

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AS A DETERMINANT OF WILLINGNESS TO DEFEND A COUNTERATTITUDINAL POSITION

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The effects of several factors on willingness to take a counterattitudinal position in a forthcoming debate were investigated. Participants were presented with the dilemma of either compromising their own position and thereby not forfeiting a competitive advantage in the debate or forfeiting a competitive advantage by not compromising their own position. Participants were more willing to compromise their own position when they anticipated performing before an evaluative audience than when the debate was to be held in "private". This effect generalized across type of audience (teammates or experimenter), type of issue (central or peripheral religious issue), and participant's initial position (extreme or moderate). While several of the manipulated variables significantly affected perceptions of the situation, none of the perceptions was strongly related to the behavioral measure. One implication of the results is that perhaps evaluation of performance per se is largely responsible for the observed lowered willingness on the part of group representatives to forfeit a competitive advantage.

*Keywords:* performance evaluation, willingness to defend, counterattitudinal position, determinant.

After recounting an experience of shooting an elephant before some 2,000 Burmese natives, George Orwell admitted that he behaved in a manner that was inconsistent with his beliefs and desires and remarked: "I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it *solely* to avoid looking like a fool" (Orwell, 1964, p. 277). Orwell's narration illustrates the amount of sacrifice that people are willing to endure in order to avoid "looking foolish" or to "save

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The authors thank Harry Hallows, Jeffrey Leeds, Gregory King, George Dempsey, Blake Frank, and Sol Satin for their help in data collection and clerical assistance, and Kathleen Zechmeister for help with the scenario writing. Support for this study was provided by General Support Grant FR-05666-02 awarded to the Institute for Juvenile Research by the National Institutes of Health. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, 1971, San Francisco.

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face". In a series of experiments on face-saving, Brown (1970) has demonstrated that participants will incur considerable costs (i.e., forfeit money) in order to avoid looking foolish while performing before an audience that functions in an evaluative capacity. In Brown's experiments, participants were given the alternative choices of accepting large payoffs for describing their feelings and giving a demonstration of a performance on an embarrassing task before members of a panel or accepting small payoffs for writing an anonymous description of their feelings without talking to the panel members. He found that participants were willing to reduce their payoffs more in order to avoid full public exposure when the audience was to serve in an evaluative capacity than when the audience was nonevaluative.

Brown's experiments focus on monetary costs that people are willing to forgo while Orwell's description concerns another type of "cost", willingness to compromise one's belief. In both Brown's experiments and Orwell's narrative, performance evaluation seemed to be the primary motive force in inducing "sacrifice". In the present experiment, the effects of anticipating to "perform" before an audience that serves in an evaluative capacity, on willingness to compromise one's position on a religious belief is examined. The manipulation consisted specifically of an evaluation, in one condition, of the debating process in addition to the outcome of the debate. Also varied were the nature of the audience (viz., teammates vs. a neutral experimenter) and the type of issue (viz., a central vs. a peripheral religious issue). Both representative role obligations (e.g., Lamm & Kogan, 1970) and the nature of the issue (e.g., Muney & Deutsch, 1968) have been shown to influence compromise and attitude change in persuasive debate situations. In this experiment, both of these factors were separated from performance evaluation per se.

In order to insure that most of the variance in behavior would be accounted for by the manipulated variables, an attempt was made to select two issues on which there was a small amount of variance in position endorsement. Also, it was expected that the selected issues would be viewed differently by the participants. Pretest results, using four issues related to religion, indicated that on one of the central religious beliefs (viz., "Jesus was born of a virgin") most respondents endorsed the extreme "pro" position while on one of the peripheral religious beliefs (viz., "Natural techniques are the only acceptable methods of birth control") most respondents endorsed the extreme "anti" position. In addition, the amount of variance in behavior attributable to initial position was assessed in the analysis of variance.

The main dependent measure used to investigate the effects of these variables was willingness to role-reverse (i.e., take an opposing position) in a forthcoming persuasive debate. In previous investigations, role reversal was manipulated as an independent variable, and its effects on conflict resolution and attitude change were assessed (e.g., Johnson, 1967; Muney & Deutsch, 1968). The effectiveness of role reversal as a technique for facilitating conflict resolution may depend in part on the extent to which a participant is willing to take the suggested position in a debate. The focus in this investigation was on some of the precursors to "willingness to role reverse".

