

How to Talk about Gender Equity in the Workplace: Using WAGES as an Experiential Learning Tool to Reduce Reactance and Promote Feelings of Challenge Over Threat

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Introduction

Interventions aimed at raising awareness of gender equity in the workplace must provide participants with knowledge of sexism.

- Knowledge can elicit reactance (deny veracity of information)
- Knowledge can lower self-efficacy (feelings of personal agency)

Experiential learning offers a model for how information can be shared without reactance or diminishing self-efficacy (Kolb, 1984).

- Ideas are not fixed, but are shaped through experience
- Reflection on experience enables greater understanding
- Peer learning and discussion advances reflection to include more abstract ideas about experiences
- Gained knowledge is used to understand new experiences

Workshop Activity for Gender Equity Simulation (WAGES) uses experiential learning to show how gender inequity is often the result of subtle, unconscious bias that accumulates over time.

- Participants first play a board game type activity to develop the initial experience of how gender inequity with bias
- Players are trying to advance through the academic ranks
- Assigned to either the green team or white team
- Players draw cards that describe day-to-day scenarios, that are experienced differently by green and white team members
- The white team accrues small advantages each turn

A senior faculty member congratulates you on your skill in completing a big grant proposal on time.

Earn 3 credit chips as you await your reviews.
Move 1 space forward.

A senior faculty member congratulates you on your good luck in completing a big grant proposal on time.

Earn 2 credit chips as you await your reviews.
Move 1 space forward.

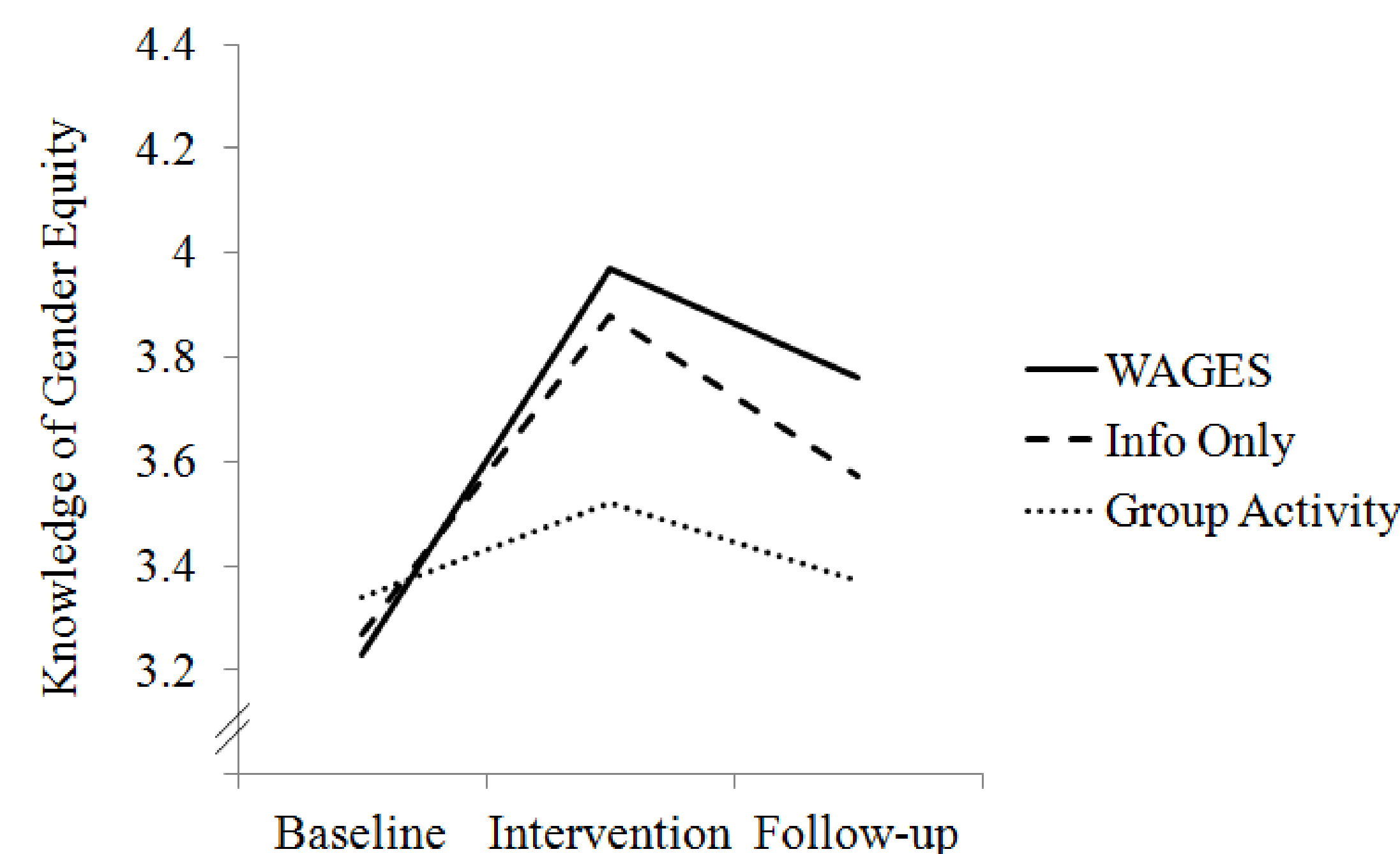
Sample items for Green and White players at the Assistant Professor Level

-Participants then discuss what this bias means and what can be done about it at the individual, group, and institutional levels

- In particular, participants learn that good intentions alone cannot offset the activation of subtle, unconscious bias

Knowledge of Gender Equity

Participants who played WAGES reported more knowledge at the follow-up than both the Info Only ($p < .03$, $d = .33$) and Group Activity ($p < .001$, $d = .67$) conditions.

