A STUDY OF GROUPHATE IN A COURSE ON SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

SCOTT A. MYERS AND ALAN K. GOODBOY

West Virginia University

Summary.—This study explored the relationship between grouphate and cohesion, consensus, relational satisfaction, affective learning, and cognitive learning. Participants were 83 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory course on small group communication. Participants completed the Grouphate scale, the Classroom Cohesion scale, the Consensus scale, the Relational Satisfaction scale, three subscales of the Instructional Affect Assessment Instrument, and the Cognitive Learning Loss measure. Mean grouphate significantly increased during the semester, and negative correlations were found between scores for grouphate and cohesion (−.50), consensus (−.45), relational satisfaction (−.58), attitude toward the behaviors recommended in the course (−.23), the likelihood of developing an appreciation for the course content (−.33), and cognitive learning (−.32). Results may imply that students’ grouphate is not associated with prosocial outcomes of the group work in this course.

Group work, which usually consists of students working together in a group small enough so all members can contribute to the assigned task (Cohen, 1986), is a fundamental component of many courses on small group communication (Warnemunde, 1986). Despite the pedagogical benefits, e.g., students’ increased self-esteem, development of peer relationships, increased liking of school, associated with having students work in groups in some situations (Allen & Plax, 2002), many students dislike it. In fact, an informal survey of students’ attitudes showed a majority enrolled in a small group communication course reported disliking working in groups (Keyton, 1994). Consequently, it should be no surprise that some students experience grouphate, which was originally defined as a feeling of dread that arises when facing the possibility of having to work in a group (Sorensen, 1981). Because grouphate remains a relatively understudied construct (Keyton, Harmon, & Frey, 1996), a question is how do perceptions of grouphate of students working in classroom groups change over the course of a semester?

A goal of this study was to examine the relationship between grouphate and two sets of outcomes. The first set of outcomes is cohesion, consensus, and relational satisfaction. Cohesion is the tendency for group members to
unite to achieve common goals (Carron, 1982), consensus occurs when group members agree with the group’s decision or when group members’ individual positions are close enough they can support the group’s decision (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988), and relational satisfaction is the building and maintaining of member relationships during communicative processes and practices throughout a group’s life span (Anderson, Martin, & Riddle, 2001). Because all three outcomes are positively linked to group productivity (Farris & Lim, 1969; Michaelsen, Watson, & Black, 1989; Evans & Dion, 1991), students who experience groupphate in their classroom groups may report less cohesion, consensus, and relational satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to test whether, among students working in classroom groups, an inverse relationship might obtain for responses to measures of groupphate with cohesion, consensus, and relational satisfaction.

The second set of outcomes of interest is students’ affective learning and cognitive learning. Affective learning consists of the positive or negative attitudes, beliefs, and values students attach to their instructor’s communication in the classroom (McCroskey, 1994), the course, or the behaviors recommended in the course (Andersen, 1979). Cognitive learning focuses on students’ acquisition of knowledge (Bloom, 1956) as group experience may affect learning. An inverse relationship was hypothesized between groupphate and perceived affective learning.

Method

Participants

Participants were 83 students (45 men, 38 women; M age = 21.0 yr., SD = 3.4; 28 first-year students or 33%, 18 sophomores or 22%, 18 juniors or 22%, 19 seniors or 23%) solicited from a pool of 112 undergraduate students enrolled in a first-year course on small group communication. Students were assigned to groups of 3 to 5 members randomly by the instructor during the second week of the course and completed four in-class group activities and three out-of-class group assignments during the semester. Students in each group received the same grade for all activities and assignments. There was no control group.

Procedure

Participants completed one scale on the first day and a series of scales on the last day of the course. Data of only participants who completed both test sessions were included. On the first day (time one), participants completed the Groupphate scale (Keyton, et al., 1996). On the last day (time two), participants completed the Groupphate scale, the Classroom Cohesion scale (Rosenfeld & Gilbert, 1989), the Consensus scale (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988), the Relational Satisfaction scale (Anderson, et al., 2001), three subscales of the Instructional Affect Assessment Instrument (McCroskey,
1994), and the Cognitive Learning Loss measure (Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, & Plax, 1987). With the exception of the Grouphate scale, participants completed all scales with reference to their group during the course (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>.32</th>
<th>.12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grouphate (T1)</td>
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<td>2. Grouphate (T2)</td>
<td>16.5</td>
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<td>3. Cohesion</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
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<td>4. Consensus</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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<td>5. Satisfaction</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
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<td>6. Affective</td>
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<td>7. Affective</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<td>8. Development</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<td>9. Cognitive</td>
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The Grouphate scale (Keyton, et al., 1996) is a six-item measure that asks participants about their general feelings about working in groups. Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 5: strongly agree and 1: strongly disagree. The sample’s Cronbach alpha was .86 (M = 14.9, SD = 3.7) at Time 1 and .91 (M = 16.5, SD = 5.3) at Time 2.

