Encouraging Retention in Less Traditional College Students: Assignments and Strategies

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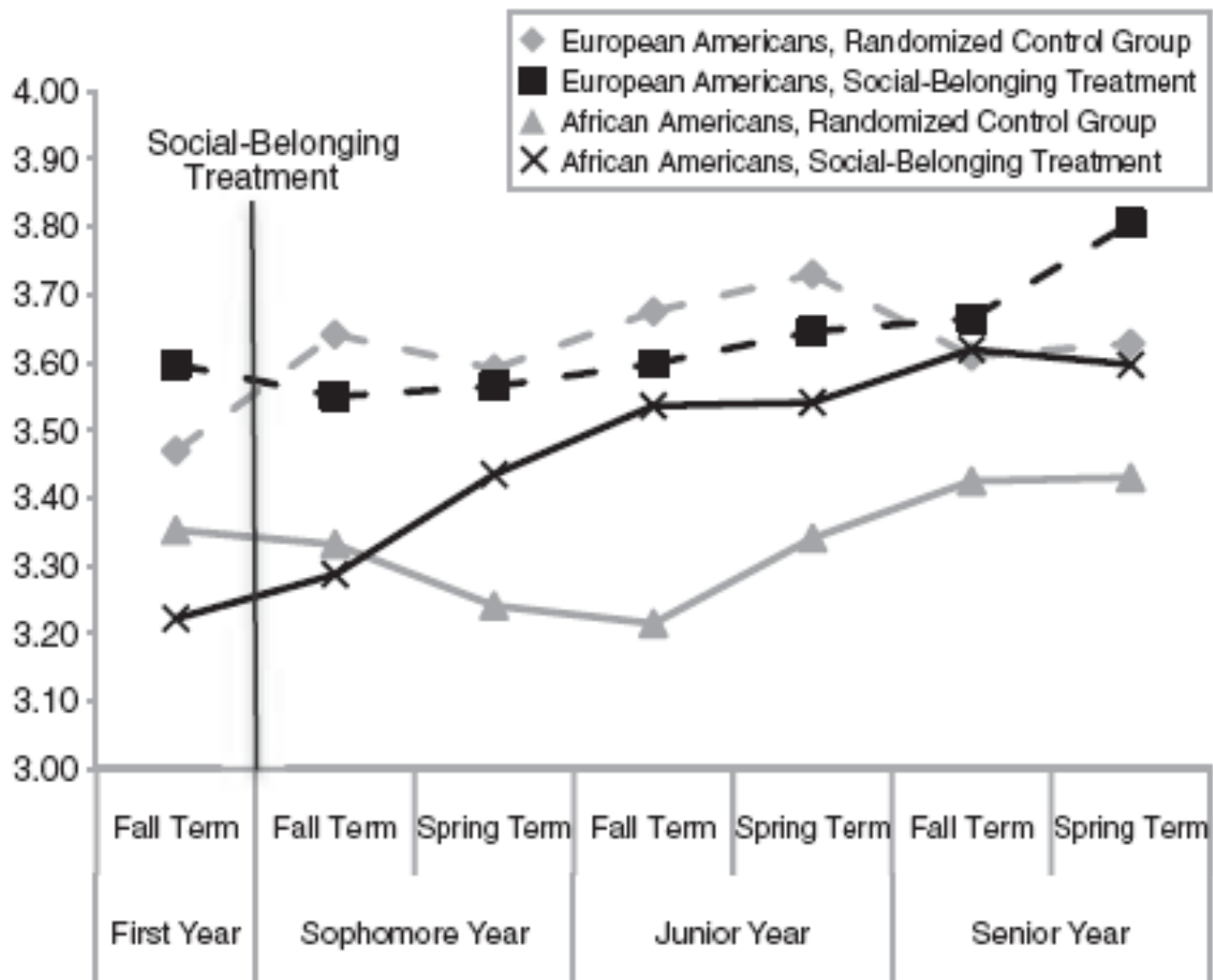
May 18, 2016

