

SHORT NOTE

**I AM DEVIANT, BECAUSE ...:
THE IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS UPON
THE BLACK SHEEP EFFECT**

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This study explored the effect of different performance conditions upon the occurrence of the black sheep effect. It is expected that a poorly performing ingroup member would be evaluated less positively than an equally poorly performing outgroup member, whereas a well performing ingroup member would be evaluated more positively than an equally well performing outgroup member (i.e., the black sheep hypothesis). This pattern is expected only when no information is given concerning the nature of the performance circumstances. When subjects are informed that the performance circumstances were unfavourable, attributional processes can become activated resulting in a pattern of evaluations that differs from the one suggested by the black sheep hypothesis. Our results revealed indeed that information on the nature of the performance condition, influences the occurrence of the black sheep effect.

Research on the black sheep effect (Marques & Leyens, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988; Marques, 1990; Marques & Rocha, 1992, Marques & Paez, 1994) demonstrated that subjects evaluate desirable ingroup members more positively than equally desirable outgroup members, and undesirable ingroup members more negatively than equally undesirable outgroup members. Marques and colleagues interpreted this form of *intragroup* differentiation as a manifestation of ingroup bias, aimed at protecting a positive image of the own group. By doing so, group members would safeguard their social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner 1982).

Attribution processes constitute another method which can be used to protect the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup. Indeed, Hewstone (1990) and Weber (1994) demonstrated that group members make group-serving attributions to satisfy their social identity needs. For example, a negative

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performance of an ingroup member is attributed to situational factors, whereas a positive performance is attributed to ingroup characteristics. In contrast, a positive performance by an outgroup member is attributed to situational factors, whereas a negative performance is attributed to outgroup characteristics. Such an attributional strategy can also be considered as a form of ingroup bias since it results in an ingroup favouring intergroup differentiation, thereby contributing to the group members' social identity. Thus, the occurrence of the black sheep phenomenon and of group-serving attributions are both conceived of as ingroup protecting devices. However, these two mechanisms to promote a positive ingroup image involve partly opposite behaviours. While group-serving attributions protect the ingroup status by minimizing the negative performance of an ingroup member, the black sheep phenomenon aims at the same goal by aggravating the poor performance of an ingroup member. Since the existence of both types of processes has been repeatedly observed, the question arises which factors determine which process will predominate over the other one.

In a first attempt to explore this question, we will compare group members' evaluations of a good/bad performance by an ingroup/outgroup member in two different performance conditions. In the first one, subjects will be asked to evaluate a good or a bad performance by an ingroup or an outgroup member without having any further information concerning the conditions under which the performance had to be delivered. Since this condition constitutes a replication of the study by Marques and Yzerbyt (1988, experiment 2) it is expected that the black sheep effect will be obtained. In the second condition, subjects will receive the same information as in the first one but they will additionally be told that these performances occurred under unfavourable circumstances. It is assumed that the provision of this additional information will facilitate the use of attributional strategies and that the evaluations will exhibit a different pattern than the one predicted by the black sheep hypothesis.

The design of the present study thus contains three between-subjects factors. Subjects will be asked to evaluate a poor or a good performance (i.e., factor: quality of performance), delivered by an ingroup or an outgroup member (i.e., factor: performer's group membership). Furthermore, they will receive either no information with respect to the conditions under which the performance had to be delivered or they will be informed that these conditions were quite unfavourable (i.e., factor: performance condition).

When no information is provided concerning the performance conditions, it is expected that the black sheep phenomenon will be obtained. A poorly performing ingroup member will be evaluated more negatively than an equally poorly performing outgroup member. At the same time, a good performance by an ingroup member will be evaluated more positively than an equally good performance by an outgroup member. In other words, the performance

evaluations are expected to reveal a quality of performance by performer's group membership interaction.

The explicit information that the performance conditions were unfavourable is expected to facilitate the occurrence of attributional processes. Since these attribution processes do often have a group-serving quality (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Hewstone, 1990; Weber, 1994), it is expected that they will influence the pattern of the speaker evaluations. More specifically, attributing a poor performance to the unfavourable conditions rather than to the performing group member can be supposed to alleviate the impact of this poor performance upon the evaluation of the group. Since such group-protecting processes do occur mainly to protect the own group, it is expected that especially a poor performance of an ingroup member will be attributed to the unfavourable performance conditions. As a consequence, a poorly performing ingroup member can be expected to be evaluated more positively than an equally poorly performing outgroup member. In the case of a good performance, it is expected that a good performing ingroup member will always be evaluated more positively than an equally good performing outgroup member. In other words, when the performance conditions are unfavourable, it is expected that an ingroup/outgroup main effect will be obtained rather than an interaction between the performer's group membership and the quality of the performance.

The combination of these two patterns of evaluations should result then in a three-way interaction between the performer's group membership, the quality of the performance and information about the performance condition.

Method

Subjects

Eighty three male high school students, aged 12 to 13, participated in the study. Subjects were randomly allocated to the experimental conditions and cell size ranged from nine to 12 subjects.