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

One hundred male and ninety-six female students enrolled in the introductory psychology courses at the University of Houston participated in the experiment. All of the participants volunteered to serve in the experiment and received extra class credit for doing so.

### OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN

The experimental conditions were arranged in a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design. Three conditions were manipulated with each condition having two levels. The conditions were centrality-peripherality of the issue to be discussed, self or group representation for the debate session, and high or low performance evaluation. In addition, the initial attitudinal position of each participant on the relevant issue (i.e., the participant's actual position regarding the issue) was obtained and categorized as either "extreme" or "moderate" in terms of degree of agreement or disagreement with the issue statement. The conditions were divided evenly by sex.

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

**Issue** Each participant was assigned a position on 1 of 2 issues used in the study. One issue was designated as central to certain religious beliefs while the other issue was relatively peripheral or more indirectly related to orthodox Christian dogma. The central issue-statement was "Jesus was born of a virgin". The peripheral issue was "Natural techniques (abstinence or rhythm) are the only acceptable methods of birth control".

**Representation** Participants were run either individually or in groups of three or four. All groups comprised members of the same sex. In the group condition, all participants were led to believe that they would represent the other members in an upcoming debate concerning the issue that their group was assigned. These factors were absent in the individual condition with the participant expecting to represent only himself in the forthcoming debate.

**Performance evaluation** The degree of expected evaluation of the participant's own performance concerning the negotiation session was varied. In the low performance evaluation condition, the participant was instructed that the debate would be conducted in complete privacy with no one present except himself and his opponent. It would be his responsibility to report the outcome of the debate either to the experimenter (in the individual condition) or to the other members of his team (representation condition) and that he

would be evaluated either by the experimenter (individual condition) or by the other members (representation condition) only on the outcome of the debate (i.e., the degree to which he obtained a compromise from his opponent).

In the high performance evaluation condition, the participant was led to believe that in addition to being rated on the outcome of the debate, he would also be evaluated on his performance during the debate. The experimenter (individual condition) or the other members of his group (representation condition) would be present to observe the debate and would give him feedback on his performance upon completion of the session.

#### PROCEDURE

The procedure used in the group representation condition is described in detail. Upon arrival, each participant entered a cubicle where he was given an issue-statement (“Virgin Birth” or “Natural Techniques...”) on which he was to indicate his position by circling one of the alternatives ranging from 1 = *I am certain that the statement is true* to 8 = *I am certain that the statement is false*. The experimenter then collected the questionnaires and noted the position checked by each respondent. Following this the participants were asked to come out of the cubicles and to arrange themselves around a central table where they were told that they would be a team with a randomly-chosen representative who would defend a position on that issue in a debate with a representative of another team who would defend a position at the opposite end of the scale on the same issue. The participants were informed that the positions were randomly assigned to the groups. They were also told that their representative was to try to persuade the other team’s randomly-chosen representative to change his assigned position to one that was closer to his team’s position. In addition, they were informed that although only the spokesman would actually debate, all of the team members would work together in planning a pre-debate strategy. The experimenter then described the rules of the negotiations which were to be conducted under either a high (audience present in an evaluative capacity) or a low (no audience present) performance-evaluation condition.

At this point, the participants returned to their cubicles where they received a questionnaire which contained a description of procedures repeating the experimenter’s instructions, the position that their team had been assigned, whether or not they had been chosen as their team’s spokesman, and a number of postdecision questions. Unknown to the participant, the position assigned to his “team” was based upon the actual position which each participant had indicated was opposite to his initial position. If the participant had indicated a position from 1 to 4 on the statement, he received a questionnaire indicating that his “team” had been assigned position 8 to defend. The reverse was true if the participant had initially indicated a position from 5 to 8, with his “team” being assigned position 1. In addition, every participant was informed on the questionnaire that he had been randomly chosen as a spokesman for the group. Following this, the participants were told:

If you feel that you are not able to defend the position that was suggested to you, you will be given the opportunity to indicate which position on the scale you could defend. (This might be either your own real position or some position between your own position and the suggested position, assuming that the suggested position is different from your own position on this issue.) The actual position that you will defend will be the position you indicate that you can defend. However, since the winner of the persuasion contest will be determined in part by the adequacy of defense of the suggested position, taking a position other than the suggested one may weaken your chances of winning the contest.

