

REDUCING RACISM, SEXISM, AND HOMOPHOBIA IN COLLEGE STUDENTS BY COMPLETING A PSYCHOLOGY OF PREJUDICE COURSE

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Students enrolled in Psychology of Prejudice and Introductory Psychology courses completed measures of racism, sexism, and attitudes toward homosexuals at the beginning and end of the term. We predicted that those who took part in the Psychology of Prejudice class would have significantly reduced prejudice as a result of the course experience. We also predicted that the Introductory Psychology students would show a minimal decrease in prejudice. As predicted, students in the prejudice class showed significant decreases in prejudice, while the introductory psychology students did not. Course involvement was related to greater prejudice reduction in two prejudice areas, but course grade was not related to prejudice reduction. We discuss the implications for prejudice reduction through class activities and education.

Prejudice is a serious issue that has perpetually faced humankind. Allport (1979) defined prejudice as a "feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience" (p. 6). Prejudice is unusually negative and causes individuals to form preconceived notions of groups, assuming that all group members are the same. People's perceptions of others are filtered through their previous experiences and attitudes. Therefore, it is important to consider the outgroup as well as the individual when studying prejudice.

Psychologists have studied the causes and consequences of prejudice and have developed effective prejudice reduction techniques based on education and experience. School-based interventions have shown that talking about race and racial attitudes and focusing on internal attributions instead of race can reduce prejudice

(Aboud & Fenwick, 1999). Cognition, affect, and behavior all play a role in students transferring what they learn in the classroom to the real world, and students can find ways to reduce prejudice on an interpersonal level (Harris, 2003). Multicultural education and diversity appreciation training has been effective in reducing prejudice among counseling trainees (Kiselica, Maben & Locke, 1999). Students who took part in a prejudice and conflict seminar had significantly lower anti-Black attitudes when compared with other students who had not taken the seminar (Rudman & Ashmore, 2001). In college, attitudes toward homosexuals improved with the amount of college education (Schellenberg, Hirt, & Sears, 1999) and students who completed a diversity course reported less racism and greater intergroup tolerance than those who did not take the course (Hogan & Mallott,

2005).

Individual-oriented techniques have been found to reduce contemporary prejudice. These techniques help individuals recognize the contradictions in their own personality and behavior, and therefore, become more tolerant of people of different groups. Intergroup approaches also help prejudiced people to realize that individuals comprising different groups are not homogeneous and begin to realize that each group is as assorted and diverse as their own. Recognizing the foundation of prejudice helps to reduce prejudice through intervention techniques (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). Along these same lines, forcing people to be aware of their hypocrisy seems to be effective in reducing prejudice. Making people feel guilty and uncomfortable with their racism has been found to reduce aversive racists' prejudice towards Asians, although the hypocrisy technique did not seem to be as effective for those who were considered to be low in prejudice (Son Hing, Li, & Zanna, 2002).

Research shows that ingroup prejudice can be reduced through educational programs dealing with diversity. We were interested in the effects Psychology of Prejudice and Introductory Psychology courses have on racism, sexism, and homosexual attitudes in college students. In addition, we were interested in the relations between course outcomes, course involvement and prejudice reduction. If such courses assist in the reduction of prejudice, colleges may consider adding these courses to their curriculum and students may choose to sign-up for these courses to gain a greater understanding of human diversity.

In our study, completing a Psychology

of Prejudice course was predicted to reduce racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes in college students. Students who completed Introductory Psychology courses were also expected to show a decrease in these prejudice attitudes, although the reduction was predicted to be greater for the Psychology of Prejudice course that deals directly with these topics. Students who were more involved in the Psychology of Prejudice class and students who earned better grades in the class were also predicted to show the greatest prejudice reduction. To see significant changes in prejudice, we believed that students must learn theories and research and be able to become involved in discussions and exercises as part of the course experience.