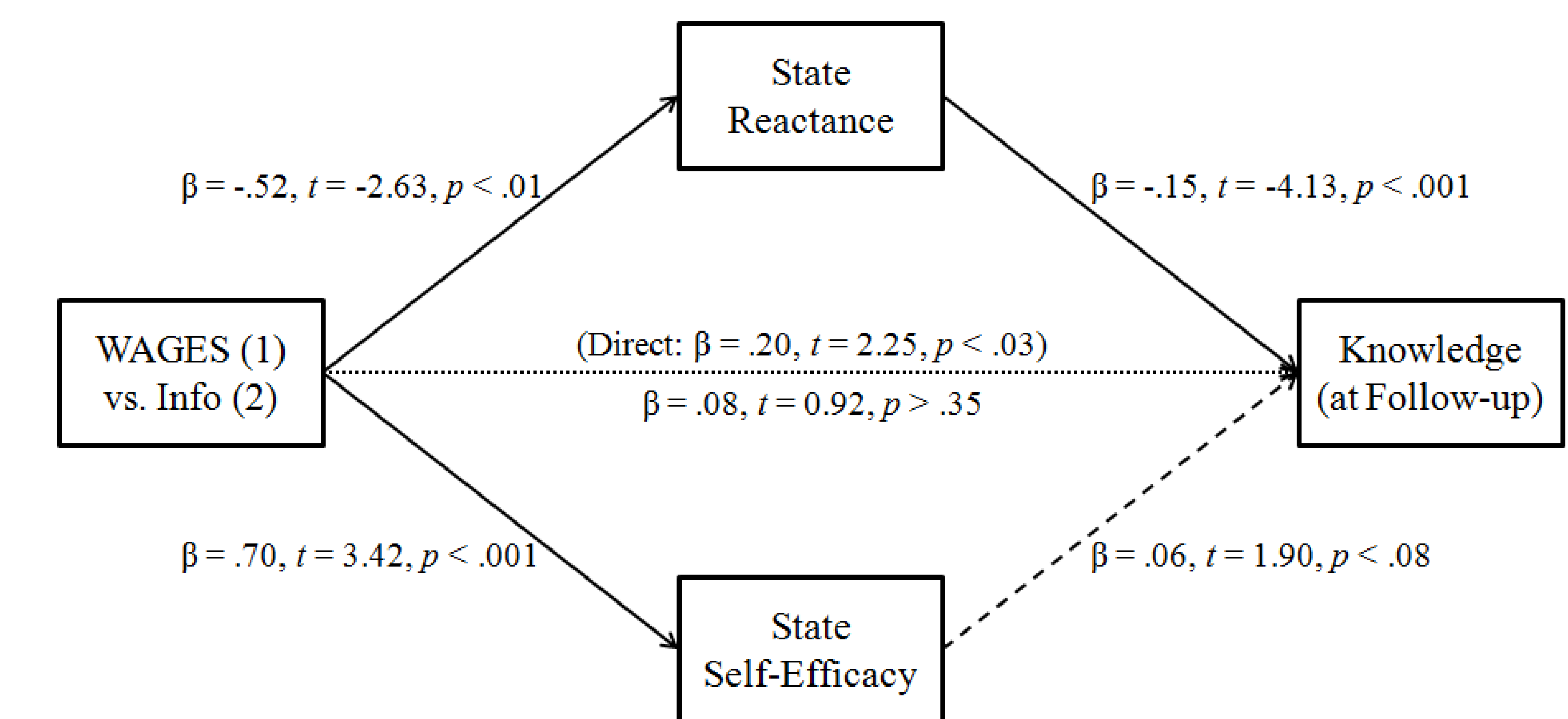


Intervention x Time Interaction: $F(4, 472) = 13.98$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$

Results

Reactance and Self-Efficacy

WAGES resulted in less reactance and more self-efficacy than the Info Only group, which in turn predicted more knowledge at the follow-up, indicating mediation.



Overall Model: $F(6, 162) = 9.84$, $p < .001$, $r^2 = .27$

Methods

Design: 3 (Intervention: WAGES vs. Info Only vs. Group Activity) x 3 (Time: Baseline, Intervention, Follow-up) mixed design

- Info Only read WAGES information on handouts (no experiential learning)
- Group Activity played Chutes & Ladders and discussed groups

Participants: 241 undergrad (139 women; $M_{age}=19.4$, 86% White)

Materials and Procedure: Knowledge of Gender Equity (KGE) measured at all time points (1-5 scale)

- KGE, 21 items (Shields et al., 2011): e.g., "Gender has no influence on the results of workplace evaluations." (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .88-.91$)

Reactance & self-efficacy measured after intervention (1-7 scale)

- Reactance, 4 items: e.g., "Much of the information given today seemed exaggerated." ($\alpha = .84$)
- Self-efficacy, 7 items: e.g., "What I heard today provides opportunities for me to overcome obstacles." ($\alpha = .88$)

Discussion

Summary of Results:

- WAGES is an effective experiential learning tool to deliver knowledge about gender equity in the workplace
- WAGES is effective because it evokes less reactance and more self-efficacy than information alone

Current Projects:

- Assess the extent to which WAGES increases recognition of gender bias and increases behaviors to reduce gender inequity
- Examine the effectiveness of WAGES over longer term
- Examine WAGES effectiveness with faculty and administrators in STEM domains



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