

Introduction

- Student self-efficacy (i.e., the sense that they have what it takes to accomplish their academic goals) is a robust predictor of college retention (e.g., Paunesku, 2015; Ramo-Sánchez, 2007).
- We propose that adopting a mindset that education contributes to one's sense of meaning/purpose in life positively contributes to students' efficacy beliefs.
- Meaning/Purpose in life is predictive of positive health and coping (e.g., Hooker et al., 2018)
- Having students identify how their education contributes to sense of purpose increases persistence and academic success (Yeager et al., 2014)

Does purpose for learning promote student self-efficacy?

Hypothesis: Students who complete a purpose for learning writing/reflection task will report higher student self-efficacy compared to students who complete a control writing task.

Method

Participants

- 311 undergraduate students (232 women, 20 men; $M_{age} = 20.03$, $SD_{age} = 3.84$)

Procedure

- Participants completed a questionnaire on computer that contained all materials.

 1. Participants randomly assigned to Purpose for learning or Control writing task.
 2. Participants completed 3-item student self-efficacy self-report measure (Bandura, 2006).
 3. Participants completed 10-item state meaning in life questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), meant as manipulation check.
 4. Participants completed demographic survey.
 5. Participants debriefed and dismissed.

Method Cont.

Materials

• Writing conditions

- **Purpose for learning condition:** Responded to the following two questions: 1) "How does your education contribute to you sense of personal importance?", 2) "How will learning in school help you to be the person you want to be or help you make the kind of impact you want to on the people around you or in society in general?"
- **Control condition:** Responded to the following two questions: 1) "How is college different from high school?", 2) "How is your life different now compared to when you were in high school?"

• Dependent Measures

- **Student Self-efficacy:** 3-items; "I feel confident that I can master the course content" (1 = cannot do at all, 10 = highly certain can do; $\alpha = .92$; $M = 7.51$, $SD = 1.62$).
- **Meaning in life Manipulation Check:** 10-items to assess two dimensions of meaning in life: *presence of meaning* (e.g., My life has a clear sense of purpose; 1 = absolutely untrue, 7 = absolutely true; $\alpha = .84$; $M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.18$) and *search for meaning* (e.g., e.g., "I am looking to find my life's purpose"; 1 = absolutely untrue, 7 = absolutely true; $\alpha = .86$, $M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.22$)

