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Pers Soc Psychol Bull 1995; 21; 1061

DOI: 10.1177/01461672952110007

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Constraints on Excuse Making: The Detering Effects of Shyness and Anticipated Retest

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Although prior research has documented a pervasive egocentric bias in the self-perceptions, self-ascriptions, and behaviors of most people, shy individuals seem not to share this bias. This study examined whether the apparent absence of an egocentric bias among shy individuals is reflected in their excuse making following poor performance. It also examined whether anticipating a challenge to one's excuses would dissuade even nonshy individuals from making excuses. Shy and nonshy subjects received either success or failure feedback on an intelligence test and then were or were not told that they would be retested. Consistent with predictions, shy individuals refrained from making consistency-lowering excuses regardless of performance feedback and retest instructions. By contrast, nonshy subjects made consistency-lowering excuses after failure feedback, but only when they expected that their excuses would go unchallenged by a retest.

Research documents a pervasive egocentric bias in the way most people perceive themselves and their social surroundings, a bias toward creating and maintaining an inflated sense of self-worth (Bradley, 1978; Greenwald, 1980; Miller, 1976). Illustrations of this bias are myriad. For example, numerous researchers have documented a self-serving bias in causal attributions, whereby individuals take personal responsibility for their positive outcomes yet externalize responsibility for their negative outcomes (e.g., Arkin, Gleason, & Johnston, 1976; Mullen & Riordan, 1988; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1976; Whitley & Frieze, 1985, 1986; Wortman, Costanzo, & Witt, 1973). Other investigators have noted that people tend to misremember their past in self-enhancing ways (Greenwald, 1980; Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher,

1981). Still other research has revealed that individuals tend to accept as valid information that is flattering yet disparage information that is negative (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Holt, 1985; Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). Indeed, there appears to be considerable support for the general social psychological finding termed *benefectance*, which proposes a universal cognitive bias toward sustaining an exaggerated positive view of the self (Greenwald, 1980).

Yet, although the egocentric bias is widespread, it is notably absent among individuals who are chronically anxious or shy. Unlike their nonshy counterparts, shy individuals accept as accurate evaluative information that is negative and tend to resist and even reject information that is positive (Alden, 1987; Asendorpf, 1987; Franzoi, 1983; Meleshko & Alden, 1993). When recalling self-relevant information, they seem to selectively remember negative information more readily than positive information (Breck & Smith, 1983; O'Banion & Arkowitz, 1977). Finally, shy individuals seem unwilling to engage in self-serving and protective strategies such as the self-serving bias (Arkin, Appelman, & Burger, 1980) and acquired self-handicaps (Shepperd & Arkin, 1990). This reluctance of shy individuals to endorse an exaggerated positive view of themselves or to defend

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PSPB, Vol. 21 No. 10, October 1995 1061-1072

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themselves against evaluative information that is negative may stem from a cautious, protective self-presentation style (e.g., Meleshko & Alden, 1993) but could also reflect a genuinely less positive self-evaluation coupled with an inclination to be accurate in their self-perceptions (e.g., Arkin et al., 1980). We examined whether the apparent absence of an egocentric bias among shy individuals extends to their excuse making following poor performance. Further, the specificity of the attribution dimensions associated with excuse making affords a somewhat more refined test of the benefactance hypothesis. Specifically, the linkage of an excuse to specific elements of the situation is examined (see below).

It is worth noting that the absence of excuse making under conditions in which people's attribution reports are constrained by external reality (e.g., the bogus pipeline, a retest) has been demonstrated before (Arkin et al., 1980; Wortman et al., 1973). However, no investigation has examined whether consistency-lowering, consensus-raising, and distinctiveness-raising excuses in response to the threat of repeated performance vary independently and reflect a logical linkage of an excuse with the requirements of the situation (i.e., consistency lowering with a repeated performance, consensus lowering with normative information, etc.).

SNYDER'S EXCUSE THEORY

Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983) have proposed a model of excuse making based on Kelley's (1967, 1971, 1973) analysis of covariance model. According to this model, individuals can reduce the negative implications of a poor performance by raising the perceived consensus ("Everyone else did poorly too"), lowering the perceived consistency ("I typically do much better"), or raising the perceived distinctiveness ("It's only on this that I do poorly") of their behavior. In an empirical examination of this model of excuse making, Mehlman and Snyder (1985; see also Basgall & Snyder, 1988) gave subjects either success or failure feedback on an intelligence test. Subjects were then given an opportunity to make excuses for their test performance. As predicted, subjects given failure feedback after the test engaged in greater distinctiveness raising and consistency lowering (but not consensus raising) than subjects given success feedback.

The findings of Mehlman and Snyder provide strong evidence that individuals use excuses to distance themselves from poor performances or outcomes. Nevertheless, there is reason to expect that shy people will refrain from making excuses. Several researchers have noted that shy individuals regard themselves negatively (Cheek & Briggs, 1990; Cheek & Melchior, 1990). They tend to

expect that their social behavior will be deficient and that others will evaluate them unfavorably (Cacioppo, Glass, & Merluzzi, 1979; Leary, Kowalski, & Campbell, 1988; Smith & Sarason, 1975). They also tend to evaluate themselves negatively, being more self-critical than is justified by others' evaluations (Clark & Arkowitz, 1975). Their negative self-view and their willing acceptance of negative information would predict that shy people would regard unfavorable performance feedback as accurate. Rather than distancing themselves from such feedback by making excuses, shy individuals, relative to their nonshy counterparts, would be expected to refrain from excuse making.

Of note, there is some evidence that shy males will preemptively report their anxiety as an excuse, provided that anxiety can serve as an acceptable explanation for an anticipated poor performance. Specifically, in a study by Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, Smith, Augelli, & Ingram, 1985), shy and nonshy subjects performing an evaluative task were told that shyness would have no effect on task performance or were given no information about the effect of shyness on task performance. Subsequently, subjects were given an opportunity to report how anxious they were feeling about the forthcoming task. Only shy males given no information about the effect of anxiety on task performance reported high levels of anxiety.