Method

Participants

Thirty three undergraduate students enrolled in one section of Psychology of Prejudice and 66 undergraduates enrolled in two sections of Introductory Psychology participated. The students attended a small, private college and the first author (TFP) taught all class sections. Students in the Psychology of Prejudice class were 94% Caucasian, 3% African-American, and 3% Hispanic, with an average age of 20.58 years ($SD = 1.35$, range = 18-23). The students in Psychology of Prejudice were primarily Psychology majors (82%), whereas only 9% of the students in the Introductory Psychology courses were Psychology majors. Students in the Introductory Psychology classes were 95% Caucasian and 5% African-American, with an average age of 18.86 years ($SD = 1.39$, range = 18-25). The majority of students

in Psychology of Prejudice were women (73%), as were the majority of students in Introductory Psychology (59%). All of the students in Psychology of Prejudice indicated that they were heterosexual and 97% of the students in Introductory Psychology selected the heterosexual sexual orientation option.

Materials and Procedure

The Psychology of Prejudice course examined the development and persistence of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination from a social psychology perspective. The course provided an overview of theories of prejudice, exposure to relevant research, and discussion of prejudice reduction. Readings covered historical, cultural, and sociological perspectives of issues related to ethnicity, gender, and social class (a course syllabus is available from the first author). The Introductory Psychology class was a survey of the entire field of psychology. Although prejudice was covered in the context of the Introductory Psychology course, prejudice was not the main topic. The Psychology of Prejudice and the Introductory Psychology courses met three times a week, 80 minutes each session, for the standard 10-week period on the term system used at the college.

Students completed questionnaires measuring old-fashioned and modern racism (McConahay, 1986), old-fashioned and modern sexism (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 2000), and attitudes toward homosexuals (Kite & Deaux, 1986) the first day of class, placed their responses in an envelope, sealed it, and passed the envelope to the instructor. The instructor kept the

sealed envelopes in a locked cabinet in his office. Students answered all questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*). Modern sexism and racism tap the more subtle, contemporary forms of prejudice whereas old-fashioned sexism and racism measure the more direct, traditional forms of prejudice. We chose these questionnaires because they are widely used measures of prejudice with documented reliability and validity.

At the end of the term, students completed the identical questionnaires and a brief demographic form. When students were finished with these measures, the instructor returned the envelopes with the pre-course questionnaires. Next, the instructor explained the intention of the current study and all students agreed to have their responses included in this study. We assessed participant race, age, sexual orientation, and perceived involvement in class on a demographic questionnaire at the end of the term. We asked students "How involved were you in learning the material in this course" and we instructed them to circle a number on a 10 point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all involved* to 10 = *Extremely involved*. We also used final earned course percentages of the students in Psychology of Prejudice to investigate how course performance and prejudice reduction were related.