The participant was then asked whether or not he could defend the assigned position, and if he could not, what position he would defend (this included positions 1 through 8 as originally presented). The remainder of the questionnaire (which consisted of the participants' reactions to various aspects of the upcoming debate) was then completed and all participants returned to the central table, ostensibly to plan a strategy for the debate. The experimenter then asked the participants which of them had been designated as spokesman and, to their surprise, all of the participants raised their hands. Reaction to this event indicated that a successful deception had been carried out. Participants were then debriefed and questioned about any suspicions that they had and whether they had been aware of the manipulations or had heard about the experiment before the session. After completing a brief demographic questionnaire the participants were dismissed.

The individual conditions were identical to the group conditions with the exception, of course, that no spokesman was chosen and no team effort was involved.

#### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The major dependent variable consisted of the number of scale steps that the participant was willing to go toward the suggested experimental position divided by the distance between his initial endorsed position and the suggested position. This ratio corrects for differences between participants in initial position. The higher the ratio, the further a participant was willing to go from his own position to the contrasting position suggested by the experimenter.

There were 13 additional items on the questionnaire. These items asked for the participants' ratings on how compelling it was to adopt the assigned position, to what degree the participant perceived this as a win-lose competition or problem-solving debate, eagerness to participate, intensity of own position, disparity between own and assigned position, predicted satisfaction resulting from a successful defense of the position, with how many people and how often they had discussed the issue, and how often they had publicly defended their own position.

## RESULTS

Due to a proportional relationship among the means and variances for the treatment conditions, a square root transformation was performed on the willingness to compromise

**TABLE 1**  
**ANALYSES OF VARIANCE OF WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE SITUATION AS A WIN-LOSE CONTEST OR A PROBLEM-SOLVING DEBATE**

Source	Willingness to Compromise				Perception of Situation			
	df	MS	F	p	df	MS	F	p
Performance	1	1.01	4.73	< .05		1820	6.32	< .01
Evaluation (A)	1	0.22	1.02			3.76	1.31	
Group vs Self (B)	1	0.00	< 1			4.52	1.57	
Issue (C)	1	0.38					1	
Starting Position (D)	1	0.00	1.78			0.02	4.05	
AxB	1	0.26	< 1			6.94	< 1	
AxC	1	0.05	1.23			0.97	< 1	
AxD	1	0.01	< 1			0.25	< 1	
BxC	1	0.02	< 1			2.10		
BxD	1	0.16	< 1			5.37	< 1	
CxD	1	0.13	< 1			2.13	< 1	
AxBxC	1	0.24	< 1			0.20		< .01
AxBxD	1	0.02	< 1			25.45		
AxCxD	1	0.18	1.12			2.92	< 1	
BxCxD	1	0.21	< 1			0.00		
AxBxCxD						2.88		
Within Cells								
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measure. The results of a 4-way analysis of variance, including initial position (“extreme” or “moderate”) as a variable, are presented in Table 1. A significant main effect was obtained for “performance evaluation” with participants in the high performance evaluation condition compromising more (0.63) than those in the low performance evaluation condition (0.49). On average, participants in the former condition were willing to go further toward defending an assigned position which was opposite to that which they actually held. No significant interactions with this variable indicate that this effect generalized across the type of issue, whether or not one represented a group and one’s initial position. Also, there were no significant main effects for any of these variables.