On the Classroom Cohesion scale (Rosenfeld & Gilbert, 1989), a 10-item measure, participants indicate how much cohesion they experience within a group. Responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of 5: strongly agree and 1: strongly disagree. The sample’s Cronbach alpha was .95 (M = 35.2, SD = 8.9).

The Consensus scale (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988) is a 21-item measure on which participants report their feelings about their group’s decision-making process, their relationships with each other, and their individual contributions to the group’s decision-making process, using a 5-point Likert scale (anchors 5: strongly agree and 1: strongly disagree). The present Cronbach alpha was .92 (M = 82.7, SD = 10.6).

On the Relational Satisfaction scale (Anderson, et al., 2001), a 12-item measure of participants’ satisfaction with the relationships established within their work group, responses are solicited using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors of 5: strongly agree and 1: strongly disagree. Here the Cronbach alpha was .87 (M = 45.4, SD = 7.2).

The Instructional Affect Assessment Instrument (McCroskey, 1994) is a 24-item, 7-point bipolar scale that measures students’ affect toward the course content, the recommended course behaviors, and the instructor. In
this study, three subscales (12 of the 24 items) were used to assess students’ affect toward the course content, toward the recommended course behaviors, and toward the likelihood of developing an appreciation for the course content. In this study, Cronbach alpha was .86 (M = 18.0, SD = 3.6) for students’ affect toward the course content, .89 (M = 20.1, SD = 3.5) for scores of students’ affect toward the recommended course behaviors, and a .94 (M = 19.0, SD = 4.5) for scores of students’ likelihood of developing an appreciation for the course content.

The Cognitive Learning Loss measure (Richmond, et al., 1987), a two-item scale, has anchors of 0: nothing and 9: more than in any other class, to rate how much they have learned from their instructor and how much they could have learned had they taken the course from an “ideal” instructor. In this study, two modifications were made. Cognitive learning was assessed by scores from the first item, which has been considered a direct indicator of cognitive learning (Richmond, et al., 1987). Second, instead of referencing their instructors, participants were instructed to indicate how much learning had occurred based on their group membership. Because this computation of cognitive learning is for a single item, a Cronbach alpha was not computed. In this study, a mean score of 6.2 (SD = 1.6) was obtained for this measure.

RESULTS
To assess how students’ perceptions of groupphate changed over the course of a semester a paired-samples t test was applied. Students had a lower mean for groupphate on the first day of class (M = 15.0, SD = 3.7) than on the last day of class (M = 16.5, SD = 5.4; t_{60} = 2.50, p < .05).

As expected, among these students working in groups, an inverse relationship was indicated by Pearson correlations of scores on groupphate with those on cohesion, consensus, and relational satisfaction. Groupphate scores were negatively correlated with cohesion (−.50), consensus (−.45), and relational satisfaction (−.58). All correlations were significant (p < .01).

Support was found also for the hypothesis that groupphate scores would be negatively correlated with attitude toward the behaviors recommended in the course (r = −.23, p < .05), the likelihood of developing an appreciation for the course content (r = −.33, p < .01), and cognitive learning (r = −.32, p < .01) but not significantly correlated with attitude toward the course content (r = .03, p = .70).

DISCUSSION
These findings indicate that perceptions of groupphate of this group of students were negatively correlated with perceived cohesion, consensus, relational satisfaction, attitude toward the behaviors recommended in the course, the likelihood of developing an appreciation for the course content, and
cognitive learning, but not with attitude toward the course content. Also, students had more negative feelings about working in groups on the last day of the course than on the first day.

These findings, even without a control group, are consistent with the implication that learning about group work and participating in group work are two distinct concepts when measured as learning about group work (i.e., assessed at the individual level via lectures, examinations, and papers) and participating in group work (i.e., assessed at the group level via group projects) because these require different amounts of contribution, participation, input, and accountability. Research conducted by Lewis and Hayward (2003) indicated how students who are used to working individually may have problems working in groups. When given a choice of learning activities in an undergraduate organizational communication course, they found students list several factors as being important considerations in their choice of the activities. The three most important factors were “how likely I was to get a good grade,” “how difficult [the activity] would be,” and “amount of effort involved” (Lewis & Hayward, 2003, p. 151). If these three factors be generalizable to college students enrolled in a small group course, such factors may affect how students complete group tasks and subsequent feelings of group hate, cohesion, consensus, relational satisfaction, affective learning, and cognitive learning. Students were from one eastern university, however.

A limitation which requires consideration by researchers is the lack of data gathered for each group and its members. Freeman (1996) discovered members of high-performing groups meet more often, believe groups are a useful part of their education, and report higher rates of participation than members of low-performing groups. It is possible the designation of high-versus low-performance is related to the measure of group hate. Moreover, the extent to which group members worked together to complete each group was not assessed. Another limitation is on the correlational design employed in this study. Given these analyses, it is not possible to evaluate causal relationships which could be useful to instructors of classes in small group communication in designing courses and developing assignments.

REFERENCES


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