Results

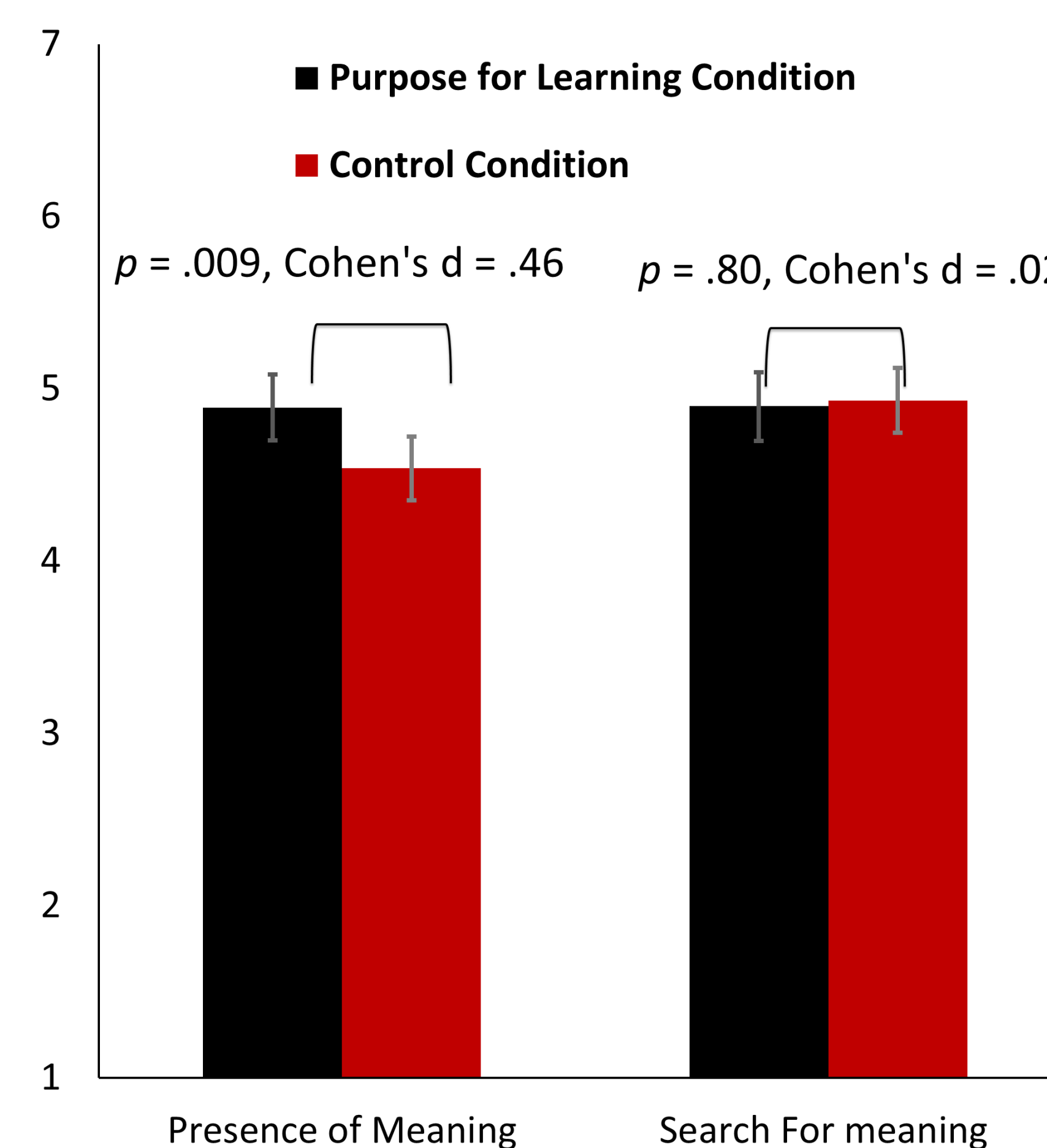


Figure 1. Manipulation check. The effect of the purpose for learning condition, compared to the control condition, on presence of meaning and search for meaning, respectively.

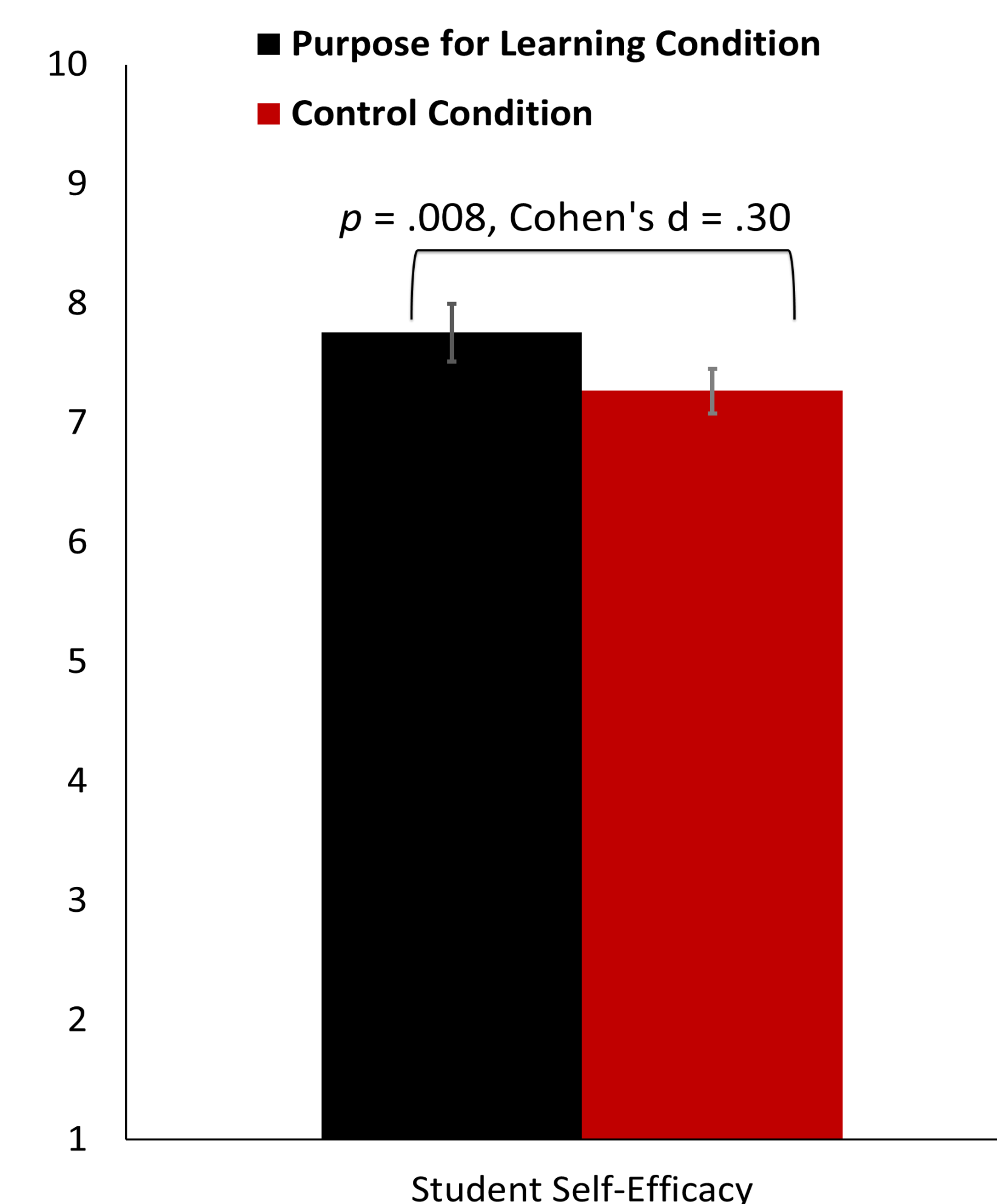


Figure 2. The effect of the purpose for learning condition, compared to the control condition on student self-efficacy

Discussion

• Key Take-Home Message:

- Encouraging students to view their education as meaningful positively affects their belief that they have what it takes to succeed in college.
- **Significance of findings**
 - Simple intervention task could help students develop confidence in their academic abilities.
 - Could be applied to help struggling and/or underrepresented students.
 - Efficacy is an important predictor of student success and retention.
- **Unanswered questions**
 - Does increase in self-efficacy translate to academic success and retention?
 - Why does viewing goals as meaningful give people confidence?
 - Lasting effects of writing task?
 - Boundary conditions? Can it help students who have already given up in school and on the verge of dropping out?

References

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