Significant effects were also found for a number of post-reaction questions. Table 1 contains the results for the “perception of the situation as a win-lose contest or as a problem-solving venture”. A main effect for “performance evaluation” indicates that participants in the high performance evaluation condition perceived the situation more in terms of a “win-lose” contest ( $F = 3.55$ ) than those in the low performance evaluation condition ( $F = 4.21$ ). The interaction between performance evaluation and representation indicates that this effect was stronger for the “self” condition ( $F = 3.45$  vs.  $F = 4.61$ ) than for the “group” condition ( $F = 3.64$  vs.  $F = 3.94$ ). Main effects for issue and starting position were obtained for “How strongly do

<sup>2</sup> In order to take account of unequal cell sizes, an unweighted means analysis of variance was performed using the computer program MANOVA (see Clyde et al., 1966).

you feel about your own personal position on this issue?" Participants with extreme initial positions felt more strongly ( $M = 3.46$ ) than those with moderate initial positions ( $M = 2.36$ ) ( $F = 60.28$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $180$ ,  $p < .001$ ). All subjects felt more strongly about their position on the "Natural techniques..." issue ( $M = 2.99$ ) than on the "Virgin birth" issue ( $M = 2.61$ ) ( $F = 8.72$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $180$ ,  $p < .004$ ). Several significant effects were obtained for the "perceived importance of the issue relative to social and religious issues in general". Participants saw the "Natural techniques" issue as being more important ( $M = 2.79$ ) than the "Virgin birth..." issue ( $M = 2.01$ ) ( $F = 29.44$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $169$ ,  $p < .001$ ), especially in the "low performance evaluation" condition ( $M = 3.16$  vs.  $M = 1.92$ ) ( $F = 8.29$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $169$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Participants with extreme starting positions rated whichever issue they were assigned as "more important" ( $M = 2.79$ ) than those with moderate starting positions ( $M = 2.12$ ) ( $F = 11.23$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $169$ ,  $p < .001$ ), especially in the "self" condition ( $M = 2.89$  vs.  $M = 1.85$ ) ( $F = 4.31$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $169$ ,  $p < .04$ ). An issue by starting position interaction was obtained for the question, "How central do you feel this issue is in the area of religion?" Participants with extreme initial positions saw the "Virgin birth" issue as more central ( $M = 3.86$ ) than the "Natural techniques" issue ( $M = 3.49$ ) while those with moderate initial positions saw the latter as being more central ( $M = 3.64$ ) than the former ( $M = 3.29$ ) ( $F = 5.21$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $179$ ,  $p < .02$ ) - Finally, those with extreme initial positions were more eager to participate in the experiment ( $M = 2.08$ ) than those with moderate initial positions ( $M = 1.77$ ) ( $F = 7.11$ ,  $df = 1$  and  $178$ ,  $p < .008$ ). No other main effects or interactions were significant for this variable.

Spearman rank-order correlations were computed between all of the variables producing a 14 x 14 matrix. None of the correlations between the measure of "willingness to compromise" and the post-reaction questions was significant. The highest correlation of this set was with the perception of the situation as "win-lose" ( $r = -0.16$ ). However, moderately strong relationships were obtained among several of the post-reaction variables. Some of these include: a positive relationship between perceived centrality of issue and rated importance of issue ( $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < .05$ ), the more centrally rated issue was seen as the more important one, irrespective of whether that issue was "Natural techniques" or "Virgin birth"; a positive correlation between eagerness to participate and the amount of effort the participant was willing to expend in defending his position ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ); a positive correlation between eagerness to participate and how strongly he felt about his actual position on the issue ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The strength of the participant's feelings about his own personal position was also positively related to the number of other people he had discussed the issue with ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $p < .05$ ), the frequency of having discussed the issue with others ( $r = 0.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and the frequency of having publicly defended the issue in situations where some of the audience and/or discussants were in agreement and others were in disagreement with the participant's position ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The latter three