Procedure

The present study was conducted in the students' regular classroom. At the start of the experiment, subjects had to describe four different pictures. They were then led to believe that, on the basis of their descriptions, they would be divided into two different groups: "in-depth thinkers" and "broad thinkers". Once subjects were divided into two groups, they had to listen to a tape-recorded speech lasting about five minutes. It was told that the city of Leuven

was planning to build some playgrounds for the youth. In order to do this, the city needed to know the opinions of the youth. Therefore, several young people, identified either as “in-depth” thinkers or as “broad” thinkers, had to prepare a speech. It was told that it was important to have speeches from the two groups of thinkers since these two groups could have quite different opinions concerning the design of playgrounds. In half of the experimental conditions subjects were then confronted with an ingroup speaker and in the other half with an outgroup speaker. These speakers performed either successfully or poorly (the content of these two speeches was identical but the presentation style varied considerably). Before listening to the speech, subjects were given information about the circumstances under which the speaker had to prepare his speech. In half of the conditions it was told that the speaker had no preparation time at all, whereas in the other half subjects were given no information in this respect. When the speech was finished, subjects were asked to complete a booklet containing eight evaluation questions.

Dependent Measures

After the speech, subjects had to answer the following question: (1) “How would you evaluate the speaker on each of the following items ... (intelligent, incompetent, boring, friendly, creative, not interesting, motivated, and inexperienced). The subjects indicated their answers on 7-point scales (ranging from 1 = weak to 7 = strong). Calculation of Cronbach’s coefficient indicated rather weak internal consistency ($\alpha = .68$). Therefore, factor analysis on the eight items was performed revealing two factors with an eigenvalue of 3.58 and 1.58. The three items intelligent, creative and incompetent appeared to have high positive factor loadings on the first factor and negative factor loadings on the second. The other five items exhibited relatively low loadings on both factors, and we decided therefore to use only the items intelligent, creative and incompetent in our analyses. Cronbach’s coefficient revealed very strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). Moreover, factor analysis on these three items produced one single factor (*eigenvalue* = 2.69, factor loadings of .93, .96, and .95, respectively), indicating that 89,9 per cent of the variance was accounted for. Thus, a single average score was used in the analyses.

Results

Evaluation of the Speaker

A 2 (group membership) \times 2 (quality performance) \times 2 (performance condition) ANOVA first revealed a significant main effect for group membership, $F(1, 75) = 11.88, p < .001$. In line with the ingroup bias hypothesis of Social Identity Theory, an ingroup speaker ($M = 4.77$) was evaluated more positively than an outgroup speaker ($M = 4.26$). No significant main effect was found for quality of the performance, $F(1, 75) = 1.52, ns.$, and performance condition, $F(1, 75) = 1.44, ns.$

Furthermore, all two-way interactions appeared to be significant. First, the interaction between group membership and quality of the performance was significant, $F(1, 75) = 58.22, p < .001$. A good performing ingroup member was evaluated more positively than an equally good performing outgroup member ($M = 5.41$ vs. $M = 3.82$, respectively; $t[43] = 8.16, p < .001$), whereas a poor performing ingroup member was evaluated more negatively than an equally poor performing outgroup member ($M = 4.05$ vs. $M = 4.71$, respectively; $t[40] = -2.06, p < .05$). This finding clearly replicates the black sheep effect. Second, a significant interaction between quality of the performance and performance condition emerged, $F(1, 75) = 10.41, p < .005$. In the unfavourable performance condition no significant difference was found between a well performing speaker and a poor performing speaker ($M = 4.50$ vs. $M = 4.72$, respectively; $t[44] = -.78, ns.$), whereas in the unspecified performance condition a well performing speaker was evaluated more positively than a poor performing speaker ($M = 4.72$ vs. $M = 4.08$, respectively; $t[39] = 1.74, p < .05$). Finally, a significant interaction between group membership and performance condition was found, $F(1, 75) = 18.01, p < .001$. In the unfavourable performance condition an ingroup speaker was evaluated more positively than an outgroup speaker ($M = 5.17$ vs. $M = 4.03$, respectively; $t[44] = 5.30, p < .001$), whereas there was no significant difference between the ingroup and outgroup speaker in the unspecified performance condition ($M = 4.28$ vs. $M = 4.49$, respectively; $t[39] = -.57, ns.$).

Finally, the analysis also revealed that the predicted three-way interaction between group membership of the speaker, quality of the performance, and performance conditions was indeed significant, $F(1, 75) = 22.51, p < .001$ (see Table 1). In order to examine whether this interaction exhibited the expected pattern, additional analyses were performed at each level of the performance condition factor.

Table 1
*Mean Evaluations of the Speaker as a Function of Group Membership
of the Speaker, Quality of the Performance, and Performance Conditions*

	Performance conditions			
	Unfavourable		Unspecified	
	Ingroup member	Outgroup member	Ingroup member	Outgroup member
Good performance	5.28 ($N=12$)	3.72 ($N=12$)	5.59 ($N=9$)	3.93 ($N=10$)
Poor performance	5.03 ($N=10$)	4.40 ($N=10$)	2.96 ($N=9$)	5.00 ($N=11$)

Note. Answers were provided on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = weak to 7 = strong.

