

# Is Embarrassment A Moral Emotion?

## The Prospect and Experience of Embarrassment Promote Antisocial Behavior

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Research Question: How does the prospect and experience of embarrassment affect behavior?

Current Conceptualization of Embarrassment:

Embarrassment induces prosocial behavior (Tangney et al., 2007)

The prospect of embarrassment leads to avoidance (Miller, 2007)

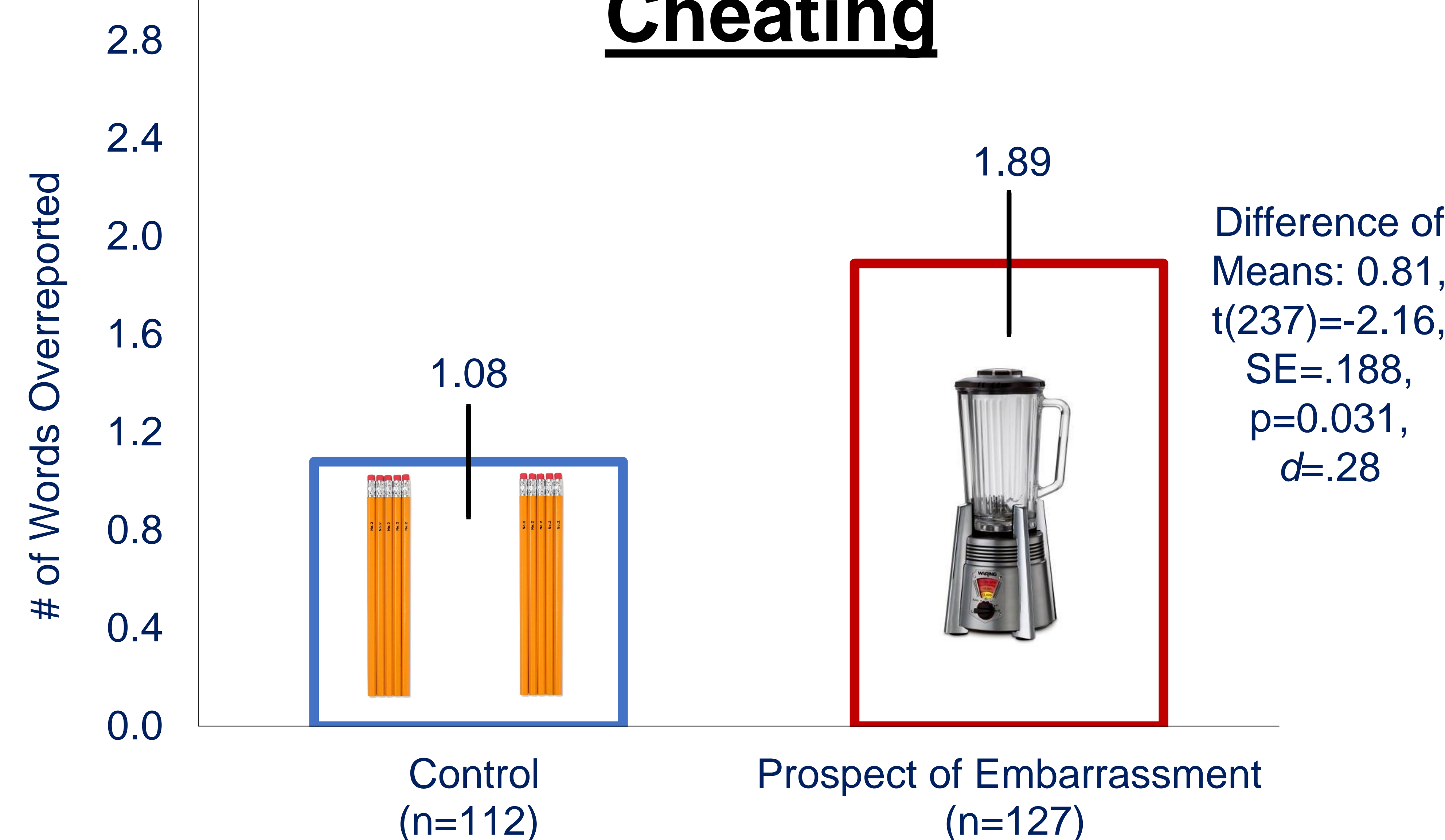
Embarrassment is a moral emotion that improves social relations (Keltner & Haidt, 1999)

This conceptualization has not been directly tested despite embarrassment being an omnipresent emotion.

