

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
EFFECT OF SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES
ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

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AN ABSTRACT

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Problem

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the effectiveness of subliminal techniques for improving academic performance. It was hypothesized that: students who use subliminal programs designed to improve recall in test situations will outperform classmates who listen to identical sounding placebo tapes containing no subliminal messages. In addition, it was expected that the subliminal group would show more improvement than the control group on attitudinal measures of scholastic ability.

Procedures

Subjects were Clarion University students enrolled in General Studies 100:

Reading and Study Skills, conducted at Venango Campus. Of the 16 class members, 15 participated in the study. Three of the subjects had no previous college experience and therefore were not used for grade average comparisons. Their data has been included in the pre-post questionnaire analysis.

The data was collected during regular meetings of the class. Questionnaires were administered and subjects drew their respective audio cassette from a box in which both subliminal and placebo tapes were mixed together. Both tapes looked identical with each tape having its own number for purposes of identification at the conclusion of the experiment.

Subjects were instructed to listen to the tapes each day. They were told that the sound of ocean waves would help them relax and be less tense about assignments and tests. They were not told that there was any difference in the tapes nor that they contained subliminal messages.

After 12 weeks, the students turned in their audio cassettes and were asked to fill in the same questionnaire with additional posttest questions about the use of the previous tapes. Official grade reports indicating cumulative grade averages and semester grade averages were used as evidence of scholastic performance.

After all data was collected, Midwest Research notified the principal investigator as to which audio cassettes were imbedded with subliminal messages and which were ocean waves only. To insure that triple blind research conditions be maintained, the researcher who dealt with Midwest had no contact with the subjects until after the experiment had been concluded and the post- questionnaires completed.

The pre- and postquestionnaires were designed to collect information relative to age, sex, year in college, course load, degree aspirations, study skills and attitudes, time spent in study, test-taking ability, expected grades, predicted college success and feelings about college. In addition, the postquestionnaire asked questions about the audio cassettes, including attitude, help, enjoyment and frequency of use.

The subliminal programs selected for this study were produced by Midwest Research.

They were custom labeled to facilitate the research, but are commercially available. Listed as program number 36: Passing Exams with Flying Colors, they contain subliminal messages for improving self-image, study skills and increased recall in test situations. These messages are recorded below the threshold of conscious hearing and contain compressed speech communicating several thousand affirmations per hour.

The placebo tapes sound identical to the subliminal tapes with sounds from nature. They are made up of about 90 percent ocean waves with sea gull and cricket noises to break the routine. Placebo tapes contain no subliminal communication.

Findings

The intent of this study was to demonstrate the effectiveness of subliminal techniques for improving academic performance. It was hypothesized that: students who use subliminal programs designed to improve recall in test situations will outperform classmates who listen to identical sounding placebo tapes containing no subliminal messages.

The two groups were quite similar in terms of the characteristics measured by the questionnaire. Those characteristics were age, sex, year in college, course load, grade averages and frequency of use of audio cassettes.

Comparison of pre- and postquestionnaire results showed that the groups were attitudinally similar, with the control group self-appraisal improving slightly more than the subliminal group. The only questionnaire results to stand out had to do with time spent in study. The subliminal group increased their average study time from 14 1/2 to 15 3/4 hours per week. The control group averaged 13 1/2 hours of study on the prequestionnaire and dropped to 10 3/4 hours by the time of the postquestionnaire.

All students who participated in this study thought they were listening to relaxing sounds of ocean waves only and they were not aware that half the tapes had subliminal messages imbedded in them. The students who unknowingly listened to SCWL program number 36: Passing Exams with Flying Colors increased their group's semester average by .45 over their previous cumulative average. Those students who listened to ocean waves without subliminal messages did not improve their group average, even though they had been in the course "Reading and Study Skills."

In other words, the subliminal group's average grade went from "C" to "B-" while the control group's average stayed at "C+."

The subliminal group raised their average from 2.28 to 2.73 without a corresponding change in self-appraisal. They experienced an increase in academic performance without realizing it.

Conclusions

In this study, the students who unknowingly used subliminal programs designed to improve recall in test situations did, in fact, outperform classmates who listened to identical sounding placebo tapes containing no subliminal messages.

From the review of related research and evidence collected in this study, it appears that subliminal techniques do enhance the learning process in three ways: (1) by increasing the intensity of healthy motivational tendencies already present; (2) by projecting new and useful information directly into the subconscious, bypassing the change resisting process of the conscious mind; and (3) by increasing one's awareness and ability to recall appropriate information.

Comparison of Subliminal and Control Groups

A.	<u>Demographics:</u>	<u>Subliminal Group</u>	<u>Control Group</u>
	Age	29% over 28	25% over 28
	Sex	57% Male	50% Male
	Previous credits earned	Average 24	Average 21
	Year in college	71% Freshmen	63% Freshmen
	Semester credit load	Average 13 cr	Average 13 cr
B.	<u>Use of tapes</u>		
	Did you enjoy the tape?	"No" = 0	"No" = 25%
	Hard to listen for 30 minutes?	"NO" = 71%	"No" = 38%
	Frequency of use	3 times/week	3 times/week
	Did tape help performance?	"No" = 14%	"No" = 50%
C.	Shift from pre to post:		
	Change in expected course grade	-.09	+.13
	Change in expected semester grade	-.35	-.38
	Change in expected graduation avg.	+.08	-.16
	Change in study time per week	1 1/4 hr/wk	-2 3/4 hr/wk
D.	Academic Performance:		
	Previous cumulative average	2.28	2.47
	Semester average	2.73	2.46
	Change in grade average	+.45	-.01

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