

Working under cover: Performance-related self-confidence among members of contextually devalued groups who try to pass

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Abstract

This paper experimentally examines the effects of passing (versus revealing) a contextually devalued identity on performance-related self-confidence. An experimental scenario was developed on the basis of the results of a pilot study. Studies 1 and 2 (total N = 255) experimentally manipulate passing versus revealing a contextually devalued identity, to an ingroup or an outgroup partner. The results show that, although passing makes participants believe that their partner has more positive expectations of them, it also undermines performance-related self-confidence. Moreover, the results show that negative self-directed affect (i.e., guilt and shame) mediated the negative effect of passing on performance-related self-confidence. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Members of devalued or stigmatized groups are frequently exposed to negative stereotypes and expectations (e.g., Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). These negative stereotypes and expectations can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, resulting in low self-confidence (Biernat, Crandall, Young, Kobrynowicz, & Halpin, 1998; Cadinu, Maass, Frigerio, Impagliazzo, & Latinotti, 2003; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Lord & Saenz, 1985; Schmader & Johns, 2003; Stangor, Carr, & Kiang, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Members of devalued groups can choose to break this self-fulfilling cycle by hiding their devalued group membership and passing as members of a more valued group (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Katz, 1981; Tajfel, 1981). Although this strategy should lead others to associate the self with more positive expectations, it is as yet unclear whether or not it successfully raises self-confidence. In this paper we empirically demonstrate that passing as a member of a more valued group is not an effective way to raise one's self-confidence, and provide evidence for the psychological process responsible for this effect. In this way, we demonstrate that self-confidence among members of devalued groups does not only depend on the external expectations of the self people perceive others to have, as it may be negatively affected by the very strategies aimed at improving those expectations.

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PASSING AS AN IDENTITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Past research on the effects of the negative stereotypes and expectations held about members of specific groups mainly focused on the effects of visible group memberships (see also Quinn, 2004). However, people often have a choice of whether or not to reveal their (devalued) group membership to others. This choice is clearly present when group memberships are not visible (as sexual orientation, certain mental and physical illnesses, and devalued professions; Holmes & River, 1998; Lee & Craft, 2002), but even identities which are usually visible may in some contexts be hidden, allowing for self-presentation on the basis of a more positive identity (e.g., when interacting through the internet; Jaffe, Lee, Huang, & Oshagan, 1999).

Passing as a member of a more positively evaluated group is thus an identity management strategy available to those who anticipate becoming targets of prejudice or discrimination in a particular context and who aim to avoid that type of treatment (Croteau, 1996). Passing implies both covering the devalued identity and actively adopting a new identity (Croteau, 1996; Goffman, 1963; Griffin, 1992). In principle, members of devalued groups can also choose to simply cover the devalued identity without necessarily passing as members of a more positively evaluated group (Croteau, 1996; Goffman, 1963; Griffin, 1992). However, it is not always possible to draw a clear distinction between these two strategies. First, in contexts where one group is clearly devalued in comparison to other groups, covering the devalued identity automatically implies passing as member of a more valued group. This is because people are assumed to belong to dominant groups or master categories, unless they explicitly state otherwise. For example, a gay worker who hides his sexual orientation from his colleagues is implicitly assumed to be heterosexual, and a schizophrenic who does not reveal his ailment is implicitly assumed to be mentally healthy (Goffman, 1963; Griffin, 1992). Second, in contexts where the devalued group membership is relevant and thus explicitly requested (for example, when workers are selected for a team on the basis of their professional experience), the only choices available are to either pass or to reveal the devalued identity (in the same example, people can only either reveal they do not have sufficient experience, or pass as someone who does). In this paper we are especially interested in this type of context, where people are forced to choose to either pass or reveal an identity that is contextually devalued.

CONSEQUENCES OF PASSING

Past research reveals that passing is accompanied by costs as well as by benefits. Indeed, passing involves two simultaneous acts: an act of deceit (lying about membership in the devalued group) and an act of self-presentation (presenting oneself as member of a more valued group membership). Past research indeed shows that passing protects members of devalued groups from prejudice directed at their group (Croteau, 1996; Link, 1982; Quinn, Kahng, & Crocker, 2004; Waldo, 1999). That is, they can escape the threat of negative expectations (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995) and may even reap the benefits of positive ones (e.g., Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). In fact, people choose to pass because they generally expect to be more valued and accepted by others when doing so (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ostfield & Jehn, 1999 for reviews).

