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# BEHAVIORAL INTENTION AS A FUNCTION OF VALUE ATTITUDE INCONSISTENCY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SALIENCE

BY

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B. A., University of South Florida, 1977

## THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Communication in the Graduate Studies Program of the College of Arts and Sciences University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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#### INTRODUCTION

An individual's personal values may reveal insight into how the individual comes to behave, decide, evaluate and order his life. The difficulty is in quantifying the values held by the individual and identifying the factors that may enhance or alter the development of a personal value system. Dukes (1955), in his overview of the studies of values, notes the difficulty in determining the starting point of values systems in the developing child. The author laments the "lack of certainty" in research and suggests a lingitudinal study which does not lose the "lifelike complexity" when subjected to controls.

Quantifications would only be successful when the researcher could be sure of what was being observed. Rokeach (1968) determined the need to examine values by his definition marking the differences between values and attitudes:

An attitude . . . is an organization of several beliefs focusing on a specific object or situation, predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner. Values, on the other hand, have to do with modes of conduct [instrumental values] and end states of existence [terminal values]. (p. 159)

It is within this framework that Rokeach suggests that we have a personal agenda or hierarchy of values which we arrange and develop as we mature. The manner in which these values are rank-ordered for the individual's life determines how the

individual's attitudes, and ultimately, behavior will be revealed. In fact, Rokeach (1968) further notes "that the value-attitude system will affect other connected parts and lead to behavior change."

(p. 162).

The Rokeach Values Survey (RVS) is a reliable tool for understanding values and generating change through induced perceptions of cognitive inconsistency. Rokeach developed a form whereby subjects are presented with two alphabetical lists of relatively important terminal and instrumental values. The subjects are then asked to rank-order them based on personal importance. The procedure has led to a systematic body of research on the relationships between values, attitudes, and behavior with respect to various demographic characteristics.

Cochrane and Rokeach (1970) undertook a critical review of this methodology. They discovered a strong tendency for those values which appeared lower on the alphabetical list to receive lower overall rankings. However, statistical manipulations did not reveal an order effect bias. Careful inspection of the scales led the researchers to speculate that "the top half of the Instrumental scale which is administered after the Terminal scale happens, by chance, to contain more values that are generally regarded as more important than the values contained in the second half of the scale." (p. 160) Even with nonalphabetical presentations to subjects, values such as Ambitious, Courageous, and Honest appear at the top of the list while values such as

<u>Intelligent</u> and <u>Imaginative</u> from the bottom half of the list and rank them higher, supporting the findings of no correlation between alphabetical position and declared importance in value.

Rokeach's use of the value hierarchy has centered on the induction and changes in attitudes, behaviors, and values. For example, Rokeach speculates that states of inconsistency exist internally in the individual's value system and that for one reason or another (i.e., ego defense, conformity) the individual is unaware of said state.

Rokeach (1968) suggests that one of the advantages of rankordering the list of values is that the subject may not be aware
of the possibility that he is revealing something about himself
that others may interpret as logically inconsistent, or, even
as hypocritical. (p. 26) By making the individual conscious of
the existence of the inconsistency it is possible to change the
core values. Movement will occur because of the natural internal
drive to correct internal imbalance. Rokeach (1973, p. 159) refers
to this process as "reeducation."

Creating awareness of the values-inconsistency was the basis for Rokeach's (1968) classic study in values, in which students were asked to rank-order the list of terminal values. Subjects were then asked to compare their rankings to the results collected from a larger group of Michigan State University students. Rokeach drew attention (p. 27) to the inconsistency in values rankings whereby the students, on the average, <u>ranked</u> freedom first and

equality sixth. Rokeach noted that "this suggests that the Michigan State University students in general are more interested in their own freedom than they are in freedom for other people."