Snyder et al. (1985) interpreted these findings as suggesting that some anxiety reports by shy individuals represent a strategic attempt to excuse an anticipated poor performance. Although this may be true, there are other reasonable interpretations of the data, including the possibility that the no-effect instructions (a) actually induced shy subjects to experience less anxiety and (b) introduced experimenter demand into the design, leading shy subjects to respond in the manner they believed the experimenter wanted. These alternative interpretations raise the possibility that the anxiety reports of shy subjects may have been artificially low in the no-effect condition rather than strategically inflated in the no-information condition. The ambiguity surrounding the Snyder et al. (1985) findings precludes drawing on them in making predictions in the present study.

EXCUSE MAKING AND AN ANTICIPATED CHALLENGE

Importantly, even nonshy individuals should refrain from excuse making if they expect that their excuses will be challenged. The challenge can be as simple as a retest. Although a retest permits the opportunity to rectify a poor performance, it also presents the risk of repeating it. Repeating a poor performance, of course, is unpleas-

ant in its own right. However, it is particularly aversive if it is unexpected. Specifically, Feather (1967, 1969) has demonstrated that satisfaction with a particular outcome is determined in part by expectations regarding the outcome. Whereas positive outcomes are perceived as more pleasant if they are unexpected than if they are expected, negative outcomes are perceived as more unpleasant if they are unexpected than if they are expected. Moreover, there is some evidence that individuals will preemptively lower their expectations regarding the attainment of future desired outcomes to insulate themselves from disappointment should they not attain the outcome (Pyszczynski, 1982).

We expect a similar process to moderate the excuse making of nonshy individuals. To avoid the negative affect associated with receiving unexpected negative feedback, we predict that nonshy individuals faced with a retest will refrain from excuse making. That is, nonshy individuals should be less likely to claim they would perform better on a retest if they expect to retake the test than if they do not.

Although the prospect of a retest should diminish claims of low consistency (i.e., "This poor performance will not be repeated on a retest"), it should have no effect on claims of high consensus or high distinctiveness, because the latter two types of excuses are not threatened by the prospect of a retest. Instead, claims of high consensus can be challenged on the basis of normative information, whereas claims of high distinctiveness can be challenged solely by information on performance in other domains.

OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

In sum, the present study examined whether consistency claims are moderated by situational constraints and by individual differences in shyness. In line with previous research (e.g., Basgall & Snyder, 1988; Mehlman & Snyder, 1985), we predicted that individuals would claim lower consistency ("I would perform better on a retest or on a test measuring some other form of intelligence") following a poor performance than following a successful performance. More important, we predicted that shy individuals would refrain from making consistency-lowering excuses following a poor performance even when the claim would go unchallenged (i.e., no retest was anticipated). Nonshy individuals, by contrast, would claim low consistency when no retest was anticipated but would withhold such claims when a retest was anticipated.

Although our primary purpose was to examine the use of consistency-lowering excuses, we also investigated the use of consensus-raising and distinctiveness-raising

excuses to examine whether the different forms of excuse making vary differentially in response to the demands of the situation. For reasons stated earlier, we predicted that the prospect of a retest would have no effect on consensus and distinctiveness claims.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 120 male and female introductory psychology students randomly assigned to conditions and run in groups of four. All subjects had completed the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) prior to the experiment. The Self-Consciousness Scale includes a measure of social anxiety in addition to measures of public and private self-consciousness.

Procedure

On arriving for the experiment, subjects were seated in cubicles that permitted them to see the experimenter but not to see one another. Subjects learned that the experiment was part of a nationwide effort to gather information regarding a new intelligence test. The test was described as a valid predictor of academic success and highly indicative of intelligence. Subjects were instructed that they would have 12 min to complete the test. The tests would then be scored and returned to them.

After ensuring that all subjects understood the instructions, the experimenter administered the 12-minute Verbal Reasoning Analogy Test (V-RAT), the same 40-item test used by Mehlman and Snyder (1985). At the end of the test period, the experimenter collected the tests and test booklets and gave them to a student employee, who retired to an adjacent room ostensibly to score them. Meanwhile, subjects completed several innocuous questionnaires to distract them from talking with one another. Embedded in these questionnaires were two items assessing subjects' perceptions of the validity of the V-RAT.

Shortly after subjects completed the questionnaires, the student employee returned the scored tests to the experimenter, who then distributed them to the subjects. Subjects in the success condition learned that they had performed extremely well on the V-RAT, answering 36 items (90%) correctly; subjects in the failure condition learned that they had performed poorly on the V-RAT, answering only 23 items (58%) correctly.

As subjects examined their scores, the student employee called the experimenter from the room. After a few moments, the experimenter returned. In half the sessions, the experimenter explained that they were running ahead of schedule in this session, so that there

was time to administer an alternative form of the same test (retest condition). Subjects in the remaining sessions were told nothing about a second test (no-retest condition).

All subjects were then given a final questionnaire to complete, consisting of manipulation check items, the two items administered previously assessing subjects' perceptions of the validity of the V-RAT, and six items modeled after the ones used by Mehlman and Snyder (1985) measuring consistency, consensus, and distinctiveness attributions. Subjects in the retest condition believed that they would take the second V-RAT after completing this questionnaire. Subjects in the no-retest condition believed that they would depart after completing the questionnaire. After completing this final questionnaire, subjects were debriefed thoroughly, thanked for their participation, and dismissed.

Given the nature of the deception, the debriefing was conducted with great care, using procedures recommended by Mills (1976). First, the necessity of occasionally using deception in psychological research was discussed. Second, the nature of the deception on the current study was gradually revealed in a nonthreatening, noncondescending fashion. Finally, the experimenter explained that the feedback was entirely false and that the tests were never actually scored.

