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# Own Group Bias: The Effects of Individual Competence and Group Outcome

ALLEN H. RYEN and ARNOLD KAHN[1]

*Abstract.* Although much human interaction occurs in intergroup situtations, few studies have examined the effects of individual and group outcomes on attitudes toward own and other group. The present study examined the effects of individual and group competence on attraction toward own and other group. The task was a simulated football game whose outcomes for individual and for group were manipulated by the experimenter. Prior to engaging in the contest, team members displayed an own group bias. Furthermore, winning increased the preference for own group and losing decreased this perference. Winning or losing more than one game had little effect on any of the dependent measures. High competent players expressed greater enjoyment of the game and the part they played in it than low competent players, but they did not exhibit greater OGB.

Own group bias (OGB) is defined as the tendency for group members to evaluate the groups they belong to (hereafter referred to as own group), members of these groups, and the products of these groups, favorably; while rating groups to which they are not a member (hereafter referred to as other group), members of other groups, and the products of other groups, unfavorably. OGB has been noted in field research by Campbell (1967) and by Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, and Sherif (1961). These latter authors formed adolescents in a summer camp into two distinct groups. By placing these groups in competition severe intergroup antagonism resulted which later carried over into noncompetitive settings. Many other investigators (e.g., Bass & Dunteman, 1963; Blake & Mouton, 1961; Ferguson & Kelley, 1964; and Wilson & Kayatani, 1968) have reported similar findings in laboratory research.

## Occurrence of OGB—Minimal Conditions

A number of recent studies have attempted to identify the minimal conditions necessary for the occurrence of OGB. Sherif, *et. al.* (1961) have argued that OGB will only develop in well-organized groups who are in a competitive situation. However, recent work by Rabbie (1966; Rabbie & Horwitz, 1969) has provided evidence that classifying persons as a group and allowing them to experience common fate as group members were sufficient to produce the effect. Other research has suggested that mere classification, by itself, is sufficient (Mann, 1961; Rosenblatt, 1964). Furthermore, from the point of view of Heider's balance theory (1958), if a person is classified as a member of a group, to achieve a balanced state, he will come to like that group. One

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purpose of the present study was to examine whether classification alone will produce OGB.

## Modification of OGB

One possible method of modifying OGB would be to manipulate the success of both the group as a whole, and the individual members. Sample and Botto (1968), in a study directly investigating the effects of group outcome on OGB, found that own-group ratings were very labile, while other-group ratings tended to remain rather stable. They concluded that winning or losing provided a positive (or negative) environment in which own, and to a lesser extent, other group are evaluated. Similar findings have been reported by a number of investigators (Deutsch, 1959; Phillips & D'Amico, 1956; Wilson & Miller, 1961; Zander, Stotland, & Wolfe, 1960). None of these authors have investigated the effects of multiple successes or failures on OGB and this was examined in the present study.

The relationship between individual competence or success and OGB is less clear, although there is general agreement that individual outcomes do affect attitudes towards own and other groups (Rabbie & Wilkens, 1968; Rosenblatt, 1964; Sherif, 1954; Thibaut, 1950; Zander & Cohen, 1955). There is also agreement that persons enjoying a high degree of success will like their own group more than unsuccessful members. However, there is much less agreement as to the attraction to the group by moderate and unsuccessful persons. For example, while Sherif (1954) and Rosenblatt (1964) hypothesize that low competence members will show strong OGB, a study by Rabbie and Wilkens (1968) produced contrary findings. The present study was addressed to clarifying the issue by manipulating three levels of individual competence high, moderate, and low. Furthermore, the interactive effects of group and individual competence could be examined.

## Hypotheses

1. In line with Heider's theory it was predicted that classification as a member of a group will be sufficient for the occurrence of OGB.

2. On the basis of findings by Sample and Botto (1968) and others, it was predicted that group success would led to greater OGB than group failure.

2a. It was also predicted that the more games a group won the greater the OGB, and the more games lost the less the OGB.

3. On the basis of results from studies on social status it was predicted that the greater the individual competence the greater the OGB.

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## Method

*Subjects.* The subjects were 72 undergraduate male students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the Iowa State University. Subjects were divided into 24 triads.

*Task.* The task was a simulated football game played by an offensive and a defensive team. *S*s used a series of lights and switches to indicate their choice of football plays. The nature of the apparatus allowed us to give false feedback to subjects about the success of individual plays and the outcome of a particular game. The success of each play of each game was thus pre-determined and independent of individual responses. Competence of individual team members and the outcomes of each individual team were controlled and standardized in this manner.

*Independent and Dependent Variables.* Two levels of group competence, winning and losing, consisted of either outscoring the opposition in a contest or being outscored by the opposition.

Three levels of individual competence, high, medium, and low, were defined by the percentage of successful offensive plays made by an individual member. High competence was defined as 80 percent successful offensive plays; medium competence, 50 percent; and low competence, 20 percent. Defensive plays were made by the entire team and the competence was set at 50 percent successful plays.

A team played either one, two, or three games. Each team either won all its contests or lost all of them.

The major dependent variable was OGB, measured by an 8-point, six-item semantic differential scale on which *S*s rated their own and the other group. The adjective pairs were: friendly-unfriendly, responsible-irresponsible, sloppy-orderly, sensible-foolish, practical-impractical, and patient-impatient.