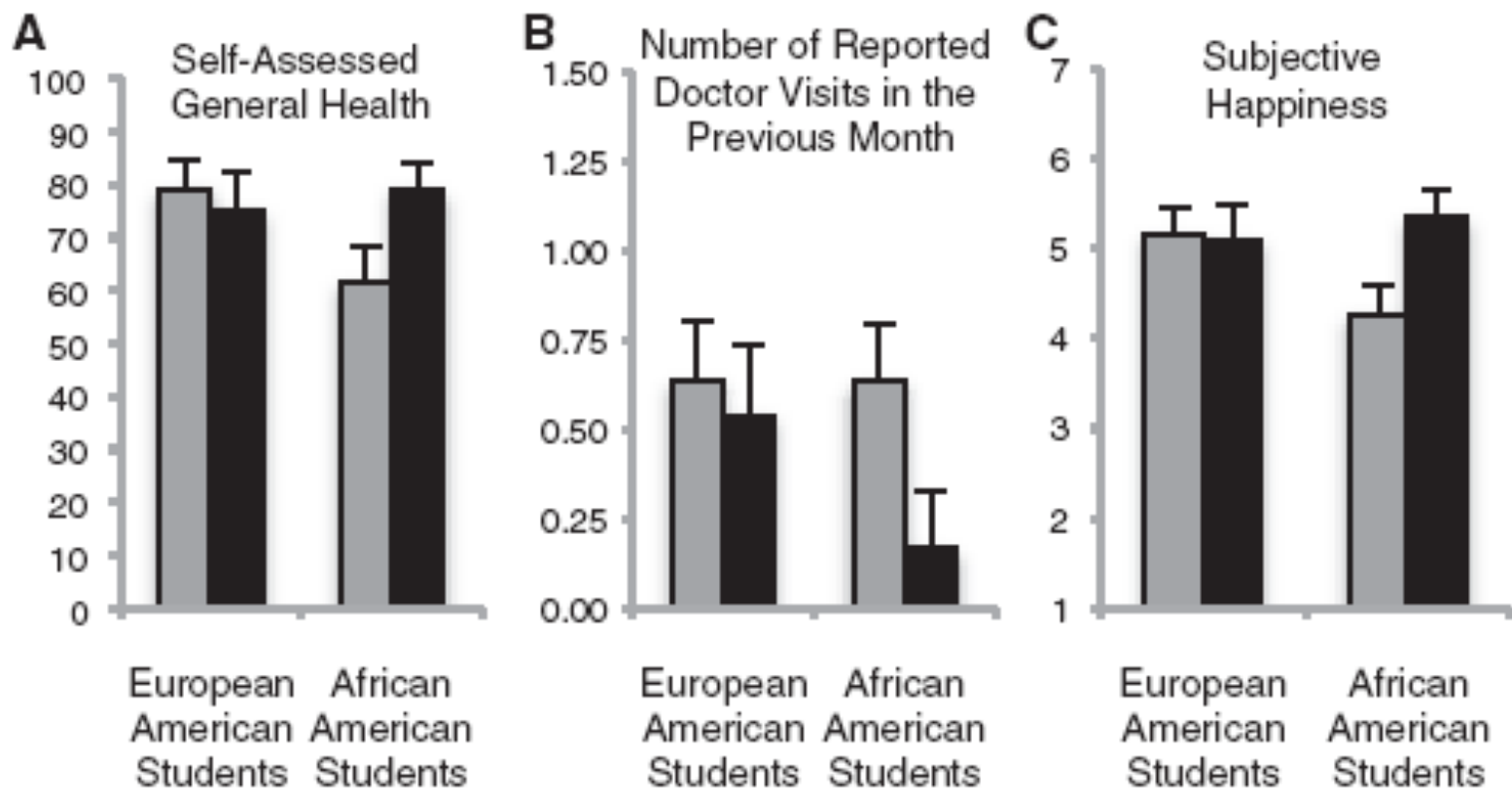# Social Belonging Intervention

- Original study done at Stanford (Walton,G., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). [A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students](). *Science*,331, 1147-1151.)

- Follow up work done at UT Austin ([http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/magazine/who-gets-to-graduate.html?_r=0]())

- New work being done at small schools through Great Lakes College Association

How the intervention worked...

- Students given several statements that communicated how common it was for students to struggle with belonging in both a social and academic sense when they first arrive on campus
- Students are asked to write an essay/make a video sharing their experiences (or what their experiences might be) that could be used to help other new students

European Americans, Randomized Control Group
European Americans, Social-Belonging Treatment
African Americans, Randomized Control Group
African Americans, Social-Belonging Treatment

Social-Belonging Treatment

4.00
3.90
3.80
3.70
3.60
3.50
3.40
3.30
3.20
3.10
3.00

Fall Term   Fall Term   Spring Term   Fall Term   Spring Term   Fall Term   Spring Term