RESULTS

The mean shyness score was 19.4 ($Mdn = 20$; $SD = 4.9$), with scores ranging from 8 to 30. Shyness scores did not differ significantly across the four experimental conditions, $F(3, 111) < 1$. In addition, the median, range, and standard deviations of the shyness scores within the four experimental conditions were quite similar.¹

Preliminary analyses revealed that shyness correlated with both public self-consciousness ($r = .39$) and private self-consciousness ($r = .13$). To ensure that any observed effects were attributable to shyness and not to one of the correlated measures, both public and private self-consciousness were included in all analyses as covariates.

Data from 5 subjects who were suspicious of their score or failed to follow instructions were omitted from analysis. Because no sex effects were found in the initial analyses, all subsequent analyses collapsed across sex. Data from the remaining 115 subjects were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression (Pedhazur, 1982). In all cases, the two covariates (public and private self-consciousness) were entered into the regression model first. Then the three main effect terms (shyness, performance feedback, and retest instructions) were entered into the regression model. Next to enter the model were the three first-order interaction terms (Shyness \times Perfor-

mance Feedback; Shyness \times Retest Instructions; Performance Feedback \times Retest Instructions) and, finally, the single second-order interaction term (Shyness \times Retest Instructions \times Performance Feedback).

Checks on the Feedback Manipulation

The performance feedback manipulation was quite successful. Success feedback subjects reported greater satisfaction with their scores ($M = 7.86$ on a 7-9 scale) than failure feedback subjects ($M = 2.98$), $F(1, 105) = 311.94$, $p < .001$. Of note, subjects in the no-retest condition also indicated greater satisfaction with their scores ($M = 5.75$) than subjects in the retest condition ($M = 5.05$), $F(1, 105) < 10.34$, $p < .005$. Both these main effects, however, were qualified by a significant performance feedback by retest instructions interaction, $F(1, 105) = 6.51$, $p < .02$. Comparison of cell means for this interaction revealed that subjects in both the success/retest ($M = 7.73$) and the success/no-retest ($M = 8.00$) conditions were satisfied with their test scores, $t < 1$. By contrast, subjects in the failure/retest condition were less satisfied with their scores ($M = 2.18$) than subjects in the failure/no-retest condition ($M = 3.73$), $t = 3.99$, $p < .001$. This interaction is intriguing. Perhaps the expectation of retaking the test enabled failure/retest subjects to express greater dissatisfaction with their scores in the knowledge that they would soon have an opportunity to rectify their poor performance. Likewise, failure/no-retest subjects may have reported or conceded less dissatisfaction with their poor performance because they lacked the opportunity to improve it. Regardless, the performance feedback by retest instructions interaction merits additional study. Finally, subjects receiving success feedback ($M = 6.74$) were more likely than subjects receiving failure feedback ($M = 3.69$) to report that their score on the test accurately reflected their ability, $F(1, 105) = 86.02$, $p < .001$. This latter finding is consistent with research on the self-serving attributional bias (e.g., Bradley, 1978).

In sum, although there were a few unexpected findings regarding retest instructions, the analyses revealed that the performance feedback manipulation was very successful. We now turn to the primary dependent measure.

Consistency-Lowering Excuses

We hypothesized that failure feedback subjects would be more inclined than success feedback subjects to make consistency-lowering excuses. We also hypothesized that the tendency to make consistency-lowering excuses would be moderated by the anticipation of a retest and individual differences in shyness. To examine these hypotheses, we analyzed subjects' responses to the two consistency items. The first item read, "If you were to retake the V-RAT, how well do you think you would do

compared to your present performance?" Responses were anchored by 1, *much worse than my present score*, and 9, *much better than my present score*. The second item read, "If you were to take an alternative form of the V-RAT (of equal difficulty) on several separate occasions, how likely would you be to receive pretty much the same score (i.e., within 3 points)?" Responses were anchored by 1, *very unlikely*, and 9, *very likely*.

As expected, failure feedback subjects ($M = 6.10$) were more likely than success feedback subjects ($M = 5.37$) to estimate that they would perform better on a retest, $F(1, 105) = 9.48, p < .005$. In addition, failure feedback subjects ($M = 5.66$) were less likely than success feedback subjects ($M = 6.65$) to estimate that they would receive a similar score on an alternative form of the test, $F(1, 105) = 10.24, p < .005$. Of note, an effect for shyness emerged for one of the two measures of consistency, $F(1, 105) = 5.09, p < .05, b = -.19$. The sign of the regression coefficient indicates that nonshy individuals were more likely than shy individuals to predict a better retest performance.

The main effects for both consistency items were qualified by one or more two-way interactions. More important, these two-way interactions were themselves qualified by the predicted three-way interaction of shyness, performance feedback, and retest instructions; $F(1, 105) = 3.07, p = .08$, for the retest item, and $F(1, 105) = 4.82, p < .05$, for the alternative form item. To identify the nature of the interaction for the first item, shyness was entered as a predictor in four separate regression analyses predicting subjects' estimates of their retest performance (one for success/retest subjects, one for success/no-retest subjects, one for failure/retest subjects, and one for failure/no-retest subjects). The resulting regression coefficients were tested to determine whether they differed significantly from zero. These tests revealed that only one of the four regression coefficients, shyness as a predictor of retest performance among failure/no-retest subjects, was significant ($p < .01, b = -.17$).

To aid in the interpretation of this interaction, we used the regression coefficients generated to compute estimate scores for points one standard deviation above and below the mean shyness score for each of the four experimental conditions (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The regression lines for the four experimental conditions are plotted in Figure 1. Just as expected, shy subjects did not use the attributional strategy of consistency lowering. Instead, they estimated a similar retest performance regardless of their performance feedback and whether they expected to take an alternative form of the test, a finding consistent with Arkin et al. (1980). By contrast, nonshy subjects did make consistency-lowering excuses, but only under certain conditions. Specifically, nonshy subjects reported that they would perform better

on a retest when they received failure feedback and when no retest was expected. In sum, and as expected, low-consistency claims in the failure feedback condition were made only by nonshy individuals who expected no retest.

