Insidious Assumptions: Pluralistic Ignorance in the Classroom

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Session Overview

✧ What is pluralistic ignorance?
✧ The consequences of bad assumptions.
✧ Why we still have hope!
✧ Does ignorance influence students?
✧ Is ignorance related to performance?
✧ What can we do about it?
Questions?

I’m confused, but everyone else seems to understand.
I don’t feel the way everyone else seems to

Pluralistic Ignorance
Everyone else was getting drunk...

... and having sex

Last Friday Night?
Perkins & Berkowitz (1986)

“Getting 'drunk' frequently is ok because it is an important part of the college experience”

Assumed Agreement
“Getting 'drunk' frequently is ok because it is an important part of the college experience”
Classmate?  
Student?  
You?
Combating Ignorance
(Schroeder & Prentice, 1998)

✧ Peer-focused: show data on ignorance
✧ Individual-focused: responsible decisions

4 to 6 weeks later

Drinks per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 to 6 weeks later
Combating Ignorance
(Schroeder & Prentice, 1998)

- **Peer-focused**: show data on ignorance
- **Individual-focused**: responsible decisions

![Bar chart showing drinks per week for men and women 4 to 6 weeks later.](image)
Research Questions

✧ Are students ignorant?

✧ Related to exam performance?

✧ What drives relationship?

✧ Can intervention help?
Do students evidence pluralistic ignorance in study behavior estimation?

STUDY 1
Testing Ignorance

✧ Fall 2014 Social Psychology (N = 117)

✧ Before exam 1 – “How many hours…
  ▪ Did you study for exam?”
  ▪ Did average student in this class study for exam?”
Testing Ignorance

Do students show evidence of pluralistic ignorance in study behavior estimation?

$t(99) = 3.69, p < .001$

$r(100) = .27, p < .01$

Related to own behavior?
Discussion

✧ Consistent with P.I. model…

- Students underestimate others’ study time
- Estimations related to own study behavior
Is pluralistic ignorance of study behavior related to exam performance?

STUDY 2
Testing Ignorance

✧ Spring 2015 Social Psychology (N = 114)

✧ Procedure
  ▪ Similar to study 1
  ▪ Collected & matched exam scores
Is pluralistic ignorance of study behavior related to exam performance?

$t(93) = -1.87, p = .056$

$F(2, 91) = 4.88, \ p = .009, \ R^2 = 0.10$
Discussion

✧ P.I. of study behavior related to exam perf

- Pattern opposite expected
- Study time and exam performance distinct constructs
- Perceived lack of preparation?
What drives the pluralistic ignorance-exam performance relationship?

STUDY 3
Testing Ignorance

✧ Fall 2015 Social Psychology \((N = 119)\)

✧ Procedure

- Similar to studies 1 & 2
- Unprepared variable
  - “How prepared do you need to be to do well?” - “How prepared are you?”
Testing Ignorance

What drives the P.I. of study behavior & exam performance relationship?

- **Actual Mean**
- **Estimated Mean**

- $t(87) = -2.31, \ p = .02$

- $F(2,85) = 4.06, \ p = .02, \ R^2 = 0.09$

- $a = 1.48^{**}$
- $b = -0.36^{*}$
- $c = -1.02$
- $c = -1.58^{*}$

Unprepared

Plural Ig

Exam Perf
Discussion

✧ P.I. – exam performance mediated

- Feeling unprepared driving relationship

- Can typical P.I. intervention help?
Can an intervention reduce the P.I.-Exam performance relationship?

STUDY 4
Testing Ignorance

✧ Fall 2015 Social Psychology ($N = 119$)

✧ Procedure
  - Intervention one-week before exam 2
    - Data on true mean
  - Other procedures same as study 3
Testing Ignorance

Can an intervention reduce the P.I.-exam performance relationship?

- Actual Mean
- Estimated Mean
- Study Time
- Un-prep
- Exam

$t(102) = 0.24, p > .05$

$F(3,100) = 4.20, p < .01$
Discussion

✧ No Pluralistic Ignorance Effect

- P.I. no longer related to exam performance
- P.I. no longer predicted unpreparedness
- Correlational Methods
What does this all mean?

CONCLUSIONS
What we know so far…

- Students underestimate others’ study time
- Underestimation is related to exam performance
- P.I. $\rightarrow$ Feeling unprepared $\rightarrow$ performance
- Intervention eliminated ignorance

What can you do in your courses?

http://goo.gl/PhAZVs
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