First Year   Sophomore Year   Junior Year   Senior Year

A Self-Assessed General Health

B Number of Reported Doctor Visits in the Previous Month

C Subjective Happiness

Legend: ☐ Randomized Control Group   ■ Social-Belonging Treatment

European American Students / African American Students

"I didn't go to a very good high school, and I worried that my high school courses had not prepared me well for college. Honestly, when I got here, I thought professors were scary. I thought they were critical and hard in their grading, and I worried a lot about how they and other students would evaluate me. I was nervous about speaking in class and I didn't like other people to read my papers. Around my sophomore year I felt more comfortable – I began to enjoy my classes more and I found some close friends who I trusted. I also became more comfortable speaking in class, and sometimes I asked my friends to edit my papers for me. And I saw that even when professors are critical, or their grading harsh, it didn't mean they looked down on me or that I didn't belong. It was just their way of motivating high-achieving [school name] students."
- junior, White male

"When I first got to [school name], I worried that I was different from other [students at] [school name]. Everyone else seemed so certain that they were right for [school name], I wasn't sure I fit in. Sometime after my first year, I came to realize that many people come to [school name] uncertain whether they fit in or not. Now it seems ironic – everybody feels they are different freshman year from everybody else, when really in at least some ways we are all pretty similar. Since I realized that, my experience at [school name] has been almost one-hundred percent positive."

- senior, African American female

Narrative and Culturally Relevant Approaches

- S. McCoy, S. Sherwin, L. Tomas Bustillos "The Narrative Approach: A Culturally Relevant Tool" *Diversity and Democracy*, Fall 2014, Vol. 17, No. 4.

Context

- Tribal college in NW Montana
- Originally developed for students in academic recovery program for students in academic or financial aid trouble
- Increased successful completion of academic recovery program from 20% to over 75%
- More recently added to new student orientation and non-cognitive support courses for developmental studies students
- Increased successful completion of developmental studies program by as much as 40%

Prompts on Story Map Worksheet

- **How will your story end the way it is being written now? How do you want your story to end?**

  – Encouraging goal oriented behavior; maintaining focus on academic success

- **What events inspired you to write this story?**

  – Encouraging intrinsic motivation necessary to persevere through challenges

- **Who are the main characters of the story?**

  – Encourages reflection both about their traits and identity, but also to reflect on how to maximize positive influences and minimize negative ones

- **What are the problems faced by the main character, and how are they solved?**

  – Encourages engagement in problem solving to deal with obstacles; also asks them to anticipate unexpected "plot twists"

First Gen Students & Cultural Mismatch

- As Ian and I discussed last year, students may differ in culture, i.e., collectivist versus individualist.

- These differences may relate to different views of the self, i.e., interdependent and independent respectively.
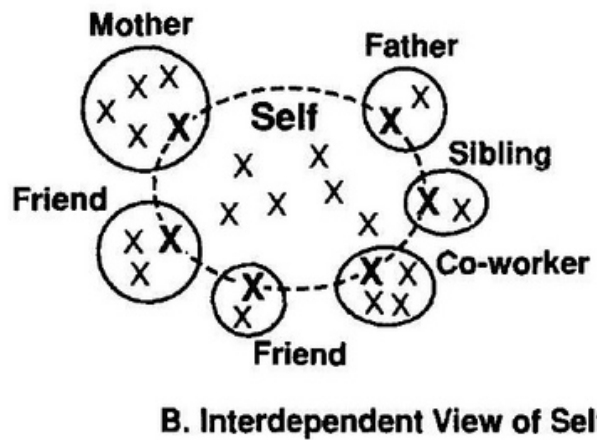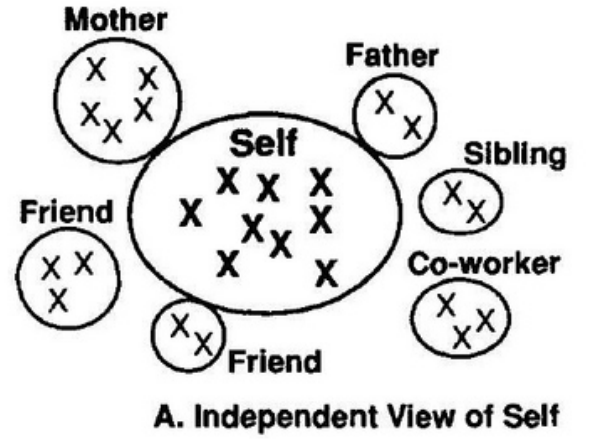

Mother
Father
Self
Sibling
Friend
Co-worker
Friend

A. Independent View of Self

Mother
Father
Self
Sibling
Friend
Co-worker
Friend

B. Interdependent View of Self

Figure 1. Conceptual representations of the self. (A: Independent construal. B: Interdependent construal.)