*Procedure.* As soon as a subject arrived he was requested not to communicate with other *S*s unless specifically instructed to do so. When all had arrived, they were arbitrarily divided into two triads and taken to separate experimental rooms. Inside each room, each subject was given an ID tag (X, Y, or Z) and told that their group was to constitute the Red Team. They were then instructed about the nature of the football game and informed of their objectives—to win as many games as time permitted, by scoring as many points as possible. In the one-game condition, the semantic differential scales for both own and other group were now administered.

Next, *S*s were given specific instructions about the task, which included an explanation of the possible plays and strategies which could be employed, instructions concerning the use of the apparatus in playing the football game, and an explanation of the playing rules. Special emphasis was placed on the rule concerning the

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sequence in which individual play choices were made. On offense, the sequence of Player X, Player Y, Player Z was to be followed without exception throughout each contest; on defense, choice of plays was to be made by the entire team. After going through a brief example, the first game was undertaken.

The experimenter announced the outcomes of individual plays, the scoring of touchdowns by each team, as well as game outcomes by means of a microphone. After completion of the game, *S*s were administered the postgame semantic differential scales for own and other group. Finally, the *S*s were debriefed and the experiment was concluded.

The two and three game conditions were identical to the one game condition procedurally, except that the pre-game semantic different scales were administered before the final game which those individuals played, ie., before game two in the two-game condition, and before game three in the three-game condition.

## Results

*Initial Occurrence of OGB.* Hypothesis 1 pedicted that mere classification as a member of a group would be sufficient to elicit the OGB effect. This was examined by inspecting the pre-game semantic differential scores for those teams playing only one game. The mean own group rating was 35.63 while the mean other group rating was 31.46. This difference was significant at the .05 level ($t=2.31$, $df=46$).

*Effects of Group Success.* Hypothesis 2 predicted that subjects on teams that won would display greater OGB than subjects on teams that lost. This hypothesis was strongly confirmed ($F=18.39$, $df=1/54$, $p<.001$). However, the effects of repeated winning or losing were not supported. That is, winning two or three games did not significantly increase OGB scores, and losing two or three games did not significantly decrease OGB scores.

*Effects of Individual Competence.* Hypothesis 3 predicted that the greater the competence of subjects the greater the OGB. A significant effect was found when comparing high competence to medium competence players, with high competence members expressing greater OGB ($t=2.54$, $df=46$, $p<.05$). The low competence subjects, however, expressed an intermediate level of OGB, which was not significantly different from either the high or medium tompetence players.

*Additional Findings.* Subjects on winning teams reported to have enjoyed the game more ($F=12.94$, $df=1/54$, $p<.01$), perceived the game as being one of skill and intelligence ($F=8.76$, $df=1/54$, $p<.01$), and were more satisfied with the role they played ($F=6.75$, $df=1/5$, $p<.05$). Individual competence also affected enjoyment of the game ($F=4.34$, $df=2/54$, $p<.05$) and

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satisfaction with one's role ($F=3.56$, $df=1/54$, $p<.05$), the greater the competence the greater the enjoyment and role satisfaction.

## Discussion

Heider's hypothesis that the formation of a unit relation (in the present case classifying one as a group member) leads to a positive sentiment relation (that is, liking the group) was supported. Before playing the game subjects expressed a preference for their own group over the other group. This data also supported the observation by Rabbie and Wilkens (1968) that OGB is an almost immediate consequence of group membership in an anticipated competitive situation. It would be interesting to determine whether or not the anticipation of competitive interaction is a necessary condition for the occurrence of OGB, Heider would suggest such anticipation is not necessary.

Group success or failure did lead to changes in OGB as predicted, with winning increasing it and losing decreasing it. Previous data by Sample and Botto (1968) had suggested that own group ratings change more than other group ratings. However, in the present study the reverse was true. Analyses carried out separately for own- and other-group ratings indicated that winning affected other group scores ($F=6.19$, $df=1/54$, $p<.05$), but not for own group ratings ($F=1.82$). While the factors accounting for these differences between the study by Sample and Botto (1968) and the present study remain unclear, Sample and Botto's general conclusion that winning provides a positive (and losing a negative) context in which own and other groups are evaluated appears reasonable.

Surprisingly, while the effects of either winning and losing were substantial, the effects of repeated winning or losing was neglibible-subjects who played and won three games expressed no greater OGB than subjects playing and winning only a single game. The same pattern of results was found for losing. Apparently winning a single game confirms and enhances the OGB effect found to be present prior to actual interaction, and continued winning has no additional effect. Likewise, losing a single game appears to dampen the OGB effect, but continued losing does not further decrease it.

It was also surprising that individual competence had only little effect on OGB. High competence players did show greater own group preference than moderately competent subjects, but not greater OGB than low competence players. The fact that low competence subjects expressed less enjoyment of the game than high competent subjects and were less satisfied with the part they played even further clouds the issue. Evidently low competence players

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see little hope of improving their lot were they on the other team. Thus, while they don't particularly enjoy the game or the part they played in it, they at least were not ridiculed or rejected by their own team members and perhaps feel that things would have been worse were they on the other team.

Evidently, being personally successful leads to enjoyment of the game, but only team success leads to group loyalty.

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