

**ABBREVIATED MATERIALS FROM
A BRIEF-SOCIAL BELONGING INTERVENTION (WALTON & COHEN, 2011)**

Greg Walton and Geoff Cohen
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Reference

Walton, G. M. & Cohen, G. L. (2011). [A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students](#). *Science*, 331, 1447-1451.

Video Interviews with Greg Walton on the Social-Belonging Intervention

A [2-minute interview](#) with Stanford News (March 17, 2011)

A [6-minute interview](#) with the Stanford Graduate School of Business (March 30, 2012)

On Stereotype Threat

A [1-page guide](#) to empirically validated strategies to reduce stereotype threat

A talk by Claude Steele, Geoff Cohen, and Greg Walton: "[Stereotype Threat: A Close Encounter - See it, Feel it, Fix it](#)" (May 10, 2012)

They're Not Magic

Keep in mind that brief psychological interventions are not magic. They may need to be adapted for specific contexts to speak to students' experiences effectively. In addition, they are effective only when they remove barriers that otherwise prevent students from learning. That means that if a given barrier isn't relevant in a setting, a psychological intervention that removes it won't be effective. It also means that if students don't have opportunities to learn more effectively in a setting, removing a psychological barrier to learning won't be sufficient. For more:

Yeager, D. S. & Walton, G. M. (2011). [Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic](#). *Review of Educational Research*, 81, 267-301.

[Additional Online Resources](#)

Contact

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Context

The intervention was delivered individually to students in a psychology laboratory.

Script (Abbreviated)

We are interested in students' college experiences and attitudes. We have already collected data from a sample of upperclassmen, and now we are beginning a survey of freshman's experiences and attitudes. This particular study has two purposes. The first purpose is to better understand your personal experiences and attitudes here at [school name]. The second purpose is to help us provide incoming students next year and in the years to come with more accurate expectations about what college is like. As you may know, the transition to college can go a lot smoother if you know what to expect

To do this, we'll be asking you a series of questions about your experience so far in college – to better understand what it is like to be a freshman at [school name]. We'll also ask you and other students in the study to help us prepare several materials and ultimately we hope to give selections of these to incoming [school name] freshman to help them learn what college will be like. Does that make sense?

Great. Now the first thing I'd like to do is to give you a brief summary of the results of the Junior/Senior Survey that I mentioned before. I'm going to give you a summary of one aspect of the results that was particularly interesting to us. These results were consistent across different demographic groups in our sample – class year, race, gender, residential college, and so on. What we're doing now is trying to understand the results of this survey and their meaning, and one part of doing this is bringing in people like you – freshman who are in the middle of the transition to college – and getting your responses to the survey results and helping us to interpret them. Please read through this carefully, and take your time. Later on, we'll get your reactions to it. Go ahead, you have as much time as you like. Just let me know when you're done.

Junior/Senior Survey (Abbreviated)

Survey Procedure

Juniors and Seniors completed survey materials in [date]. Results were consistent across class year and across racial and gender groups.

Quantitative Summary

During their freshman year, many students worry about whether other people at [school name] accept them.

Most upperclassmen reported that, during their freshman year, they:

- “sometimes” or “frequently” worried whether other students would accept them in the context of classes and coursework.
- “sometimes” or “frequently” worried that other students at [school name] viewed their abilities negatively.
- “sometimes” or “frequently” felt intimidated by [school name] professors.

But after their freshman year, most students come to feel confident that other people at [school name] accept them. Almost all upperclassmen reported that, since their freshman year:

- their comfort in the academic environment at [school name] has improved “some” or “a lot.”
- they are “confident” or “certain” that most other students accept them in the context of classes and coursework.
- they are “confident” or “certain” that other students at [school name] view their abilities positively.

Illustrative Sample of Free-Response Reports (3 of 9 Quotations Used)

The quotations below are illustrative of the major finding of the survey.

“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.”

- Participant #17, [dormitory] senior, African American female

“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.”

- Participant #19, [dormitory] junior, White male

“The most difficult transition from high school to [school name] was coming from a situation in which I knew every student for the past seven years into a new situation in which I did not know one student before I arrived. Freshman year even though I met large numbers of people, I didn’t have a small group of close friends. I had to work to find lab partners and people to be in study groups with. I was pretty homesick, and I had to remind myself that making close friends takes time. Since then in classes, clubs, and social activities, I have met people some of whom are now just as close as my friends in high school were.”

- Participant #84, [dormitory] junior, Asian American male

Script Continued (Abbreviated)

All done. Now we would like to get your views about why you think people's experience in college develops in the way the Junior/Senior Survey describes. I want you to take some time and reflect on your own experiences as a freshman here at [school name]. In a moment I will ask you to write an essay about why people's experience in college develops as it does. When you write this essay, consider especially any aspects of your experience that are echoed in the survey results you read about. There are instructions here, but the goal is to really understand how people's experience in college changes over time. In addition, next fall we plan to take excerpts of what people write here and show them to students coming to [school name] next year or in subsequent years so they will know what their experience is likely to be like. So is this something you could do?

-Get assent-

Great. So again, we'd like you to write an essay about why you think people's experience in college changes in the way the Junior/Senior Survey describes. And be sure to illustrate your essay with examples from your own experience at [school name]. I'll leave the survey here with you so you can look back on it as you work. Go ahead and take your time and work on this as long as you want. I am sure that the students who read about your experiences will appreciate the effort that you put in. What is important here is that you get your ideas across, so don't worry so much about spelling or grammar or the quality of the writing. Take your time with this, but try to finish up within half an hour. If you need more time after that, you'll have some time to polish your essay later. But for now focus on just expressing your thoughts and feelings without too much attention to the writing quality.

Essay Prompt

The results of the Junior/Senior Survey suggest that, during freshman year students often worry about whether or not professors and other students at [school name] accept them. However, the survey results also suggest that most students eventually become comfortable at [school name] and find a family of people at [school name] with whom they are close and feel they belong.

In an effort to further understand how the transition to college takes place, we would like to ask you to describe why you think this would be so—that is, why students might feel initially unsure about their acceptance but ultimately overcome these fears. Please be sure to illustrate your essay with examples from your own experiences in classes, seminars, lectures, study groups, and labs. Please take as much time as you like.

Note – your essay may be provided, anonymously, to incoming [school name] freshmen next fall.

Script Continued (Abbreviated)

In addition to distributing written essays, we would also like to show an infomercial to incoming freshmen during orientation next fall based on the essays written by students in this study. We would like your help in preparing this video. In particular, we would like to videotape you reading your essay to the camera. Although it can be uncomfortable to speak in front of video cameras, we think it is important to do this because we believe it will be particularly effective for incoming students if they feel as if an older student is speaking directly to them about their experiences. As you probably know, it can be difficult to come into a new situation not knowing what to expect and you, as an older student who has just

gone through the same experience, are in a great position to help these freshman out. Of course, before we actually insert your footage in the infomercial we will contact you to ask your final consent. We wouldn't include your footage without that consent. Again, it is up to you whether to do this or not. If you like, I can give you a few minutes more to edit your essay a last time before you read it for the video. Do you think you would be able to do this?

-Get assent-

Great. Would you like a few minutes to edit your essay your essay?

-Edit-

OK. Let's go ahead and videotape you now.

-To video room. Read essay in front of video camera-

That was great - thanks so much for doing that!

-Back to first room-

Now we would just like to get some of your impressions about [school name]. It's really important to us that you take your time and answer these questions carefully. So, is that all right - could you do that for me?

-Get assent-

****End of Intervention. Measurement Begins****