We repeated the foregoing procedures to identify the nature of the three-way interaction for the second consistency item (subjects' estimates of their likelihood of receiving a similar score on an alternative form of the V-RAT). The tests of the four regression coefficients revealed that shyness predicted estimated performance on an alternative form of the V-RAT among failure/no-retest subjects, $p < .05, b = .19$, and among success/no-retest subjects, $p < .09, b = -.12$.

Figure 2 displays the plot of the three-way interaction for the second consistency item. The findings comport well with those from the first consistency item. Specifically, performance feedback and retest instructions once again had no effect on performance estimates among shy individuals. By contrast, among nonshy individuals, those given failure feedback and expecting no retest reported that they were unlikely to receive the same score on an alternative form of the test. Figure 2 reveals an additional interesting finding. Nonshy subjects receiving success feedback and expecting no retest were more likely than their shy counterparts (albeit only marginally significantly so) to report that they would receive the same high score on an alternative form of the test.

In sum, as predicted, subjects receiving failure feedback were more likely to make consistency-lowering excuses than subjects receiving success feedback. In addition, the consistency claims were moderated by shyness and the expectation of a retest. Specifically, consistency-lowering excuses in the failure feedback condition were made only by nonshy individuals who expected no retest.

Exploratory Analyses

Although our primary purpose was to examine the use of consistency-lowering excuses, we also investigated the use of consensus-raising and distinctiveness-raising excuses to examine whether the different forms of excuse making vary differentially in response to the demands of the situation.

Distinctiveness. According to excuse theory, subjects receiving failure feedback should claim greater distinctiveness than subjects receiving success feedback; that is, failure feedback subjects should be more likely to regard their test performance as unique and as unlikely to be repeated on a test of other abilities. Two items examined this possibility. The first item read, "Compared to your score on the V-RAT, how well would you anticipate doing on tests which are different in content from the V-RAT but are still shown to be highly predictive of intellectual performance (e.g., IQ tests, general aptitude tests,

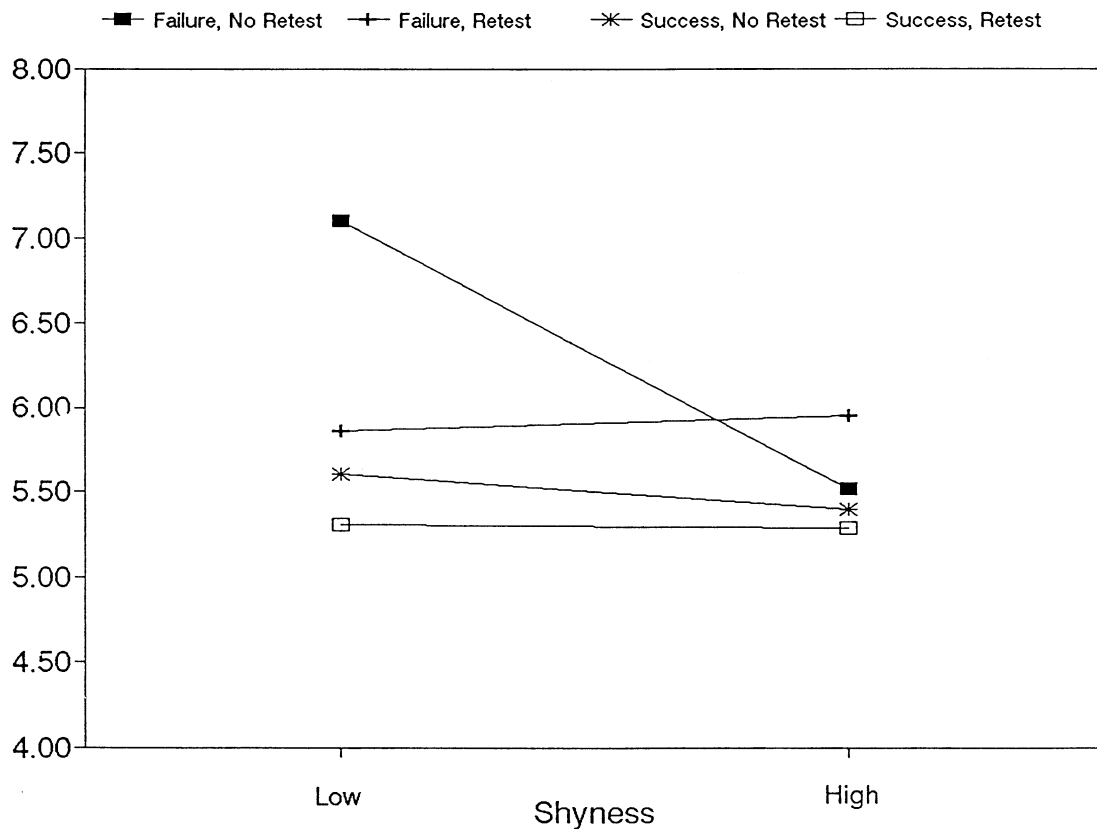


Figure 1 Estimated retest performance as a function of shyness, performance feedback, and retest instructions. The higher the score, the more subjects believed they would perform better if retested. Regression lines calculated for points ± 1 SD from the mean shyness score.

etc.)?" The second item read, "If you were to have taken a test measuring social sensitivity instead of the V-RAT for this study, how well do you think you would have done compared to your performance on the V-RAT?" Both items were anchored by 1, *much worse than the V-RAT*, and 9, *much better than the V-RAT*. Consistent with expectations, failure feedback subjects ($M = 6.78$) were more likely than success feedback subjects ($M = 5.12$) to estimate that they would perform better on a different measure of intelligence, $F(1, 105) = 55.50$, $p < .001$. Likewise, failure feedback subjects ($M = 7.10$), in comparison with success feedback subjects ($M = 5.89$), were more likely to report that they would perform better on a measure of social sensitivity than they did on the V-RAT, $F(1, 105) = 22.36$, $p < .001$. Importantly, shyness emerged as a significant predictor for the distinctiveness item dealing with a different measure of intelligence, $F(1, 105) = 3.99$, $p < .05$, $b = -.30$. The sign of the regression coefficient indicates that shy subjects were less likely than nonshy subjects to estimate that they would perform better on a different measure of intelligence. No other main effects or interactions emerged for the two measures of distinctiveness.

