepresented groups, such as Latino-Americans and African-Americans, tend to be from relatively high-SES backgrounds (Sacks, 2003). It appears that socioeconomic diversity and equality remains to be one of the last frontiers for social justice in America.

Our findings thus add a new dimension to the ongoing debate in higher education regarding both the validity of standardized testing and the importance of recognizing economic diversity as a factor that can relate to achievement. Once this idea is more widely accepted, perhaps there will be more psychological research focusing on socioeconomic status, and we will next find a way to combat the stereotyping and prejudice of low-SES individuals and the negative impact that these have on their lives.

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