variables were highly interrelated. The perception of the situation as a “win-lose competition” was positively related to the “perceived ease in defending the selected position in debate” ( $r = 0.31, p < .05$ ) and to the extent to which one would feel “satisfied if he successfully defended the position that he represented in debate” ( $r = 0.35, p < .05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In the created experimental situation, a participant was asked to argue for a position that clearly contradicted his own against someone who would argue for the participant’s own position. The “cost” for not acceding to the experimenter’s suggestion was to forfeit a “competitive advantage”. Actually, the participant was faced with the dilemma of deciding between two types of “costs”. He could take the suggested counterattitudinal position and thereby not sacrifice contest “points” initially, or stick to his own position on the issue and thereby not compromise his belief. The former decision reflects a willingness to compromise one’s position to gain a competitive advantage while the latter decision reflects a willingness to forfeit a competitive advantage in the service of remaining “faithful” to one’s position on that issue. One resolution of these competing motives is to take a position between the extremes. However, interestingly, most participants did not take this option but instead either accepted the suggested position or refused to “budge” from their own. Fifty percent of the participants accepted the suggested counterattitudinal position, while 35% did not move from their own position. Thus, only 15% of the participants took a position between these extremes. Due to the nature of the continuum of alternative positions, an intermediate position may have been considered difficult to defend. Thus, conceivably, for most participants this was an “all-or-none” decision.

In the low performance evaluation condition, approximately the same number of participants resolved the dilemma by taking the counterattitudinal position (44%) as those who resolved it by refusing to move from their own position (43%). However, the discrepancy between these choices in the high performance evaluation condition was rather large. Fifty-five percent of the participants in this condition took the counterattitudinal position while only 27% did not move from their own position. This significant difference between the conditions is not easily accounted for by examination of the post-decision perceptual data. None of the correlations between these questions and the “willingness to compromise” measure was significant. While anticipated performance evaluation did affect perceptions of the situation as “win-lose” or “problem-solving”, such perceptions were only weakly related to “willingness to compromise”. These results indicate that the observed difference in behavior between the performance evaluation conditions was not mediated by perceptions of the situation aroused by the conditions and represented in the postreaction questions. Perhaps a careful probe of participants for an explanation of their behavior would make apparent the perceptual processes that are related to their decisions.

The performance evaluation effect generalized across all of the conditions of the experiment. Irrespective of type of audience (teammates or the experimenter) or the nature of the issue being debated, participants in the high performance evaluation condition were less willing to forfeit a competitive advantage (by refusing to move from their own position) than those in the low performance evaluation condition. This finding is especially interesting when one considers that the only essential difference between these conditions consisted, in one condition, of an anticipated on-the-spot evaluation of the debating process in addition to the outcome. Thus, the obtained effect resulted from an anticipated evaluation of performance per se. This finding is also interesting when one considers it in connection with the failure to obtain a difference between the group-representing and self-representing conditions. Anticipated evaluation per se rather than the imposed responsibility of representing others served to produce more yielding and thus a lowered willingness on the part of participants to forfeit a "competitive advantage". A more general implication of this finding is that perhaps the loyalty of group representatives to the position that they defend, observed by several investigators (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1962; Druckman et al., 1972), is primarily a result of an anticipated evaluation by constituents of their performance rather than due to representation per se (see also Gruder & Rosen, 1971; Kilmoski, 1972). Similar evaluation pressures imposed on non-representatives may produce the same observed non-yielding. (This relationship may shed new light on factors related to face-saving behavior.)

In keeping with the intended purpose in choosing the two issues used, the perceptual evidence indicates that they had a differential impact on perceptions (e.g., "Natural techniques" was seen as a more important issue, etc.). However, these perceptual differences were not reflected in differences in choice behavior. Also, expected differences in perceptions obtained for starting position (e.g., "extremists" saw issues as more important, were more eager to participate, etc.) were not reflected in behavioral differences. The correlational evidence indicates that these perceptions were not related to the "willingness to compromise" measure, although several of the perceptual variables were significantly intercorrelated. The lack of correspondence between the perceptual and behavioral results (as measured by anticipated compromise) indicates perhaps that the appropriate perceptual variables were not represented in this study, or that these are distinct processes which are influenced by a different and, as yet, unmeasured set of factors.

The strong effect of performance evaluation upon willingness to compromise in a predebate setting has clear implications for future research. The relative importance of the evaluation of the negotiation process as opposed to the outcome, as well as the relationship of these variables to such factors as representation and group loyalty need further examination. A next step would be to conduct actual negotiation sessions to assess the relationship between anticipated and actual bargaining behavior and any attitude change that may occur as a result of the negotiation experience. A further probing of perceptual phenomena may offer more adequate explanations of the observed results.

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