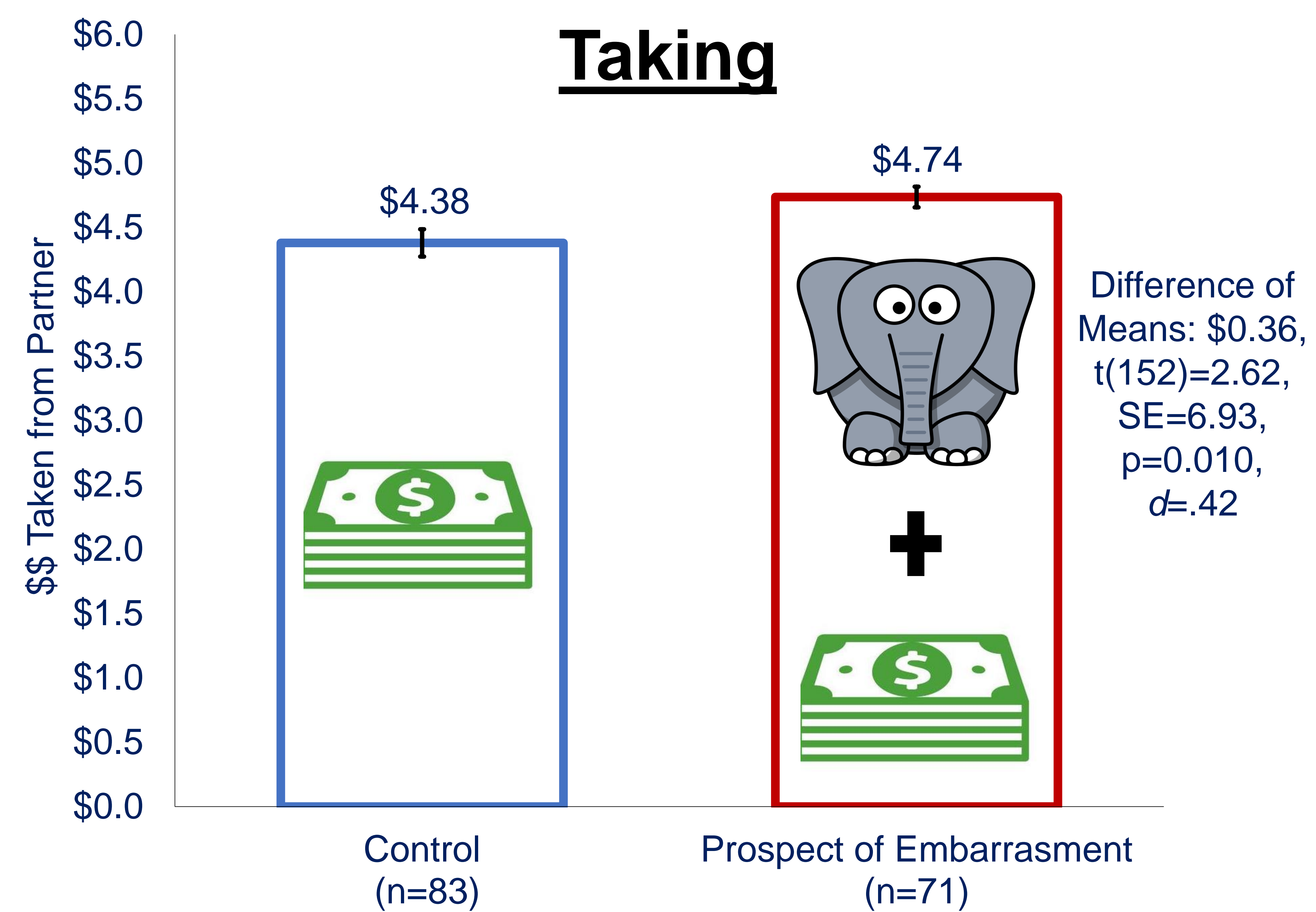
### Procedures

- Cheating:** Participants completed an anagram task and then learned that those below the median score would walk to the front of the room and **mime inanimate objects** / **pass out research supplies**. Participants then self-reported the number of anagrams they solved.
- Taking:** Participants played a dictator game where they could take up to \$5.00 from their partner. At the end of the game, participants who had less than the median amount of money **earned nothing and mimed animate objects in front of the other participants** / **earned nothing** at the end of the study.
- Self-Serving:** Participants read *50 shades of Grey* / *A Wrinkle in Time* in front of their peers. Participants then returned to their cube and were asked by a third research for help on a project.