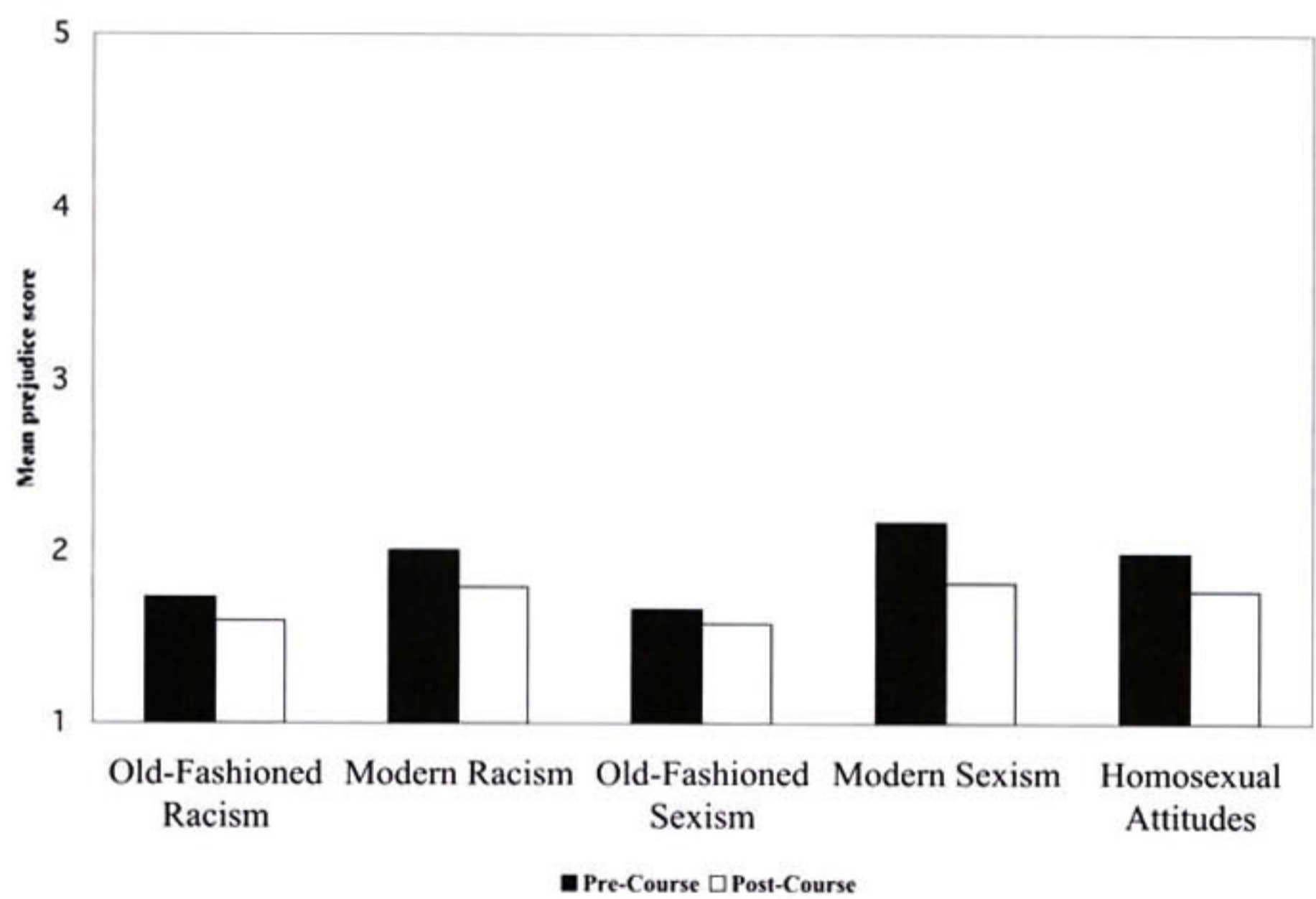
Results

We calculated scores for each of the measures of prejudice: old-fashioned and modern racism, old-fashioned and modern sexism, and attitudes toward

homosexuals. For each measure, we conducted a dependent means t-test to determine whether prejudice had decreased between the beginning and the end of the term. Students in the Psychology of Prejudice course showed a significant reduction

in old-fashioned racism, $t(31) = 2.64, p = .01, d = .26$, modern racism, $t(31) = 3.52, p < .001, d = .32$, modern sexism, $t(31) = 3.90, p < .001, d = .69$, and a significant reduction in negative attitudes toward homosexuals, $t(31) = 4.19, p < .001, d =$

Figure. Mean pre- and post-course prejudice scores by prejudice scale type for the Psychology of Prejudice course. Scale statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale where larger values indicate greater prejudice.



.31, between the start of the term to the end of the term. Although the prejudice class students showed a reduction in old-fashioned sexism, $t(31) = 1.02, p = .32$, this difference was not statistically significant. Refer to the Figure for a visual representation of the mean outcomes for the Psychology of Prejudice class.

To determine whether earned course grade and course involvement were related to prejudice reduction for the students in the Psychology of Prejudice course, we computed correlations between the prejudice change scores on each measure (post-course minus pre-course) and final course percentage and self-rated course involvement. Course grade was not related to prejudice reduction across the different measures, all $ps > .4$. However, self-rated involvement in the course was positively related to greater reduction in negative attitudes toward homosexuals, $r(30) = -.37, p = .04$, and old-fashioned sexism, $r(30) = -.42, p = .02$, but course

involvement was not related to modern sexism, old-fashioned racism, or modern racism changes. See Table for all the correlation results for the Psychology of Prejudice class.