When the performance condition was unspecified, the ANOVA revealed that the interaction between group membership of the speaker and quality of the performance was significant, $F(1, 35) = 80.10, p < .001$. Simple effect analyses were performed, showing that a poorly performing ingroup speaker was evaluated less positively than an equally poorly performing outgroup speaker ($M = 2.96$ vs. $M = 5.00$, respectively; $t[20] = -6.41, p < .001$). Moreover, there was also a significant difference between ingroup and outgroup speaker when they performed well ($M = 5.59$ vs. $M = 3.93$, respectively; $t[19] = .637, p < .001$). This result gives again strong support for an interpretation of the data in terms of a black sheep effect. Interestingly, it was also found that a poorly performing outgroup member was evaluated more positively than a well performing outgroup member, ($M = 5.00$ vs. $M = 3.93$; respectively, $t[19] = -3.72, p = .001$).

When the performance conditions were unfavourable, the interaction between group membership of the speaker and quality of the performance was again significant, $F(1, 40) = 5.03, p < .05$. Simple effects analyses revealed that an ingroup speaker was evaluated more positively than an outgroup speaker when they performed well, ($M = 5.28$ vs. $M = 3.72$, respectively; $t[24] = 5.49, p < .001$). There was also a significant difference between poorly performing ingroup- and outgroup speakers ($M = 5.03$ vs. $M = 4.40$, respectively; $t[20] = 2.15, p < .05$). As expected, a poorly performing ingroup member was evaluated more positively than an equally poorly performing outgroup member when there was a possibility to attribute this performance to external factors (i.e., unfavourable conditions). This pattern is opposite to the one that is predicted by the black sheep hypothesis. Finally, the pattern of results revealed again that a poorly performing outgroup member was evaluated more positively than a well performing outgroup member ($M = 4.40$ vs. $M = 3.72$, respectively; $t[18] = -2.32, p < .05$).

Discussion

The evaluations of the speaker thus revealed strong evidence for the black sheep hypothesis. When the performance condition remained unspecified, a poorly performing ingroup speaker was derogated more than an equally poorly performing outgroup speaker. Moreover, a well performing ingroup member was evaluated more positively than a well performing outgroup member. This is consistent with the assumptions of the black sheep hypothesis (see Marques & Paez, 1994 for a relevant overview). Furthermore, providing explicit information on the nature of the performance conditions did indeed change the pattern of the evaluations of the speakers. When subjects were told that the performance conditions were unfavourable, a poorly performing ingroup speaker was evaluated more positively than an equally poorly performing outgroup speaker. The data of the present experiment thus suggest that when more social information is made available (e.g. information concerning the time of preparation), group members make use of different evaluative strategies in order to maintain a positive image of the own group. In other words, it seems that when richer social information is available, group members will make use of this information to justify negative ingroup behaviour (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Weber, 1994).

An examination of the outgroup evaluations in both performance conditions showed that a poorly performing outgroup member was always evaluated more positively than a well performing outgroup member. How may this be explained? A possible explanation is that when an outgroup member performs poorly, he or she represents less threat to the positive ingroup image than when he or she performs well. Compared to a well performing outgroup member, a poorly performing outgroup member thus serves best the need of ingroup members to obtain positive distinctiveness between the ingroup and the relevant outgroup (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, because of positive social identity concerns poorly performing outgroup members will be evaluated more favourable than well performing outgroup members.

Another aspect that deserves more attention is the fact that up to now, the black sheep effect was only obtained in studies using established, more meaningful social groups (e.g. law vs. philosophy students, Belgian vs. North African people). In contrast, the present study suggests that the phenomenon also occurs in *minimal* intergroup settings, using novel and artificially created groups. Moreover, in the present study all independent variables were manipulated on a *between-subjects* basis, meaning that the difference between a good and a poor performance was less salient than in previous research. Despite these differences between our own and the earlier studies, our minimal intergroup setting still revealed the occurrence of the black sheep phenomena. Thus, although generalizing from artificial to natural group contexts is often

considered as constituting a dangerous practice, our results suggest that the black sheep interpretation, derived from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), may hold for both types of intergroup settings. On the other hand, it is maybe not that surprising that the subjects of our minimal groups made use of the black sheep strategy in order to establish and to protect a positive ingroup image since Worchel, Sassic and Grossman (1992) argued that members of newly created groups are especially concerned with drawing clear boundaries between their own and the other groups.

In sum, the present findings show that when group members are provided with the opportunity to attribute poor performances from ingroup members to external factors, the black sheep effect will disappear. Because this study is only a first attempt to examine the possible influence of situational information on the black sheep effect, later studies will have to attempt to disentangle the impact of group serving strategies such as the black sheep effect and the use of group attributions on evaluations of ingroup members. Moreover, future research should also include attributional measures to examine whether the effect of the information that the performance conditions were unfavourable upon the black sheep effect can indeed be explained in terms of attribution processes.

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