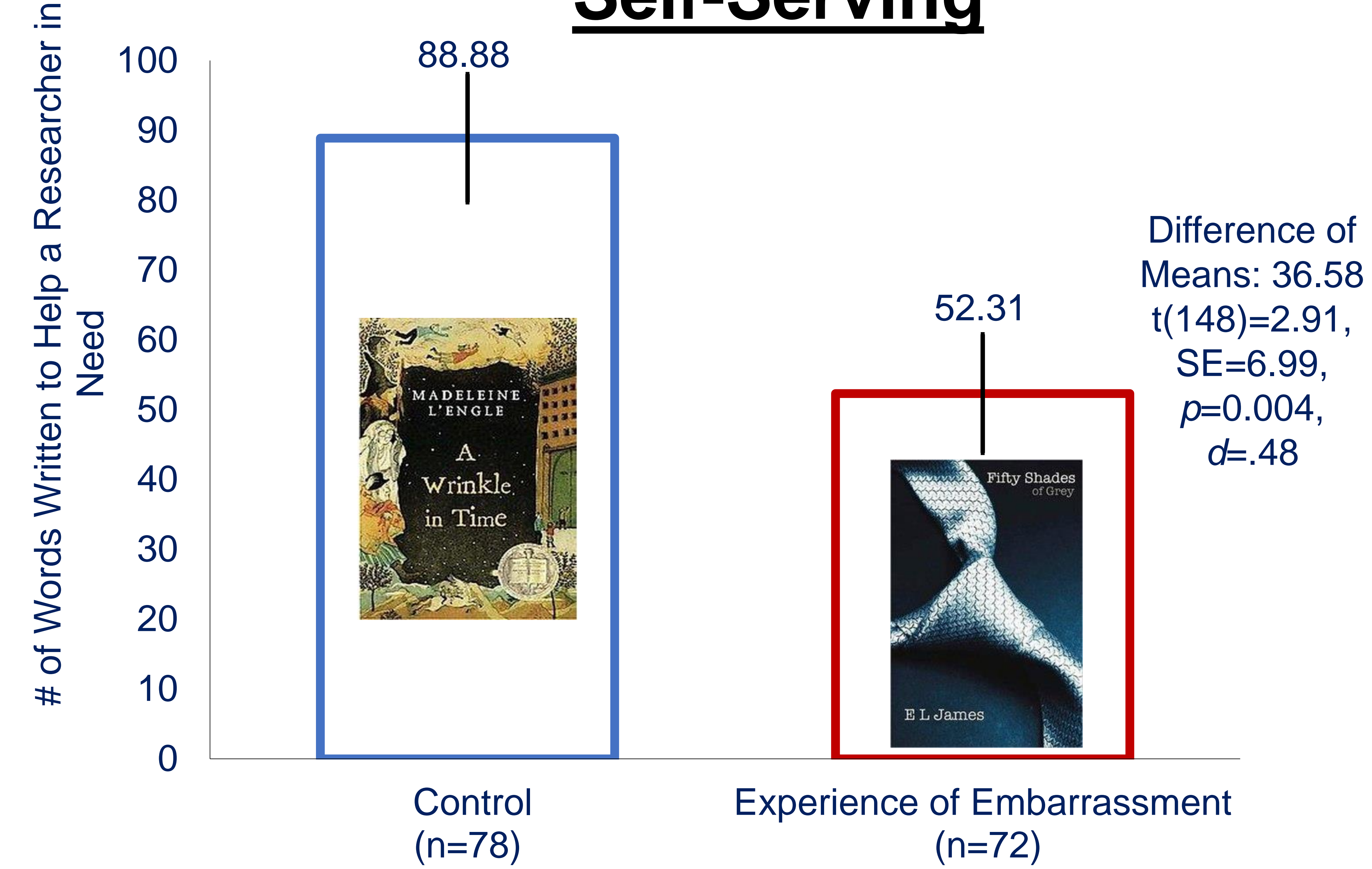
### Cheating



### Taking



### Self-Serving



### Conclusion

**The current conceptualization of embarrassment is incorrect or incomplete.**  
**The prospect of embarrassment promotes cheating and self-interested behavior.**  
**The experience of embarrassment promotes antisocial behavior.**  
**The trust we have in those who show embarrassment (Feinberg, et al. 2012) may be misplaced.**  
**Embarrassment's relation to shame and guilt requires considerable revision.**

### References

Feinberg, M., Willer, R., & Keltner, D. (2012). Flustered and faithful: Embarrassment as a signal of prosociality. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(1), 81.

Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (1999). Social functions of emotions at four levels of analysis. *Cognition & Emotion*, 13(5), 505-521.

Miller, R. S. (2007). Is embarrassment a blessing or a curse. *The self-conscious emotions: Theory and research*, 245-262. Guilford Press.

Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). Moral emotions and moral behavior. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 58, 345-372.