Rokeach repeated the procedure but induced an additional dissonant relationship between attitudes toward civil rights and the average rankings of <a href="freedom">freedom</a> and <a href="equality">equality</a>. The results:

Those who report they are "sympathetic, and have participated" in civil rights demonstrations rank freedom first on the average and equality third . . . among terminal values; those who are "sympathetic, but have not participated" rank freedom first and equality sixth; and those who are "unsympathetic" rank freedom second and equality eleventh. (1973, p. 169)

Using the freedom-equality threshold was very successful for Rokeach and replication (1973, p. 173) using various subgroups yielded similarly significant results. His conclusion, presented to subjects in the experimental condition suggested a high <u>freedom</u>, low <u>equality</u>, against civil rights attitude really suggests that the individual cares more about his personal freedom and is indifferent to other people's freedom. Those who ranked <u>freedom</u> and <u>equality</u> high with a pro civil rights behavior stance were demonstrating a concern for personal freedom as well as freedom for others. The need to balance the internal consistency resulting from this self-awareness was demonstrated in 3-week and 3-month posttests on values. Utilizing a t-test for correlated emasures, Rokeach discovered significant (p< .001) positive movement in the changes in rank-order for <u>freedom</u> and <u>equality</u> such that subjects who were confronted with this discrepancy

between their values and attitudes reported higher rankings on the equality and a more favorable civil rights attitude.

Having established the relationship between values-consistency and attitudes, Rokeach (1971b) wanted to determine if values attitude changes would persist over time. The research question was raised partly to test whether these changes were genuine for the subjects and not simply immediate responses following an experimental condition.

The subjects, freshmen from two colleges at Michigan State
University, were given three week, three month, and 15-17 month
posttests in the experimental condition. This raises the question
of demand characteristics because the mean ranking for equality was
raised an average of 2.68 points and the three-month measure marked
the third time the subjects were exposed to the RVS after freedom
and equality were singled out. Nonetheless, these were still
significant changes in ranking over an extended period of time.
In measurement of attitude change, operationalized as equal rights
for Negroes, the "immediate findings (posttest at three weeks)
yielded a 'sleeper effect'." The experimental group actually
moved away from positive attitude change. In the later posttest,
significant pro-civil rights attitudes were reported . . . suggesting
long-range attitude change as well as value change." (p. 456)

Having noted the movement in subject attitude, Rokeach then sought to discover a method for determining behavioral consistency after the values change. The posttest in this long-range study

involved the solicitation of the subjects to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in which memberships were offered for \$1.00 and/or the subjects could write asking for additional information. The results (p. 457) summarized here demonstrated that the theoretical reasoning was not flawed. The first solicitation provided 53 positive responses (40 joined for \$1.00 or wrote a letter of inquiry; of these 29 were from experimental condition) while the second solicitation (15-17 months later) provided an additional 17 new responses; 12 from the experimental condition.

In order to indirectly verify perceptions of inconsistency,

Rokeach asked the subjects how satisfied they were with their

rankings. The results indicated a significant positive relationship

between dissatisfaction and value change.

Rokeach's review of this research included a discussion of ethics. "If we can increase the process of valuation to increase freedom and equality, it could also be possible to reduce them."

Rokeach also asked for safeguards to ensure the values we choose to change and direct in an educational institution are consistent with the values of a "political democracy" and humanity. (Rokeach, 1971a, p. 92)

In response to Rokeach's call for safeguards, applications of the values research sought to demonstrate responsibility and purpose. By attempting to reeducate subject's values, it was hoped that modified behavior would follow to the benefit of all concerned. For example, Van Leuven (1980) identified nine public and private interest subgroups and administered the RVS noting the differences on key issues as they related to the use of public lands. One of the results found environmentalists ranked the terminal value a world of beauty [defined in the RVS as: "beauty of nature, the arts"] first compared to sixth for outdoor club members and thirteenth for loggers.

According to Van Leuven:

On balance . . .[the] measures of value-attitude consistency may prove useful to . . . [researchers] . . . if [the] alternatives or attitude objects can be clearly distinguished from one another and if there is sufficient interest in the public issue for the respondents to be able to evoke a gestalt-like unit relationship between the issue and their own personal values. (p. 55)

Van Leuven noted the differences in the value rankings came from what was salient to the particular subgroup, while less salient terminal values did not differ significantly from each other over time.