Consensus. According to excuse theory, subjects receiving failure feedback should supply higher consensus estimates than subjects receiving success feedback; that is, failure feedback subjects should be more likely to estimate that other participants performed similarly to themselves on the test. Two items examined this possibility. The first item asked subjects to estimate (out of 100) the number of fellow participants who performed similarly to themselves on the V-RAT. Contrary to excuse theory (yet consistent with Basgall & Snyder, 1988), success feedback subjects supplied higher estimates ($M = 68.23$) than failure feedback subjects ($M = 44.47$), $F(1, 105) = 32.37$, $p < .001$. The second item asked subjects to estimate the typical score on the V-RAT. Success feedback subjects supplied higher estimates ($M = 29.83$) than failure feedback subjects ($M = 24.33$), $F(1, 105) = 32.37$, $p < .001$, a finding that, at least on the surface, would seem to support excuse theory. However, comparing the mean responses from the second consensus item, though done in prior research (i.e., Basgall & Snyder, 1988; Mehlman & Snyder, 1985), does not truly examine whether failure feedback subjects were more

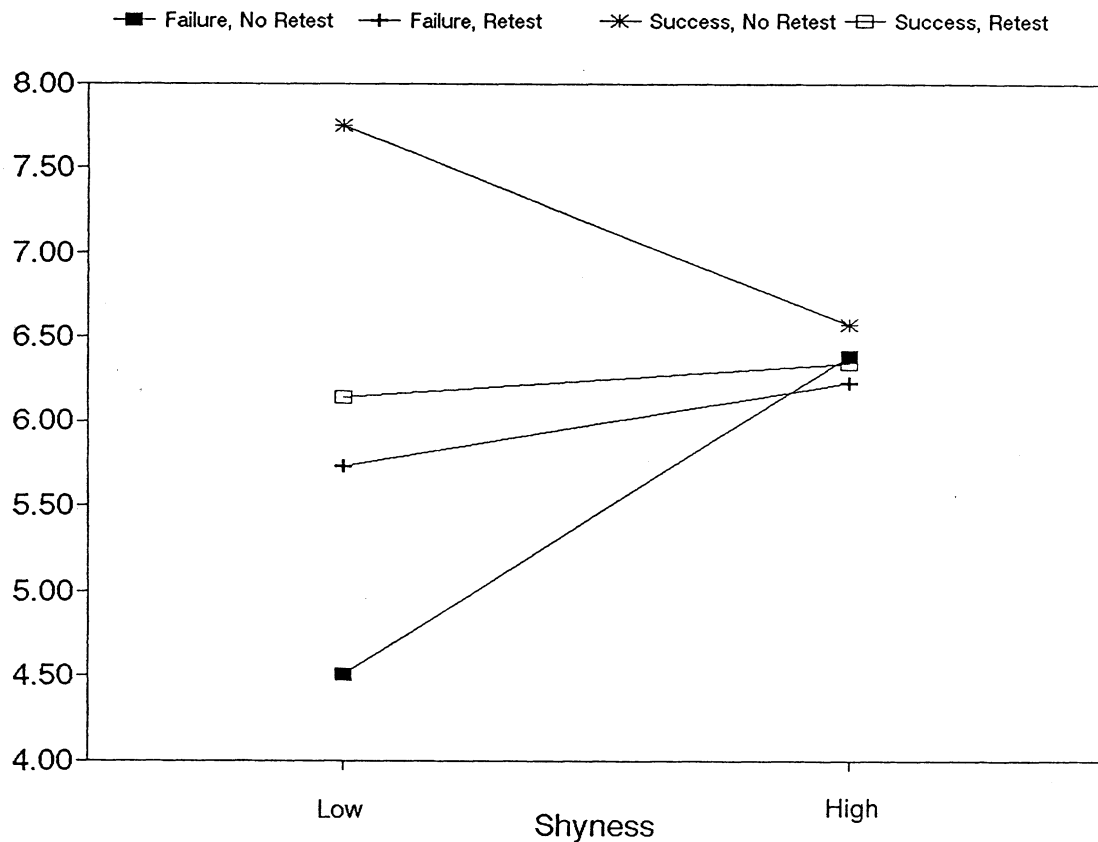


Figure 2 Estimated performance on an alternative form of the test as a function of shyness, performance feedback, and retest instructions. The higher the score, the more subjects believed they would perform similarly on an alternative form of the same test. Regression lines calculated for points ± 1 SD from the mean shyness score.

likely than success feedback subjects to estimate that other subjects received scores similar to theirs. Instead, it examines whether the score estimated as typical differs as a function of performance feedback.

To better examine consensus claims, we reanalyzed responses to the second consensus item by categorizing success and failure feedback subjects into three groups: (a) those estimating that the typical score would be lower than their own score, (b) those estimating that the typical score would be the same as their score (within 2 points), and (c) those estimating that the typical score would be higher than their score. The findings from this additional analysis, however, were again inconsistent with excuse theory. Among subjects in the success condition, 2% estimated that the typical score would be higher than their score, 49% estimated that it would be the same, and 49% estimated that it would be lower. Among subjects in the failure condition, 64% estimated that the typical score would be higher than theirs, 31% estimated that it would be the same, and 5% estimated that it would be lower. The chi-square analysis of these

percentages was significant, $\chi^2(2) = 56.4, p < .0001$. In sum, the responses to both consensus items suggest that, contrary to what might be expected from Snyder's excuse model, success feedback subjects reported greater consensus in their test performance than failure feedback subjects.