However, passing also involves deceit. For instance, research on the psychological mechanisms associated with passing revealed that those who pass also frequently fear being exposed as impostors. Therefore they dedicate a great deal of energy to monitoring their own behavior, and are more mindful in the social interaction (Frale, 1993). The thought suppression required by passing, as well as the preoccupation with being found out, increases thought intrusion which can

lead to a greater salience of the devalued identity than were it to be revealed (Smart & Wegner, 1999, 2000). In fact, research in work situations has revealed that those who pass at work report lower work satisfaction, productivity, and loyalty to the organization than those who reveal a devalued identity (Powers & Ellis, 1995).

In general, people with non-visible stigmas report lower psychological well-being than people with visible stigmas (Adnopo, Forsyth, & Nagler, 1994; Crocker et al., 1998; Frable, 1993; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). More specific comparisons of people who pass with those who reveal their stigma, indicate that those who pass report worse physical health (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988) and experience more negative self-directed emotions (such as shame and guilt) than those who reveal a devalued identity (Harris, 2001; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Paxton, 2002; Smart & Wegner, 2000). These costs have led some to argue that although passing is often used as a strategy to cope with the stress of stigmatization, it may have the paradoxical effect of increasing the stress experienced by the stigmatized (Miller & Major, 2000).

Although previous research suggest that there may be emotional costs in addition to self-presentational benefits of passing, past research on these emotional costs has mainly reported *correlational* data, with the consequence that causal relations cannot be clearly established (for example, does passing undermine well-being, or are those with depressed well-being more likely to pass?). In the research reported here we explicitly address the emotional costs of passing versus revealing a stigmatized identity, by adopting an *experimental* approach to examine the effect of passing, and focusing specifically on its effect on *performance-related self-confidence*.

We predict that, despite its *positive* effect on people's perceptions of the *expectations* others have of them, passing is likely to elicit *negative* emotions about the self, and thus undermines *self-confidence*. That is, the act of passing violates the general rule that one must be truthful. When the self has deviated from this type of rule or standard, people tend to experience shame and guilt (Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Shame and guilt are self-focused emotions (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 1993) that are specifically relevant to people's social image (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). In other words, although passing may be seen as a way to present the self more positively to others, it in fact presents the self less positively 'to oneself' (Goffman, 1963; Leary, 1999). As a consequence, we predict that not being 'true to self' will be accompanied by negative self-directed affect, namely guilt and shame (Harris, 2001; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Paxton, 2002; Smart & Wegner, 2000). Furthermore, at a cognitive level, the experience of guilt and shame typically elicits the conviction that the self is inadequate, and tends to result in self-defeating behaviour (Frijda, 1986; Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989). As a result, we predict that the psychological strain of passing causes people to experience shame and guilt, which in turn undermine self-confidence.

In sum, whereas passing can alleviate the operation of stereotype threat, we propose that it at the same time introduces another form of threat to the self, namely secrecy threat. That is, those who reveal a devalued identity expose themselves to negative expectations from others which are likely to undermine self-confidence (resulting in a positive relation between expectations from others and self-confidence). However, we hypothesize that although the act of passing results in the conviction that others hold more positive expectations about the self, it at the same time undermines self-confidence because of the guilt and shame it elicits. As a result, when passing, we predict a *negative* correlation between self-confidence and the perceived expectations the partner has about the self. In this paper, we examine this process in studies 1 and 2, by examining how participants assessed the expectations their partner were likely to have of them, participants' performance-related self-confidence, and the way these variables correlate with each other, depending on whether participants reveal their devalued identity or try to pass. In study 2 we also provide direct evidence that the negative effect of passing on self-confidence is *mediated* by negative self-directed affect, in particular, by feelings of guilt and shame.