Rokeach (1974) noted this stability, salience, and change interrelationship in a comparison study of the changes in value ranking from 1968-1971 as a composite and them by comparison of key individual subgroups. As certain issues (poverty, sexism, civil rights) became more and more examined by the news media and other personally respected sources, they became more salient. It is during this period of salience when attitudes, beliefs, and values, according to Rokeach, become more vulnerable to change.

Salience can rise and fall as the problem or issue changes importance. "Values not related to the emergence or alleviation of major societal problems should remain relatively stable."

(p. 225) The data supported this hypothesis as 25 of 36 values in the RVS yielded no significant changes.

The study also examined subgroup changes by sex, race, age, education, and income. Important changes in individual subgroups supported the salience hypothesis quite well. For example, American men elevated the ranking of a world at peace (p<.05), which does not seem at all peculiar in view of the depth of American involvement and public sentiment at the time concerning Vietnam. It would be safe to speculate that American men who were actually veterans of the conflict in Vietnam might rank a world at peace and equality even higher because of their physically salient involvement.

More recently, the Gamson-Holley (1984) study of values-behavior inconsistency demonstrated a trend in the direction of positive change in values and behavioral intent concerning seatbelt usage by automobile drivers. Subjects were made aware of their values-behavior inconsistency in either a salient (using seatbelts in an aircraft in flight) or nonsalient (strangers randomly selected and interviewed in the terminal of an airport) condition. Their hypothesis was in the genre of Rokeach's values-consistency theories their dependent measure may not have had the power to reveal significant results. Specifically, the focus of the study

was to determine behavioral intent. The study's information collection did not require the subjects to involve themselves with the process of values-inconsistency (that is, determine a rank-order of personal values that bring awareness to the apparent discrepancy between terminal value rankings and actual behavior). Instead, subjects were given one of two messages with varied levels of "induced" values-behavior inconsistency and then queried as to intent for future behavior. While the results were nonsignificant, the data trend was sufficiently encouraging to warrant replication.

Following modifications in the salience manipulation and dependent measure, the current study was conducted to research the effects of environmental salience and values-behavior inconsistency on behavioral intent.

#### EXPERIMENT

Based upon previous research, the following hypotheses were posited:

- H1: Subjects in a salient environment will report significantly greater persuasion than subjects in a nonsalient environment.
- H2: Subjects confronted with a message exposing an inconsistency between their values and behavior will undergo greater persuasion than subjects not confronted with inconsistency arousing information.

# Methodology

# Independent Variable

The experiment was a 2 (salience/nonsalience) X 2 (message/no message) design. The salient environment was operationalized as randomly sampled adults and teenagers in the airport terminal and random street interviews at a local community center.

Randomness of the seating environment was ensured by the open seating arrangement of the aircraft and that the researcher had no control over who purchased a ticket and flew during the experiment. The flights utilized in the experiment originated in two cities in Ohio (Columbus and Cleveland) and terminated locally (Orlando, Florida).

The second variable was message confrontation. The two levels of this variable were the message and no-message control. The message confrontation condition was operationalized as the condition wherein subjects were exposed to a behavior-values conflict message in the context of a survey. In the no-message control, the data collection procedure omitted the confrontation message. Random assignment of passengers to either level was accomplished by random seeding of the sea pockets with one of the different data collection tools during preflight preparation of the aircraft and preboarding of the passengers.

# Dependent Measure

The dependent measure was the amount of persuasion measured by the responses to the key item on the questionnaire. Persuasion was determined by the degree of self-reported intent to ask future car passengers to wear their seatbelts.

In the dependent measure, the subjects were first asked to complete a shortened version of the Rokeach Values Survey terminal values scale. Cognizant of the fact that the subjects were not previously solicited for participation in the project they were asked to rank-order only the top five most important values in the list as they applied to their own lives.

The message condition had the values-behavior inconsistency message inserted after the RVS and before the persuasion measure. In this message, the subjects were asked to compare their rankings on the RVS to a list of results from other surveys to see how they

compared with the other respondents. Attention was called to the fact that the terminal value <u>Family Security</u> was ranked very highly (ranked second to Freedom).