Markus, H., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98,* 224-253.

First Gen Students & Cultural Mismatch

- "Students from American middle-class contexts, for example, are typically exposed to and required to enact norms of independence, such as a focus on individual development, personal choice, and self-expression prior to college" (p. 1180).

- "Students from American working-class contexts, on the other hand, are typically exposed to and required to enact norms of interdependence prior to college, such as adjusting to and responding to others' needs and connecting to others. The material and social conditions common in working-class contexts tend to require and ultimately promote this model (Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Stephens et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2007)" (p. 1180).

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A, Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How the American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102,* 1178-1197.

First Gen Students & Cultural Mismatch

- Cultural Mismatch Theory

Middle-class American Contexts

Continuing-generation student (independent model of self)

EXPERIENCE OF SETTING — TASK CONSTRUAL — TASK PERFORMANCE

Match

University Culture (norms of independence)

Comfort — Task Less Difficult — Perform Well

Discomfort — Task More Difficult — Perform Poorly

Mismatch

First-generation student (interdependent model of self)

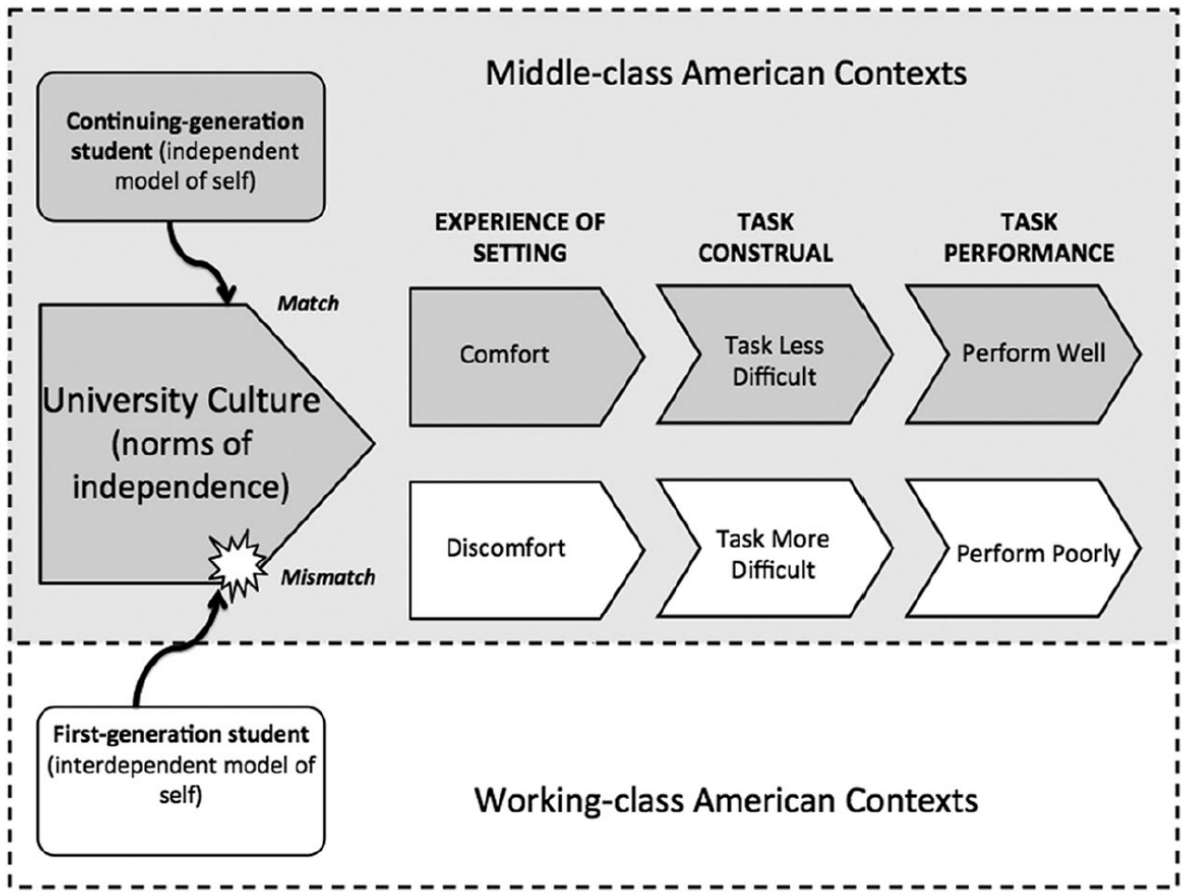Working-class American Contexts

Figure 1. Cultural mismatch theory. Model of the divergent pathways through which a match or mismatch between institutional cultural norms and students' norms can bolster or undermine academic performance.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How the American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102,* 1178-1197.