IDENTITY OF PARTNER

In this paper we also examine whether or not the effect of passing on performance-related self-confidence depends on the identity of the partner whom one deceives (someone who shares the devalued identity—an ingroup partner—or someone who belongs to the more valued group an outgroup partner). Although we would expect that people are less likely to (attempt to) pass when interacting with an ingroup partner than with an outgroup partner, it is less clear whether the group membership of the partner will influence the *effects* of passing on performance-related self-confidence. In general, feelings of self-confidence are likely to be greater when interacting with an ingroup partner compared to an outgroup partner. However, we hypothesize that the psychological costs of passing that are predicted to undermine self-confidence (i.e., guilt and shame) stem from the awareness of being untruthful to the *self*. As a result, the predicted effects of passing should emerge relatively independently of the identity of one's interaction partner.

To be able to distinguish between these two lines of reasoning (self-confidence suffers because one has to interact with an outgroup partner, or self-confidence suffers because of the experience of guilt and shame due to passing), we chose to include the group membership of the partner (ingroup versus outgroup) as a factor in our experimental design. In doing this, we made sure that participants would expect that passing might help avoid negative performance expectations of the partner about the self, irrespective of whether the partner belonged to the ingroup or the outgroup. This would enable us to compare whether the effects of passing on performance-related self-confidence were the same or different depending on the group membership of the interaction partner. Based on our theoretical reasoning that the psychological mechanisms that play a role primarily refer to the *self*, we expect that those who hide their true identity are likely to suffer psychological costs, regardless of whether they do this in front of an ingroup or an outgroup partner.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESES

In the studies reported here we investigated the impact of passing as a member of a more positively evaluated group on the performance-related self-confidence of members of contextually devalued groups. We collected real-life examples of events in which students recalled passing, to create an experimental scenario our participant population would see as realistic. In two experiments we induced participants to either pass or reveal a contextually devalued identity. We also manipulated the group membership of their interaction partner. In both studies, we assessed how participants rated the expectations their partner would have of them, and measured their performance-related self-confidence. In the second study, we also assessed participants' feelings of guilt and shame, and measured their actual task performance.

PILOT STUDY

Forty-nine male and 63 female students completed a short questionnaire about a situation in which they had chosen to (or would choose to) hide an identity. From those who indicated the type of identity they had chosen to hide ($N = 50$), most (22%) indicated their (homo-) sexual orientation, and 12% of the participants mentioned a devalued profession or study major. This was almost as frequently mentioned as more typically stigmatizing identities such as religious beliefs (16%), country of birth or

ethnic identity (14%), and more likely to be mentioned than demographic identities based on age (8%), or gender (6%).

Of those participants who explicitly mentioned the medium they would use ($N = 18$), the majority indicated they passed when engaging in computer mediated communication (67%). The majority of participants (60%) who described their expectations or motives for passing ($N = 83$) indicated that passing would protect them from rejection and negative reactions of others (e.g., it would protect them from prejudice and discrimination, raise people's expectations, or make them more valued and respected). Additionally, 22% of participants indicated that they expected passing would make them feel better (it would protect them from shame or increase their self-confidence), and 9% mentioned that passing would make them safer (e.g., on the internet). Thus, overall, participants anticipated that passing would lead to positive outcomes.

However, when participants ($N = 45$) recalled the actual consequences of passing, these were mostly negative. Only 4.4% of participants reported feeling 'good' when they passed, while 84.4% reported all sorts of negative feelings (e.g., uncomfortable, guilt, tension, shame, insecurity) and 11.1% reported several other negative effects (e.g., failure to build honest relationship, considered terminating the relationship).

In sum, participants mainly anticipated positive consequences of passing, but recalled mainly negative consequences. For instance, participants indicated they would pass to avoid feeling shame and increase their self-confidence, but reported that passing actually made them feel more ashamed and insecure. This is in line with what we would predict on the basis of our theoretical analysis. We also used these data to select a context in which participants would find it plausible to hide. For our experimental set-up we therefore chose to focus on professional identities (study major), and developed a cover-story in which this identity was contextually devalued in a computer-mediated interaction, so that participants would both be motivated to hide this devalued identity, and have the opportunity to successfully do so.