The message used to induce the values-inconsistency awareness was:

In the previous exercise you were asked to rank order these values in the order of their importance in your life. The numbers on the extreme right of the page indicate the results from another recent survey and you may want to compare how your answers matched theirs. As you can see Family Security was ranked very highly.

A recent National Transportation Safety Board report has demonstrated that flying in a commercial airliner is significantly safer than driving a car. Yet, while virtually everyone obeys the seatbelt orders in airplanes, most people do not use seatbelts in their cars. This suggests that while people value family security highly, they are willing to risk their lives of their family and friends by failing to wear their seatbelts.

The self-report measures required subjects to identify their behaviors on a seven-point Likert-type scale. The key questions were a self-report on current seatbelt usage and an item asking whether the subject intended to ask future passengers in their cars to buckle their seatbelts.

# Procedure

In the flight condition, the aircraft chosen were cleaned following their final flight of the day. During this procedure, the data collection booklets were randomly placed in the seat-pockets throughout the aircraft. The aircraft were then closed and locked, preventing anyone from attempting to board the aircraft

and affect the survey placements. The next day, passengers boarded the flights bound for Orlando, Florida, and their curiosity enabled them to find the survey (see Appendix A for survey content). The flights were also selected due to their approximately identical flight time, thus ensuring an additional control on the condition. At the termination of the flight, the attendants collected the surveys from the seatpockets and submitted them to the researcher for analysis.

In the ground condition, the researcher approached groups of subjects as individuals in randomly selected gate areas at the airport terminal and at a neighborhood community center. These areas were chosen in an attempt to control the age and socioeconomic variables, thereby obtaining a sample that was demographically similar to the in-flight groups.

One hundred thirty-eight subjects participated in the experiment; 66 in the salient condition, 72 in the nonsalient condition. In the salient in-flight condition, the 66 subjects represented 47.8% of the passenger load of the flights were at 94.5% of capacity. In the nonsalient condition, the subject N of 72 represented 55% of the 131 subjects approached.

# Results

The data were analyzed with three-factor ANOVAs using salience, message confrontation, and gender as the independent variables. Gender was included due to its potential relevance to the persuasion outcomes in the experiment.

The dependent measure included a check of current seatbelt use by each respondent. Data were then compared among all experimental groups in an effort to check initial equivalence of the comparison groups.

TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIORAL INTENT IN SELF REPORT OF SEATBELT USAGE

Variable	MS	df	F	p<	
Salience	2.01	1	7.30	.01	
Message	2.00	1	7.26	.01	
Gender	0.86	1	3.11	n. s. d	
Within Cell	0.275	130			

No interaction of the variables was observed or significant.

The results revealed two significant differences. First, salient condition subjects reported significantly more seatbelt usage than the nonsalient group  $\underline{F}(1, 130) = 7.30$ ,  $\underline{p}<.01$ . In the second comparison, subjects in the message condition reported more seatbelt usage,  $\underline{F}(1, 130) = 7.26$ ,  $\underline{p}<.01$ , than subjects in the nonmessage control. In light of this initial nonequivalence between groups, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution.

TABLE 2

ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIORAL INTENT TO SEEK SEATBELT USAGE BY PASSENGERS IN THE FUTURE

Variable	MS	df	F	p<
Salience	1.88	1	8.09	.01
Message	2.02	1	8.70	.01
Gender	1.60	1	6.90	.02
Within Cell	0.232	130		

No interaction of the variables was observed or significant.

In the key question, respondents were asked to reveal future intent to ask passengers in their automobiles to use their seatbelts. Main effects for message and salience were significant. In the salient condition ( $\bar{X}=4.85$ ), subjects reported greater persuasion than subjects in the nonsalient condition ( $\bar{X}=3.94$ ),  $\underline{F}(1,130)=8.09$ ,  $\underline{p}<.01$ . Message confrontation also significantly enhanced intentions,  $\underline{F}(1,130)=8.70$ ,  $\underline{p}<.01$ , to ask passengers to buckle up (control  $\bar{X}=3.97$ , message  $\bar{X}=4.77$ ). Thus, both hypotheses were supported.

Additionally, a gender effect was observed for the self report on future requests for passengers to use seatbelts. Females ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.79) were more influenced than males ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.00),  $\bar{F}$ (1, 130) = 6.90, p<.02. No significant interactions were obtained.

