

Ethnocentrism Reduction after Completing a Cross-Cultural Psychology Course

Terry F. Pettijohn II & Ginny M. Naples
Mercyhurst College

Presented at the 15th Annual Association for Psychological Science
Teaching Institute, Chicago, IL, May 22, 2008

E-mail: terrypet@usa.com

Introduction

- Education and experience are necessary in order to avoid racism and cultural biases along with the limited acceptance of ingroup members. Some schools and workplaces recognize the importance of culture and have designed a curriculum to address these social concerns and assess the outcomes of such educational activities.
- American college campuses are experiencing significant increases in diversity and some researchers speculate that by 2020, 46% of the students on college campuses will be of color, including low income and students who do not speak English as their first language (Seurkamp, 2007).
- Students who completed a diversity course reported less racism and greater intergroup tolerance than those students who did not take the course (Hogan & Mallott, 2005). Pettijohn and Walzer (2008) reported a decrease in student racism, sexism, and negative homosexual attitudes after completing a psychology of prejudice course. Kernahan and Davis (2007) demonstrated that a diversity course can change the awareness of racism in students, resulting in racial guilt and consequently a reduction in racism. Case (2007) found that students enrolled in a psychology of race and gender course reported raised awareness of white privilege and racism and increased support for affirmative action by the end of the term.

Ethnocentrism

- In 1906, Sumner defined ethnocentrism as “the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (p. 13).
- The concept of ethnocentrism has evolved since its introduction. In 1950, Levinson stated that ethnocentrism is “based on a pervasive and rigid ingroup-outgroup distinction; it involves stereotyped, negative imagery and hostile attitudes regarding outgroups, stereotyped positive imagery and submissive attitudes regarding ingroups, and a hierarchical, authoritarian view of group interaction in which ingroups are rightly dominant, outgroups subordinate” (p. 150).

Study Predictions

- Completing a Cross-Cultural Psychology course was predicted to reduce ethnocentric attitudes in college students
 - Students who were more involved in the Cross-Cultural Psychology class and students who earned better grades in the class were also predicted to show the greatest ethnocentric attitude reduction
- Completing an Introductory Psychology course was also expected to show a decrease in ethnocentrism, although the reduction was predicted to be greater for the students in the Cross-Cultural Psychology course that deals more directly with issues of cultural differences.

Method

- **Participants**
 - 31 undergraduate students enrolled in one section of Cross-Cultural Psychology
 - 100% white
 - 96.8% heterosexual
 - Average age = 21.26
 - 28 undergraduates enrolled in one section of Introduction to Psychology
 - 100% white
 - 96.4% heterosexual
 - Average age = 19.04 years

U.S. Ethnocentrism Scale (USE), Neuliep & McCroskey (1997)

1. Other countries should model themselves after the United States
 2. People in the United States have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere else.
 3. People in the United States could learn a lot from people of other countries.*
 4. The United States is a poor example of how to run a country.*
 5. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in the United States.
 6. Most other countries are backward in comparison with the United States.
 7. The United States is a poor role model for other countries.*
 8. Lifestyles in other countries are just as valid as in the United States.*
 9. Countries are smart to look up to the United States.
 10. Life in the United States is much better than most other places.
 11. The United States should be the role model of the world.
 12. Countries really should not use the United States as a role model.*
 13. A lot of other countries are primitive compared to the United States.
 14. I enjoy learning about the customs and values of other countries.*
 15. Although different, most countries have equally valid systems.*
 16. The United States would be better if it were more like other countries.*
- *=reverse scored

Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale (GENE), Neuliep (2002)

1. Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture.
 2. My culture should be the role model for other cultures.
 3. People from other cultures act strange when they come into my culture. f
 4. Lifestyles in other cultures are just as valid as those in my culture.*
 5. Other cultures should try to be more like my culture.
 6. I am not interested in the values and customs of other cultures. f
 7. People in my culture could learn a lot from people in other cultures.*
 8. Most people from other cultures just don't know what is good for them.
 9. I respect the values and customs of other cultures.*
 10. Other cultures are smart to look up to our culture.
 11. Most people would be happier if they lived like people in my culture.
 12. I have many friends from different cultures. f
 13. People in my culture have just about the best lifestyles of anywhere.
 14. Lifestyles in other cultures are not as valid as those in my culture.
 15. I am very interested in the values and customs of other cultures. f
 16. I apply my values with judging people who are different. f
 17. I see people who are similar to me as virtuous. f
 18. I do not cooperate with people who are different.
 19. Most people in my culture just don't know what is good for them. f
 20. I do not trust people who are different.
 21. I dislike interacting with people from different cultures.
 22. I have little respect for the values and customs of other cultures.
- *=reverse scored, f=filler