Ancillary Measures

Included on the questionnaire administered after subjects took the V-RAT and on the questionnaire administered after subjects received their feedback were two items that bear on the hypotheses of the present study. Both were 9-point Likert-type items anchored by 1, *strongly disagree*, and 9, *strongly agree*. The first item read, "The V-RAT is an accurate predictor of scholastic aptitude." The second item read, "There is a strong positive relationship between scores on the V-RAT and intelligence." Both items were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression. First to enter the model were the main effect terms of shyness, performance feedback, and timing of item (before vs after the performance

TABLE 1: Perceptions of the Test as a Function of Performance Feedback and Timing of Rating

Item and Timing of Rating	Performance Feedback	
	Success	Failure
The test predicts scholastic aptitude		
Before feedback	5.10 _a	4.77 _a
After feedback	5.38 _a	3.81 _b
Strong relationship between test and intelligence		
Before feedback	4.82 _a	4.82 _a
After feedback	5.14 _a	3.79 _b

NOTE: For each item higher numbers reflect stronger agreement, and means not having common subscripts differ at $p < .05$ using the pooled error term, $MSE = 1.00$ for both items.

feedback), followed by the two-way interactions (Shyness \times Performance Feedback; Shyness \times Timing of Item; Performance Feedback \times Timing of Item) and the single three-way interaction (Shyness \times Performance Feedback \times Timing of Item).

Analyses revealed virtually identical results for the two items. In both cases, there was a significant main effect of the timing of the item; $F(1, 109) = 7.15, p < .01$, for the first item, and $F(1, 109) = 6.89, p < .01$, for the second item. Likewise, in both cases the main effect was qualified by two significant two-way interactions. The first was a significant interaction of performance feedback and timing of item; $F(1, 109) = 23.59, p < .001$, for the first item, and $F(1, 109) = 26.53, p < .001$, for the second item. This interaction is presented in Table 1. Consistent with previous research (Pyszczynski et al. 1985; Tesser & Paulhus, 1983), subjects in the failure condition rated the test as less valid after receiving their performance feedback. Specifically, failure feedback subjects were less likely to regard the test as a predictor of scholastic aptitude and less likely to regard the test to be correlated with intelligence after learning their scores. Subjects receiving success feedback, by contrast, did not change their ratings of the validity of the test after receiving feedback.

The second interaction was an interaction of shyness and timing of item; $F(1, 109) = 6.35, p < .05$, for the first item, and $F(1, 109) = 2.80, p < .10$, for the second item. Although the pattern of means was similar across the two items, only the interaction for the first item (the only one of the two that reached conventional levels of significance) is presented in Figure 3. Figure 3 reveals that nonshy subjects rated the test as more valid before receiving feedback than after receiving feedback. Shy subjects, by contrast, did not change their judgments of the validity of the test, regarding it as less valid both before and after they received feedback. When the performance feedback by timing of item and shyness by timing of item interactions are viewed together, they reveal an

interesting pattern: Before receiving feedback, shy subjects are more likely than nonshy subjects to judge the V-RAT as invalid. After receiving feedback, however, both shy and nonshy subjects regard the V-RAT as valid when they receive favorable and as invalid when they receive unfavorable feedback.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine whether consistency claims are moderated by individual differences in shyness and by the anticipation of a challenge to one's excuses. Consistent with expectations, shy individuals refrained from making consistency-lowering excuses in all conditions. That is, regardless of performance feedback and whether they anticipated a challenge to their excuses, shy subjects reported that they would perform the same on a retest or on an alternative form of the same test. Our findings are consistent with the mounting evidence that shy individuals are reluctant to dissociate themselves from unfavorable outcomes and willingly accept negative evaluative information as accurate (see Cheek & Briggs, 1990, for a review). The fact that shy participants avoided making consistency-lowering excuses even when their excuses would go unchallenged suggests that the willingness of shy individuals to associate themselves with negative outcomes and expectations may make them less responsive to subtle shifts in their context, shifts that nonshy persons read carefully as denoting opportunities either for positive self-presentation or to avoid a negative presentation of self.

The responses of shy and nonshy participants contrasted sharply. Nonshy subjects receiving failure feedback did make consistency-lowering excuses, but only when they expected that their excuses would go unchallenged. Specifically, when nonshy subjects anticipated no retest, they reported that they would perform better on a retest or on an alternative measure of the ability. Moreover, when no retest was expected, nonshy subjects receiving success feedback were more likely to report that they would replicate their successful performance on an alternative form of the same test. When a retest was anticipated, however, nonshy subjects responded similarly to shy subjects; they claimed they would perform roughly the same as they had on the test they had just completed.

An intriguing pattern of findings emerged for the two ancillary items assessing perceptions of the validity of the analogies test. Before receiving feedback, shy subjects, in comparison with nonshy subjects, judged the test to be invalid. After receiving feedback, however, shy subjects were just as likely as nonshy subjects to regard the test as valid when they received favorable feedback and as invalid when they received unfavorable feedback. These