First Gen Students & Cultural Mismatch

- Do the different cultural messages affect student performance?
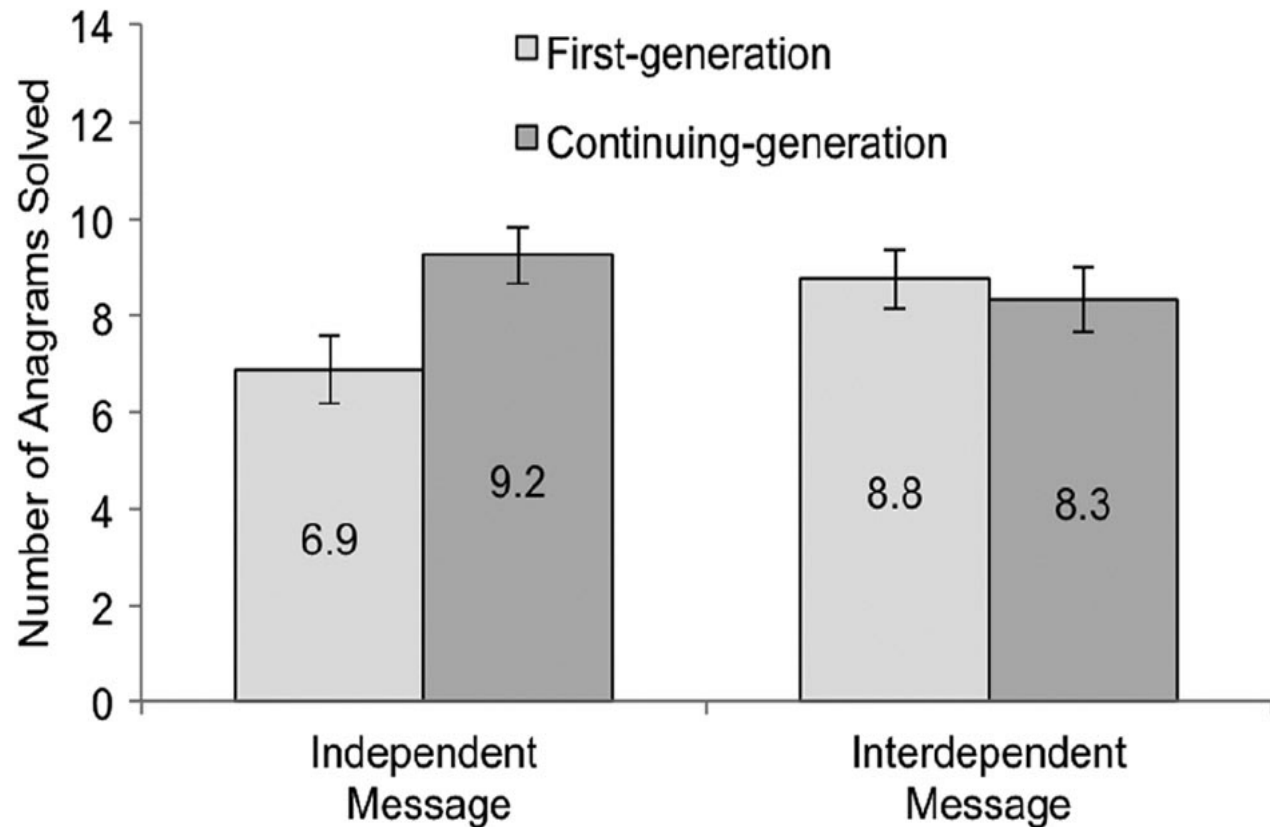
Figure 2. Mean number of anagrams solved by student social class and condition in Study 3. Error bars represent standard errors.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How the American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102,* 1178-1197.

First Gen Students & Cultural Mismatch

- What exactly are these different cultural messages?

Welcome letter supposedly from the university president.

Independent letter themes:

(a) learning by exploring personal interests
(b) expressing ideas and opinions
(c) creating your own intellectual journey
(d) participating in independent research

"[your university] has a tradition of independence: of bold students who assert their own ideas, thoughts, and opinions."

Interdependent letter themes:

(a) learning by being part of a community
(b) connecting with fellow students and faculty
(c) working together with and learning from others
(d) participating in collaborative research.