Students in the Introductory Psychology courses did not show statistically significant reductions in old-fashioned sexism, old-fashioned racism, modern racism, or negative attitudes toward homosexuals between the beginning of the term to the end of the term, all $ps > .3$. Students did, however, show a significant reduction in modern sexism, $t(64) = 1.98, p = .05, d = .21, Ms = 2.51$ and 2.40 , respectively. In Introductory Psychology, 55.4% of the students reduced their negative attitudes toward homosexuals from the beginning to the end of the term, 40% reduced their old-fashioned racism scores, 46.2% reduced their modern racism scores, 32.3% reduced their old-fashioned sexism scores, and 50.8% reduced their modern sexism scores. In Psychology of Prejudice, 87.5% of the

Table
Correlations between Prejudice Change, Course Involvement, and Course Performance in the Psychology of Prejudice Course

	<i>Course Involvement</i>	<i>Course Performance</i>
Old-Fashioned Racism Change	-.09	-.05
Modern Racism Change	-.02	.01
Old-Fashioned Sexism Change	-.42*	.03
Modern Sexism Change	-.03	.03
Homosexual Attitude Change	-.37*	-.15

Note. $N = 32$. All tests were two-tailed. $* = p < .05$. Negative correlations indicate reduced prejudice with course involvement or course performance. Students self-rated course involvement on a 10-point Likert scale. Course performance was the total percentage of points students earned in the course.

students reduced their negative attitudes toward homosexuals from the beginning to the end of the term, 59.4% reduced their old-fashioned racism scores, 30.8% reduced their modern racism scores, 50% reduced their old-fashioned sexism scores, and 68.8% reduced their modern sexism scores.

When we compared the classes at the beginning of the term, the students in Introductory Psychology reported significantly greater old-fashioned racism, $t(95) = 3.03$, $p < .01$, $d = .65$, and modern sexism, $t(95) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, $d = .64$, than the students in Psychology of Prejudice. We found no significant differences in modern racism, old-fashioned sexism, and attitudes toward homosexuals between the classes, although the means were all higher for the Introductory Psychology class. When we compared the change from pre- to post-course measures between the classes, we found that the Psychology of Prejudice students reported a significantly greater decrease in old-fashioned racism, $t(95) = 1.98$, $p = .05$, $d = .44$, modern racism, $t(95) = 2.81$, $p < .01$, $d = .60$, modern sexism, $t(95) = 2.55$, $p = .01$, $d = .53$, and negative attitudes toward homosexuals, $t(95) = 4.15$, $p < .001$, $d = .86$, compared to the Introductory Psychology students. The only area that was not significantly different between the groups was old-fashioned sexism, $t(95) = 1.47$, $p = .15$, $d = .31$, although the Psychology of Prejudice students reported a greater reduction than the Introduction to Psychology students on this measure.

Discussion

As predicted, students who completed

a Psychology of Prejudice class did reduce their levels of modern racism, modern sexism, old-fashioned racism, old-fashioned sexism, and negative attitudes toward homosexuals in this study. Although we hypothesized that students who earned higher grades and who were more involved in the class would show greater prejudice reduction, we found that those students who earned better grades did not experience more prejudice reduction. However, students who reported more involvement in the course did experience more reduction in their prejudice attitudes and beliefs in the areas of old-fashioned sexism and homosexual attitudes, but not in the other areas of prejudice. As predicted, students in Psychology of Prejudice reported greater reduction in prejudice than students in Introductory Psychology overall. The students enrolled in Introductory Psychology courses showed very little change in prejudice attitudes overall, but they did show a significant reduction in the area of modern sexism.

Although we generally found support for our predictions, there are some interesting findings that deserve additional discussion. With respect to course involvement in Psychology of Prejudice, it is interesting that only old-fashioned sexism and homosexual attitude changes were related to course involvement, and racism and modern sexism changes were not related to course involvement. The Psychology of Prejudice course covered all types of prejudice, including racism, sexism, and homophobia. The media and the American government were debating the issue of same sex marriages during the term (Spring 2005) and students may have

equated these reports with opportunities to be involved in the course outside of class time. Students may have paid more attention to popular media themes related to homosexuality, including films such as *The Laramie Project* and popular television shows such as *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, because of the Psychology of Prejudice class. The increased interest in popular media surrounding homosexuality may have amplified student thinking about homosexual issues, which may have been equated with greater course involvement.

It is also interesting that the students in the Introductory Psychology courses experienced significant reductions in modern sexism, but did not experience changes in racism, old-fashioned sexism, or attitudes about homosexuals. The topics covered in Introductory Psychology are very broad, ranging from child development to biological influences to clinical disorders. Sex roles were discussed as part of developmental psychology and the large number of women in the class may have been encouraged by messages of equality between the sexes throughout the course. Although racism was discussed as part of the social psychology unit on prejudice, it was not the primary focus of the course. These differences may explain why only modern sexism decreased for the Introductory Psychology students.

