

# Managing Stereotypes in the Classroom: What Stereotypes Exist and How Do We Respond? An Abstract



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**Abstract** As educators, we are charged with ensuring the best possible classroom experience for our students. However, all educators have their own biases, prejudices, and misperceptions that they bring into the classroom with them. Stereotypes are defined as group generalizations that link group members to typical attributes or behaviors (Correll et al. 2010). Stereotypes are a way that we simplify the world around us and reduce the amount of time we have to spend processing new environmental cues. Group-based stereotypes are often negative, but can also be positive or mixed, and generally form an expectation about how a member of that group should behave. The purpose of this research is twofold. First, we attempt to identify the most common stereotypes that professors engage in the classroom setting. The most common stereotypes include age, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Interestingly, mental health, weight, and whether a student is a student athlete or not also generate stereotypes in the classroom. Second, and more importantly, we attempt to examine the activation response that occurs for professors when faced with a stereotype. Stereotype activation can be defined as “the increased accessibility of the constellation of attributes that are believed to characterize members of a given social category” (Wheeler and Petty 2001, p. 797). Stereotypes are typically activated by a variety of external environmental stimuli that can range from subtle to blatant and differ by individual. When a stereotype is activated, people generally engage in a response behavior. Typical classroom stereotype responses involve lowering or raising expectations and standards. Professors might also ignore particular students or indicate that they are “blind” to differences among students. Other responses might involve engaging in overcompensation behaviors to avoid the appearance of discrimination in any way. For purposes of this research, we suggest that overcompensation behaviors in the classroom, based on stereotype activation, involve giving stigmatized students more attention and more resources in order to

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avoid the perception of discrimination. It is our responsibility to provide a safe environment for all of them to thrive. As such, our classrooms should foster fairness, justice, and equal opportunities for success. In order for educators to do that, we must begin by acknowledging our own biases and develop strategies for minimizing these biases.