Method

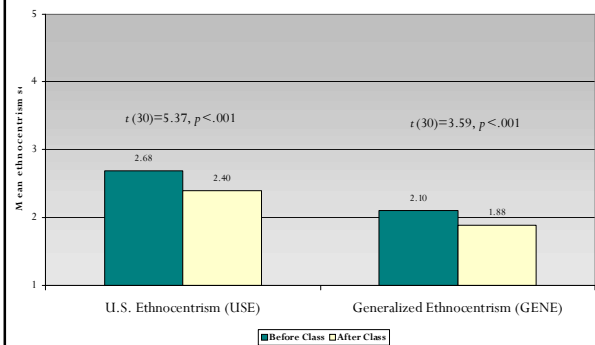
Materials & Procedure

- Students completed questionnaires measuring U.S. ethnocentrism (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) as well as generalized ethnocentrism (Neuliep, 2002) the first day of class and placed their responses in an envelope that was sealed and kept in a locked cabinet in the instructor's office. At the end of the term, students completed the same surveys and then had the envelopes with the initial questionnaires returned to them. Then, the intention of the current study was explained and all students agreed to have their responses included in this study.
- The matched procedure also allowed the researchers to consider actual course grade as a study variable.
- Participant race, age, sexual orientation, year in school, perceived involvement in class, and reason for taking the class were assessed at the end of the term.

Psychology Courses

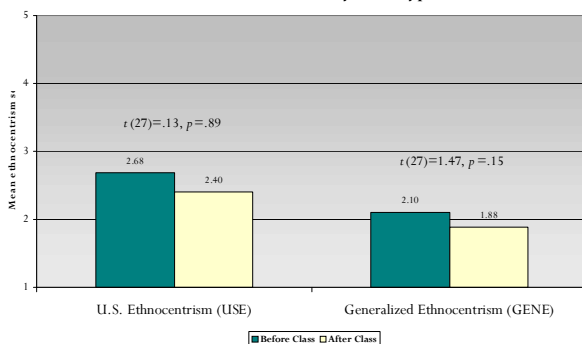
- **Cross-Cultural Psychology**
 - The Cross-Cultural Psychology course examined how elements of culture influenced cross-cultural examinations of major psychological theories.
 - Students reconsidered major psychological theories and research findings and determined the extent to which these principles generalized across cultures or fail to generalize across cultures and the implications of each (see syllabus for details).
- **Introduction to Psychology**
 - A general overview of the field of psychology

Mean Before and After Cross-Cultural Psychology Class Ethnocentrism Scores by Scale Type



Note: Scale statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) where larger values indicate greater ethnocentrism.

Mean Before and After Introductory Psychology Class Ethnocentrism Scores by Scale Type



Note: Scale statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) where larger values indicate greater ethnocentrism.

Cross-Cultural Course Grade, Involvement, and Ethnocentrism Change Correlations

	Course Grade	Course Involvement
GENE	-.17	-.29
USE	.11	-.38*

N=31. All tests were two-tailed. * $p < .05$

Negative correlations indicate reduced ethnocentrism w/higher grade and involvement.

Results Summary

- Students in the Cross-Cultural Psychology course showed a reduction in both U.S. and generalized ethnocentric views between the beginning of the term to the end of the term.
 - Course grade was not related to a reduction in ethnocentric attitudes, but self-rated involvement in the course was positively related to greater reduction in ethnocentric attitudes.
- Students in the Introductory Psychology courses did not show statistically significant reductions in ethnocentric attitudes between the beginning of the term to the end of the term.

Discussion

- One limitation of the experiment was that the majority of participants were heterosexual, Caucasian, college students, therefore generalization of results may be limited.
- These results show the value of completing and actively participating in a specific Cross-cultural course in reducing ethnocentric attitudes of college students.
- Discussions, activities, journal article reviews, readings, and writing assignments allowed students to better understand themselves and gain insight and appreciation for those who are different.
- More colleges may consider adding Cross-cultural courses in the future based on these encouraging results.

References

- Case, K. A. (2007). Raising white privilege awareness and reducing racial prejudice: Assessing diversity course effectiveness. *Teaching of Psychology, 34*(4), 231-235.
- Hogan, D. E., & Mallott, M. (2005). Changing racial prejudice through diversity education. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(2), 115-125.
- Kernahan, C., & Davis, T. (2007). Changing perspective: How learning about racism influences student awareness and emotion. *Teaching of Psychology, 34*(1), 49-52.
- Levinson, D. J. (1950). Politico-economic ideology and group memberships in relation to ethnocentrism. In T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. J. Levinson, & R. N. Sanford (Eds.), *The authoritarian personality* (pp. 151-221). New York: Harper & Brothers.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Neuliep, J. W. (2002). *Ethnocentrism*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Neuliep, J. W. (2003). *Intercultural communication: A contextual approach* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Neuliep, J. W., & McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The development of a U.S. and generalized ethnocentrism scale. *Communication Research Reports, 14*, 385-398.
- Neuliep, J. W. (2002). Assessing the reliability and validity of the generalized ethnocentrism scale. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 31*(4), 201-216.
- Neuliep, J. W., Chaudoir, M., & McCroskey, J. C., (2001). A cross-cultural comparison of ethnocentrism among Japanese and United States college students. *Communication Research Reports, 18*, 137-146.
- Pettijohn, T. F. II, & Walzer, A. S. (2008). Reducing racism, sexism, and homophobia in college students by completing a psychology of prejudice course. *College Student Journal, 42*(2), 459-468.
- Seurkamp, M. (2007). Changing student demographics. *University Business, 10*(10), 47-48.
- Sumner, W. G. (1906). *Folkways*. Boston: Ginn.