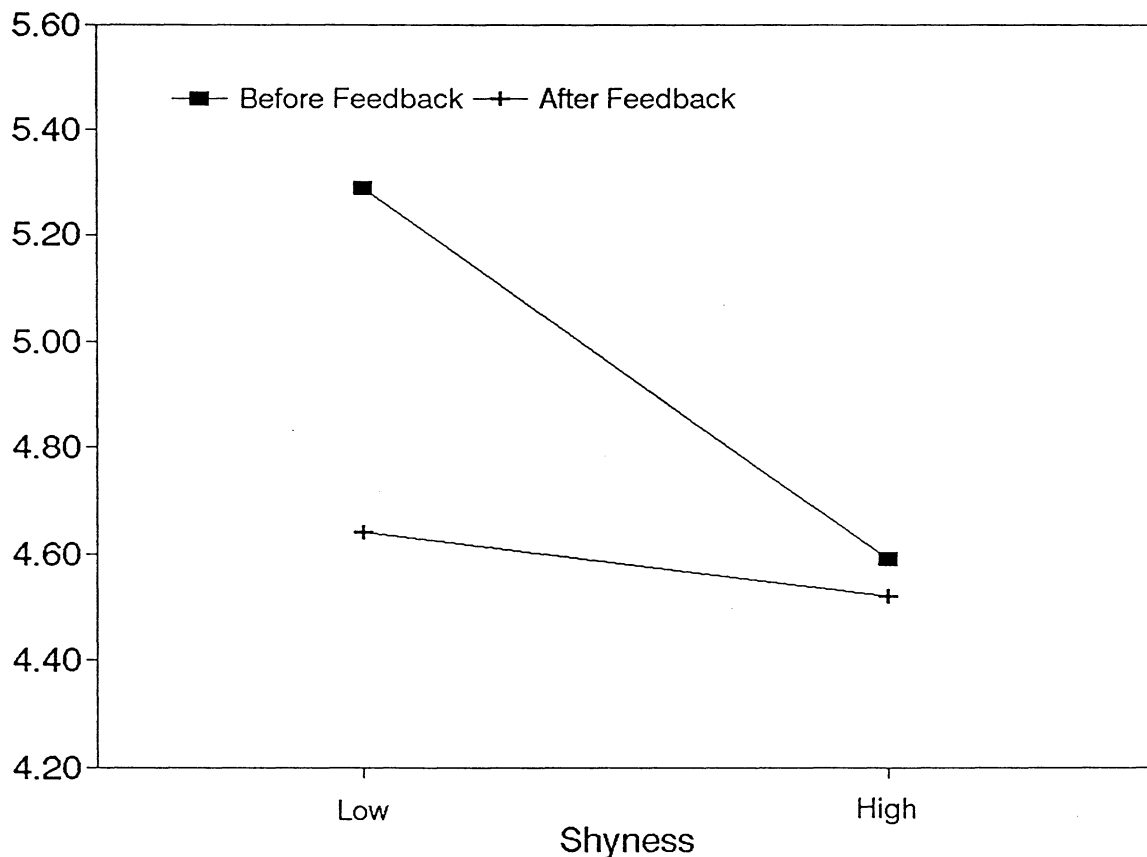


Figure 3 Judgments of the predictive ability of the V-RAT as a function of shyness and the timing of the item (before vs. after receiving performance feedback). The higher the score, the more subjects believed the V-RAT predicts scholastic aptitude. Regression lines calculated for points ± 1 SD from the mean shyness score.

findings are interesting for two reasons. First, they provide additional support for characterizing shy individuals as more conservative in their orientation. Specifically, the results suggest that shy individuals are more cautious in their approach to information that may have negative implications for the self. By preemptively judging an evaluative test as invalid, they protect themselves, albeit subtly, from the self-implications of a possible poor performance. Second, the findings suggest that shy individuals are not bereft of strategies for protecting the self. However, rather than casting doubt on the accuracy of the unfavorable outcome by making consistency-lowering excuses, shy individuals seem to prefer to adjust the meaning that can be placed on the outcome. When they perform poorly, they continue to regard the test as invalid and thus undiagnostic of ability. When they perform well, however, they alter their judgments of the test, regarding it now as valid and thus diagnostic of ability. When viewed with the responses from the consistency items, these results suggest that shy individuals accept unfavorable evaluative feedback as accurate, yet regard it as undiagnostic of ability. That is, shy individuals re-

ceiving failure feedback seem to acknowledge that they did poorly on the test and would do so again on a retest. However, they also seem to regard the test as invalid and thus not diagnostic of their ability.

Although shy and nonshy subjects differed in their responses to the consistency items and the items assessing perceptions of the validity of the test, they did not differ in their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their performance feedback. Shy subjects were just as satisfied with success feedback and just as dissatisfied with failure feedback as nonshy subjects. These apparently contradictory findings are actually quite consistent with the observations of Shrauger (1975; see also McFarlin & Blascovich, 1981), who distinguished between *cognitive* reactions, on the one hand, and *affective* reactions, on the other. On the one hand, Shrauger noted that individuals with a negative self-concept expect failure more and believe failure feedback is more accurate than individuals with a positive self-concept. On the other hand, individuals with a negative self-concept are just as displeased with unfavorable feedback as individuals with a positive self-concept. Such was the case with our findings.

Shy and nonshy subjects responded differently to the items assessing the validity of the test and the likelihood of performing similarly on a retest (a cognitive reaction), yet similarly to the item assessing satisfaction with performance on the test (an affective reaction).

Exploring the Accuracy of Responses

The responses of nonshy subjects in the failure feedback condition raise an interesting question. Are nonshy subjects responding accurately in the retest condition or in the no-retest condition? That is, how do nonshy subjects really regard themselves? One possibility is that the consistency claims of nonshy subjects are accurate in the retest condition and embellished in the no-retest condition, where subjects make excuses to sustain an inflated sense of self-worth. Such a position is grounded in research and theory on accountability and accuracy goals. Specifically, Tetlock (1992) has proposed that individuals respond to accountability demands introduced by anticipated evaluation from an unknown audience by engaging in preemptive self-criticism, resulting in more complex, self-critical thinking. In a similar vein, Kruglanski and Freund (1983) have noted variations in concerns with accuracy in social judgments and have found that an anticipated evaluation can lead individuals to modify their judgments so as to avoid appearing inaccurate.

The anticipation of a retest in the present study may have increased accountability demands and concerns with accuracy. Specifically, subjects in the retest condition undoubtedly were more likely than subjects in the no-retest condition to feel accountable for their responses to the consistency items. After all, their responses on these items could be evaluated in terms of their performance on the retest. The increased accountability, in turn, increased concerns with accuracy in judgments. The result was that nonshy failure feedback subjects in the retest condition were more modest in their consistency claims, reporting that they would likely perform similarly on a retest.