Finally, a Pearson  $\underline{r}$  correlation coefficient was computed to determine the relationship between the ranking of <u>Family Security</u> and the intent to ask passengers to buckle up in the subject's automobiles in the future. The correlation coefficient was nonsignificant ( $\underline{r}$  = +.067, df = 137). While <u>Family Security</u> was ranked highly ( $\overline{X}$  = 2.5 out of 10 values), its ranking did not predict responses to the key question.

#### DISCUSSION

Compared to previous research by Gamson-Holley (1984), the qualitative improvement in the methodology appears to have been an influence in this experiment. The results reaffirm the validity of Rokeach's (1968, 1971a, 1971b, 1974) earlier research in values and behavior inconsistence. Presentation of an inconsistency arousing message did provide movement in behavioral intent.

The results were also supportive of the Rokeach (1974) research with regard to salience and change interrelationships. Seatbelt usage is a more widely publicized issue today than the concept of civil rights. This lends credence to Rokeach's contention that during salience attitudes, beliefs, and values are more vulnerable to change.

Despite the statistical support for the predictions, there are at least two alternative explanations for the results. First, the apparent nonequivalence of the comparison groups must qualify the findings of the experiment. It is possible that salient groups were confounded with predispositions toward seatbelts. Since the aircraft passengers (salient environment) appeared more favorably disposed toward seatbelt use, it is possible that their greater intent to ask car passengers to buckle up was due to this

existing predisposition and not the treatment. However, this potential bias cannot explain the data for the inconsistency hypothesis since both aircraft and ground subjects were included in both the message and control conditions.

Still another explanation for the salience findings is that the environment actually caused cognitive reorganization regarding perceptions of one's own seatbelt use. If so, the salience influence could have resulted in an overreporting of seatbelt usage.

The gender effect may be the result of a cultural phenomenon. The female mean  $(\bar{X}=4.79)$  was higher than the male mean  $(\bar{X}=4.00)$ , possibly revealing that either the females are more vulnerable to the presentation of the values-behavior inconsistency or that females maintain a higher level of responsibility than males. Culturally, it is the woman who is more likely to chauffer the children to and from school and post-school activities. This may have led to higher involvement with this social issue for females than for males. On the other hand, males tend to commute more regularly without secondary passengers, and, therefore may not have been as affected.

In light of recent moves by state legislators to invoke mandatory seatbelt use laws, and the continued failure of current public advertising to generate significant behavioral change in this matter, it seems appropriate to offer valid experiments in the area of values research as impetus.

One of the key questions in this experiment was how to approach subjects about a highly personal behavioral issue to support the hypothesis on salience. Obviously, the task of interviewing subjects in their personal automobiles was a possibility with very cumbersome logistics. Having a large number of adult subjects in a salient environment such as a commercial airliner in flight reduces the difficulty of the task. One of the great social dilemmas of those concerned with public safety and public opinion is how to generate the attitude change necessary to stimulate the behavior of seatbelt use. Television advertising is a good channel of message delivery but it is unlikely that the viewer is buckled into their sofa at home with lap restraints. There is high face validity to the observation that most personal vehicles on the road have a radio that is in use by the occupants. Radio advertising will reach those people but the message is obviously lost among all of the other commercial advertising on the air. If public service announcements were more effective by themselves we would be a nation of caring, nonsmoking, seatbelt using, blood-donating civilians! The actions of large numbers of passengers in public transportation seems to indicate that the results of this study may have touched the answer. By engaging the subjects in an active manner in a salient environment, those interested in affecting public opinion will be able to apply the theories generated in the research done by Rokeach and others. Rokeach demonstrated that the message of values inconsistency was

effective in persuading behavioral intent and affecting attitudes.

If salience is also revealed as a satisfactory and valid variable,
then we are at the gateway of answering Rokeach's call to humanitarian
responsibility when generating values change.