Students in Introductory Psychology reported greater prejudice at the beginning of the term compared to students in Psychology of Prejudice at the beginning of the term. The composition of the students enrolled in the courses may explain this pre-course difference. Most of the stu-

dents in the Psychology of Prejudice course were psychology majors and these students have completed Introduction to Psychology and other psychology courses, creating an additive effect of psychology knowledge and experiences. Many of the Introductory Psychology students were just beginning their college educations (71% freshmen), whereas the Psychology of Prejudice class only included 21% freshmen. With additional course exposure and intellectual growth, students may gain a greater appreciation of human differences and understanding of how social, economic, and political factors influence human behavior, beliefs, and emotions. Despite the general differences in student prejudice before beginning Psychology of Prejudice and Introductory Psychology, the students in the Psychology of Prejudice course reported significant reductions in prejudice after completion of the course. Since their reported levels of prejudice were initially low, this created a floor effect with little room to show a decrease in scores. Despite this limitation, students did show a significant reduction in prejudice.

The comparison between Psychology of Prejudice and Introductory Psychology prejudice change scores demonstrates the importance of the course content in reducing prejudice. Generally teaching about human differences and the way humans think, act, and feel does not necessarily cause a change in student prejudice levels. Presenting theories and research on how prejudice develops and how it can be reduced, in addition to honest discussions of discrimination and stereotypes from personal experiences allows students to

analyze their beliefs and actions. Several new textbooks in the area of prejudice have been published in recent years and the research area is incredibly active. Requiring college students, or even high school and elementary students, to complete a course in prejudice may help reduce the effects of discrimination and prejudice in society. These students can also influence the behaviors and attitudes of their friends, family, romantic partners, and future children.

In our study, earned grade was not related to prejudice reduction. It is important to note that just educating students about other groups does not necessarily reduce prejudice because the information that people acquire is filtered through preconceived notions and personal experiences. To illustrate this point, Gimmestad and de Chlara (1982) discovered that students who read multicultural plays that depicted members of Black, Puerto Rican, Jewish, and Chinese ethnic groups had significantly increased scores on a knowledge test and a social distances test. Meanwhile, the control group, which was only provided information about the ethnic groups, showed a significant increase on the knowledge test, but no increase on the social distance tests. Cognitive changes are not equivalent to behavioral and affective changes.

It is also important to consider the role of the professor in reducing prejudice while teaching college courses. Titus (1998, March) points out that it is imperative that teachers and educators act as good examples when trying to reduce prejudice. In order for a student to get the full experience of an anti-prejudiced education, the

educator must believe in what they are teaching and serve as a positive role model. Titus also explains that students show lower levels of prejudice when they are able to think abstractly and have a flexible viewpoint, methods of thinking that professors can encourage in class and in written assignments.

One limitation of our study was that the majority of participants were heterosexual, Caucasian, college students, therefore generalization of results may be limited. Students started the Psychology of Prejudice course with relatively low levels of racism, sexism, and negative attitudes toward homosexuals. It would be very interesting to see how students with moderate or more negative prejudice views may change their attitudes after completing a Psychology of Prejudice course. We investigated racism, sexism, and homophobia, but attitudes and more direct measures of behavior could be measured in future investigations. Courses could be tailored to reduce negative attitudes and discrimination against Hispanics, Asians, Middle-Easterners, religious groups, political groups, and other social aggregates. In addition, the current study only investigated changes after 10 weeks. What happens months and years later, after students are removed from their relatively safe college environment and enter the real world? We would like to believe that the Psychology of Prejudice course makes a long-term difference in prejudice attitudes, but we do not have the data to support this assumption.

These results highlight the value of completing and actively participating in a specific Psychology of Prejudice course

in reducing racism, sexism, and homophobic 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. The current results show that doing well academically in a prejudice course is not sufficient to reap the potential benefits of prejudice reduction. Active involvement in class exercises, discussions, and required readings was related to more prejudice reduction in the current investigation. More colleges may consider adding prejudice and diversity classes in the future based on these encouraging results, but who teaches the course, how the course is organized, what material is covered, and how actively involved the students are may lead to different outcomes.

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Notes

1. Portions of this research were presented at the 13th Annual Association for Psychological Science Teaching Institute, New York, May 2006.

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