It is also possible, however, that nonshy subjects are responding accurately in the no-retest condition and modestly in the retest condition. From this alternative perspective, the excuses of nonshy subjects in the absence of situational constraints (i.e., anticipating a challenge) can be taken at face value; they are an accurate reflection of how nonshy subjects perceive themselves. The anticipation of a challenge, however, leads nonshy subjects to respond overly modestly, accepting more responsibility for the poor performance than circumstances might warrant (see Weary et al., 1982).

In the present study, there is no way of knowing how nonshy subjects receiving failure feedback actually regarded themselves—that is, whether their responses were more accurate in the retest condition or in the

no-retest condition. Nevertheless, we might speculate that there was an element of truth in the responses of both groups of subjects. Our speculation rests on the assumption that although most people's self-perceptions are generally stable, they are not immutable (see Markus & Kunda, 1986; Rogers, 1951; Turner, 1956). Instead, there is a range of ways they can view themselves, a range that likely differs from person to person in both its extremes and its breadth. What determines which self-perception a person holds at a given point in time is the situation.

Evidence from previous research would suggest that most nonshy individuals typically perceive themselves positively (Check & Briggs, 1990; Shepperd & Arkin, 1990). Nevertheless, they can be prompted by situational constraints to view themselves less positively. In the present study, we believe that the threat of a retest served as such a prompt, spurring nonshy subjects receiving failure feedback to embrace, at least temporarily, a relatively negative self-view. As a consequence, these subjects refrained from making consistency-lowering excuses for their poor performance. In sum, it is possible that neither the responses of subjects in the retest condition nor those of subjects in the no-retest condition are wholly inaccurate. Rather, they likely represent the ends of a continuum of how the self can be perceived. How the self is perceived and presented, then, is a consequence of situational factors that can emphasize either the positive end or the negative end of the self-perception continuum.

Importantly, shy subjects were unaffected by the retest manipulation. They responded similarly to the two consistency items, refraining from making consistency-lowering excuses, whether they did or did not expect a retest. From the accountability/accuracy perspective, this finding suggests possible individual differences in the extent to which people are affected by accountability demands and concerns with accuracy. Specifically, shy individuals may chronically feel accountable for their actions. As a result, they may be perpetually focused on avoiding inaccuracy in their judgments. From the range of self-views perspective, this finding suggests that the range of possible self-views for shy individuals is both narrower and more negative and their presentation of self is commensurately restricted in range. Naturally, definitive support for these ideas awaits additional research.

Other Excuse Claims

Distinctiveness-raising claims. Although subjects made higher distinctiveness claims following failure than following success, this effect was not moderated by either shyness or the anticipation of a retest. Given the design and focus of the study, this finding is perhaps not surpris-

ing. The distinctiveness items examined whether subjects would report that their current performance was unique or, alternatively, that their performance would replicate on a test tapping some other ability domain (i.e., social sensitivity or another form of intelligence). Although some subjects expected a retest, no subject expected to take a test examining other domains. This freed subjects to supply self-enhancing responses to the distinctiveness items, secure in the knowledge that their responses would not be disputed.

Yet, for one of the two items, shy individuals were less likely than nonschy participants to make distinctiveness claims. Specifically, shy individuals did not estimate that they would perform better on a test assessing an alternative form of intelligence. We view this finding as corroborating the results from the consistency items, demonstrating that shy individuals accept negative evaluative information as accurate.

Consensus-raising claims. We found no evidence of consensus-raising excuses in our study. Indeed, similarly to previous research (Basgall & Snyder, 1988), subjects supplied responses in a manner opposite to that predicted by excuse theory, with failure feedback subjects claiming less consensus than success feedback subjects. That is, when asked to estimate the number of fellow participants scoring similarly to themselves on the test, success feedback subjects estimated a larger number than failure feedback subjects. In addition, when asked to estimate the typical score on the test received by participants in the experiment, success feedback subjects were more likely than failure feedback subjects to estimate a score roughly similar to their own.

In explaining similar findings in their own data, Snyder and his colleagues (Basgall & Snyder, 1988; Mehlman & Snyder, 1985; Snyder & Harris, 1987) suggested that failure feedback subjects may have resisted making consensus-raising claims because they believed such claims could easily be contested by the experimenter. That is, subjects likely assumed that the experimenter would have access to the scores of all participants in the study and therefore could readily refute an invalid claim of high consensus. We take this explanation one step further by suggesting that the threat of a challenge not only deterred failure feedback subjects from making consensus-raising excuses but actually led them to be unduly modest in their responses.

Of course, the reports of failure feedback subjects may have been valid; these subjects may have truly believed that few others scored as poorly as themselves on the test. The present study provides no way of determining the veracity of subjects' consensus claims, and we acknowledge that this remains an interesting avenue for future research. Yet, regardless of the reason for the outcome of the consensus items, the findings are informative.

They suggest that the use of one excuse strategy (e.g., claims of low consistency) does not depend on and, in fact, may preclude the use of alternative excuse strategies (e.g., claims of high consensus).

Summary

In sum, our findings reveal that the anticipation of a challenge to one's claims moderates the use of consistency-lowering excuses among nonschy individuals following a poor performance but has no effect on the excuse reports of shy individuals. Instead, shy individuals refrain from making consistency-lowering excuses for a poor performance regardless of whether their claims can be challenged. Our findings provide clear evidence that the absence of an egocentric bias among shy individuals extends to their excuse making following a poor performance and that shy individuals appear to accept negative evaluative information as accurate.

NOTE

1. By oversight, subjects' tests were discarded without scoring. However, analysis of a sample of 47 subjects revealed no relationship between shyness scores and scores on the V-RAT ($r = .05$, n.s.).

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Received April 1, 1993

Revision received April 5, 1994

Accepted April 15, 1994