Indeed, some public safety officials are using a device which acts as a type of crash sled. The public is invited to sit in a seat while using shoulder and lap restraints. They are then subjected to a simulated low speed crash effect. The rationale is that the salience of actually experiencing the feeling of protection may stimulate compliant behavior. It would seem unwieldy to subject large numbers of the population to this experience and one-shot aversion therapy is not as effective as self-generated values change over time.

In order to extend the research of this experiment and judge the effectiveness of the experiment over time, a replication of the long-range study by Rokeach would be required. If the combination of physical and cognitive salience is successful, it could mean the beginning of a new approach to generating attitude, and ultimately behavior change with regard to social issues.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

One hundred thirty-eight subjects were surveyed in two experimental conditions to test the effects of salience and message confrontation on behavioral intent to request future car passengers to use their seatbelts. It was hypothesized that subjects in a salient environment (an airliner in flight) would report significantly greater persuasion than subjects in a nonsalient environment (on the ground in an airport terminal and at a community center). It was further posited that subjects confronted with a message exposing an inconsistency between values and behavior would undergo greater persuasion than subjects not confronted with inconsistency arousing information.

The results were analyzed using three-factor analysis of variance with salience, message confrontation, and gender as independent variables. Significant main effects were found for all three factors. Both salience and message confrontation significantly enhanced persuasion. Finally, females reported significantly higher levels of reported behavioral intent to solicit seatbelt usage from their car passengers in the future than males. There were no significant interactions.

#### APPENDIX A

The following form contains a voluntary and confidential survey. You are invited to participate by completing the survey items to the best of your ability.

Thank you.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM IN INK. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS, BUT WE WOULD LIKE YOUR FIRST CHOICE ANSWERS.

THE FOLLOWING LIST CONTAINS PRIORITIES IN OUR LIVES. WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO CHOOSE THE TOP FIVE THAT ARE APPROPRIATE FOR YOU. PLEASE RANK THEM, ONE THROUGH FIVE, FOR THEIR IMPORTANCE TO YOU IN YOUR LIFE.

Α.	A world at peace	 3
В.	Family security	 2
C.	Freedom	 1
D.	Tranquility	5
Ε.	Politics	 10
F.	Competition	 8
G.	A sense of accomplishment	 4
н.	Salvation	6
I.	Being responsible	 7
J.	National security	9

In the previous exercise you were asked to rank order these values in the order of their importance in your life. The numbers on the extreme right of the page indicate the results from another recent survey and you may want to compare how your answers matched theirs. As you can see Family Security was ranked very highly.

A recent National Transportation safety Board report has demonstrated that flying in a commercial airline is significantly safer than driving a car. Yet, while virtually everyone obeys the seatbelt orders in airplanes, most people do not use seatbelts in their cars. This suggests that while people value family security highly, they are willing to risk their lives and the lives of their family and friends by failing to wear their seatbelts.

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR ANSWER TO THESE STATEMENTS BY CIRCLING THE NUMBER WHICH MOST CLOSELY IDENTIFIES HOW YOU FEEL. On this scale the number 1 indicates never and the number 7 indicates always.

		•							
1.	I brush my teeth after eating to prevent cavities.	NEVER 1	2	SOME:	TIMES 4	5	6 ALW	AYS 7	
2.	I buckle my seatbelt when I drive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3.	I give to charity to help others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4.	I see the doctor regularly to ensure my health.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5.	In the future, I will ask my passengers to buckle their seatbelts when I drive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6.	In the future, I will ask others to give thei time and money to chari	r	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7.	In the future, I will urge others to see a doctor when they are ill.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
THA	NK YOU. WOULD YOU PLEADUT YOURSELF?	SE HELP	US BY	ANSV	WERING	A FE	W QUE	STIONS	
SEX	: MALEFEMALE								
AGE	: UNDER 1718-24_	25-3	34	_35-4	44	_45-5	5	_55+	
MARITAL STATUS: SINGLE MARRIED DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN? YES NO									
DO YOU DRIVE A CAR? YES NO DO YOU FLY VERY OFTEN? YES NO									
WHA	WHAT IS YOUR HIGHEST ATTAINED EDUCATION? HIGH SCHOOL?								
(IF	(IF YES TO COLLEGE, DO YOU HAVE A DEGREE? YES)								

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