"[your university] has a tradition of learning through community—bridging academic study with public service."

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How the American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102,* 1178-1197.

Students of Color & Belonging

- What is academic belonging?

"Academic belonging is the view of oneself as 'fitting in' in school—that is, having the qualities necessary to succeed in school and to be accepted by others there (Battistich & Hom, 1997; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Osterman, 2000)" (Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia & Cohen, 2012, p. 482).

Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(3), 479-496. doi:10.1037/a0026312
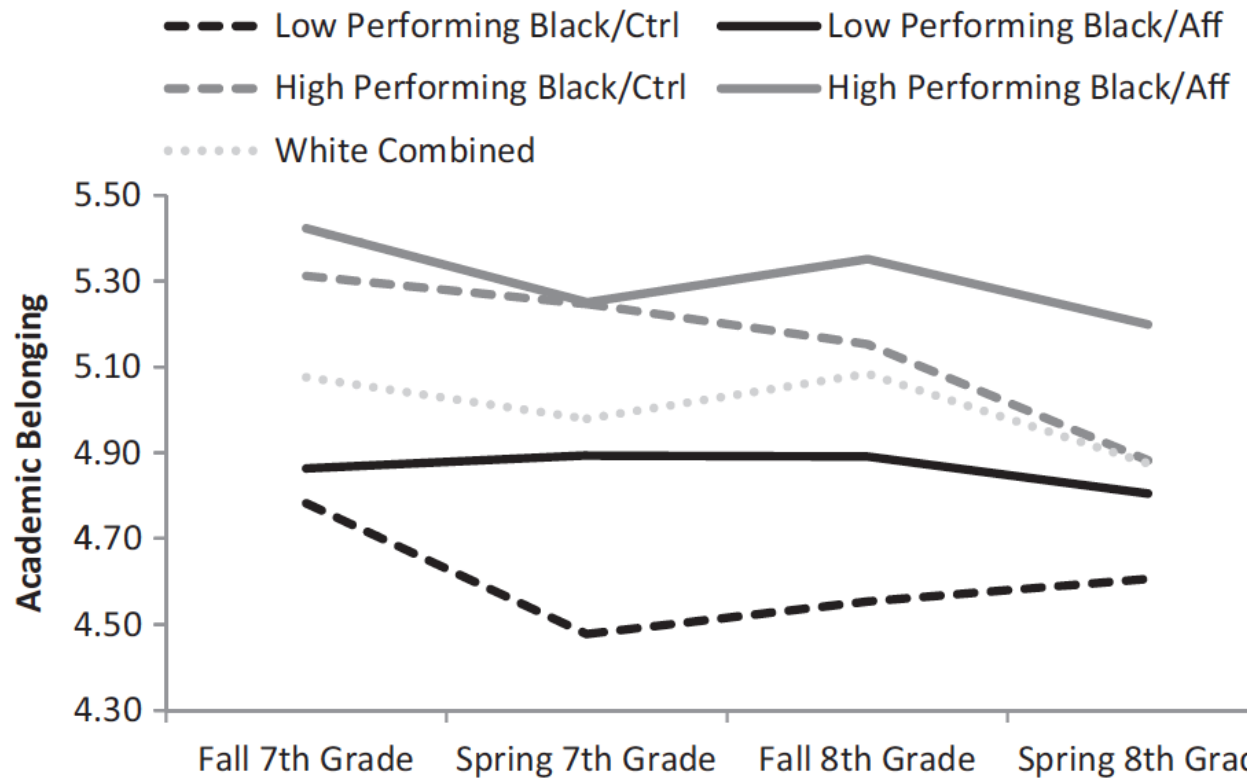
Students of Color & Belonging

- How can we instill a sense of academic belonging?

In potentially threatening contexts, we can remind people of their own cherished values and views of self (Steele, 1988).

When students write an essay about things that they cherish, it reminds them of their self-worth and self-integrity thus buffering them from perceived threats to self-worth (such as not belonging).

Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(3), 479-496. doi:10.1037/a0026312

Students of Color & Belonging

- How can we instill a sense of academic belonging?

- Students rank a list of values.

- In the *affirmation condition*, they write an essay about why their top ranked values are important to them.

- In the *control condition*, they write about why their bottom ranked values may be important to someone else.

Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *102*(3), 479-496. doi:10.1037/a0026312

Stude

- Does the affirmation intervention have an effect on belonging?

Figure 3. Longitudinal trajectory of academic belonging for Black students as a function of grade point average (GPA) and condition and for White students combined. Values are predicted means, computed 1 *SD* below (low performing) and above (high performing) the mean for GPA in the control (Ctrl) and affirmation (Aff) conditions for Black students and averaged across preintervention performance and condition for White students.

Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*(3), 479-496. doi:10.1037/a0026312

Stude

- Does belonging predict subsequent GPA?
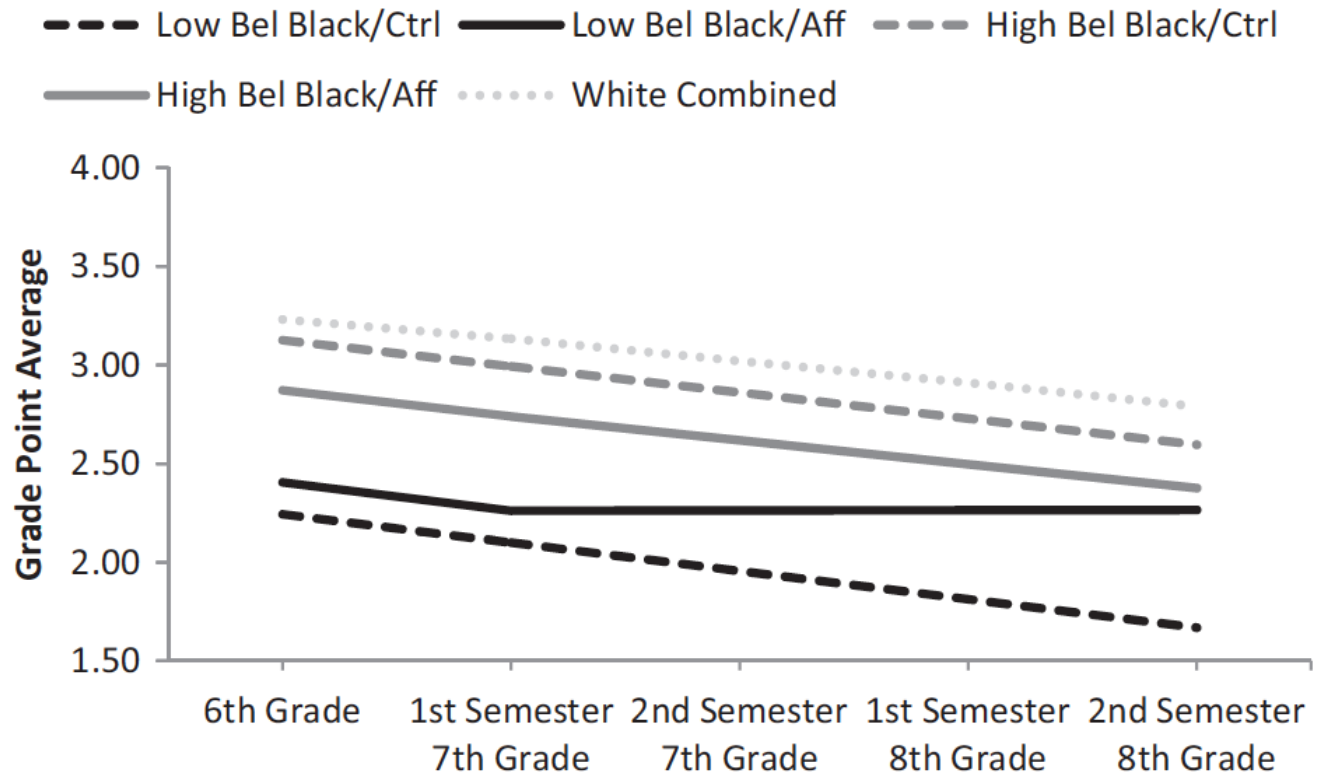
Figure 6. Grade point average for Black students as a function of prein-tervention academic belonging (Bel) and condition and White students combined. Values are predicted means, computed 1 *SD* below (low belonging) and above (high belonging) the mean for belonging in the control (Ctrl) and affirmation (Aff) conditions for Black students and averaged across belonging and condition for White students.

Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*(3), 479-496. doi:10.1037/a0026312

Women

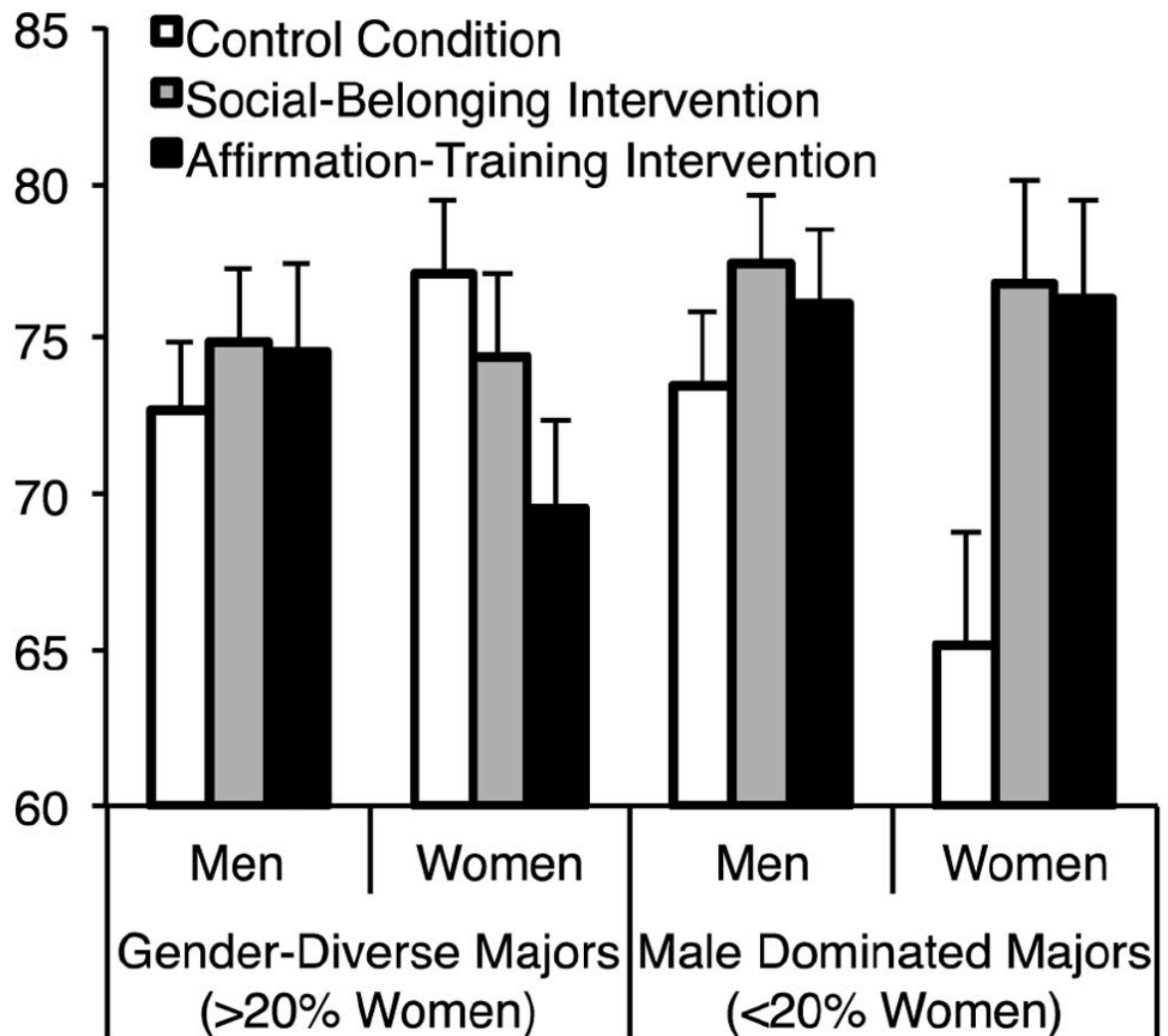- Does belonging predict subsequent GPA?

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Figure 1. First-year engineering grade point average (GPA), which is calculated on a scale from 0 to 100. Sixty is the average needed to remain in engineering; scores above 80 qualify students for the dean's honor list. Means are adjusted for average within-major GPA. Error bars represent $+1$ standard error. The y axis represents approximately 2.30 standard deviations. Sample sizes: $N_{men} = 118$; $N_{women} = 73$.

Walton, G. M., Logel, C., Peac[...] mitigate a 'chilly climate' trans[...] engineering. *Journal of Educa[...]*

For the next 10-15 minutes, think about how you could incorporate one or more of these strategies into an assignment for a CI course or other 100-level course enrolling mostly freshmen

- How would you incorporate it into your course?
- When in the semester would it come?
- Is there a way to relate it to your course content?
- How do you respond to what students say or share in this assignment?

Discussion Plan

- Sharing of assignment ideas and/or thoughts

- Other strategies you've found successful for working with students from less traditional backgrounds?