STUDY 1

This study experimentally examined how performance-related self-confidence is affected by revealing a contextually devalued identity versus passing as a member of a more positively valued group in a performance context. As outlined above, we chose to focus on a professional identity (study major, given the student population employed in this study), and established that identity as contextually devalued. In the Netherlands, study major is quite relevant to the identity of university students: when they register to study at the university, students apply for and are admitted to study a specific major. Throughout their university education they take (almost) all classes together with other students sharing the same major, and are taught in university buildings that are specifically assigned to students of that major.

In our research, we made sure that participants viewed passing as raising their partner's expectations about the self, to examine whether it (nevertheless) undermines performance-related self-confidence. We also varied the identity of the partner to whom participants passed, although in both cases we induced the same motivation to pass (i.e., to counter-act negative expectations), to examine whether or not the identity of the partner would qualify the negative effect of passing on self-confidence.

Method

Design and Participants

The study followed a 2 (Passing: passing or revealing the devalued identity) \times 2 (Partner: Ingroup or Outgroup) between participants factorial design. A total of 145 university students with a mean age of

21 took part in this study (120 females and 25 males, proportionally distributed across conditions). A minimum of one and a maximum of 8 participants were present at each experimental session, which lasted approximately 30 minutes, after which all participants were fully debriefed, and received 7,5 Dutch guilders (3.4 Euro) for their participation.

Procedure

Overview Participants were asked to perform a task associated with Art History, while they were not themselves students of Art History. Participants were paired either with one student of their own major (ingroup partner), or with one student of Art History (outgroup partner). In both cases, the partner stated that he or she would have preferred to work with an Art History student on this task (i.e., the participant's identity was devalued in this context). Participants were either induced to state that they studied Art History (Passing) or to indicate their real study major (Revealing). Participants then performed the task and answered a set of questions about this experience.

Introduction Participants sat in separate cubicles which were equipped with a personal computer, paper, and pencil. Instructions on how to proceed were provided on the computer screen. Participants indicated their age, study major, and gender. Participants then read that they would first work individually, and that later they would work with one other person present in the laboratory. Subsequently, participants read that the individual part of the task consisted of making judgments about pairs of paintings shown on the computer screen. The task would consist of 3 rounds, each round corresponding to one pair of paintings. Each pair of paintings (i.e., two paintings by Marc Chagall, two paintings by Georges Braque, and two paintings by Paul Klee) differed in various regards, but also had several aspects in common. The individual task consisted of noting down on the task form placed next to the computer as many *differences* as possible between each of the two paintings, within a 3 minute time limit for each round. Participants were also told that all participants would be performing the same task simultaneously, but that their partner would be focusing on other aspects of the paintings (he or she would be noting down *similarities* between the paintings). To make sure that participants' feelings regarding their ability and the way they perceived the expectations their partner would hold about the self stemmed from stereotypic associations, rather than from realistic expectations that they would not be sufficiently competent to perform the test, we pointed out that although the task was about paintings, it was not necessary to know much about paintings to be able to perform well on the task. We specified that the task given to pairs of participants later on in the experiment would be that of writing a short text about the paintings observed. We pointed out that performing as well as possible in the individual task would considerably facilitate the collaborative work when writing their text, and improve their chances of being well evaluated for their performance. In reality, the collaborative task with the partner was never performed.

After the tasks were carefully explained, participants were told that the dyads would now have to be formed. To manipulate whether or not participants would hide their identity and try to pass, it was important to create a context in which participants felt that passing and revealing the devalued identity both constituted reasonable action alternatives. At the same time, to be able to examine how people feel when they choose to hide their real identity, it is important to give participants the illusion that they have in fact a choice of whether they wish to pass or to reveal their identity, while at the same time inducing them to behave in line with the intended experimental manipulation. The procedure developed aimed at meeting these requirements. Participants read that half of the participants, randomly selected by the computer, would be given the opportunity to indicate their preference for the gender, age, and study major of their partner. Dyads would then be formed on the basis of these preferences, using the information that participants had provided at the start of the experiment (their

age, study major, and gender). Participants then waited a moment while the computer randomly selected which participants allegedly had the opportunity to choose their partner, and which would have to wait to be chosen. In reality, all participants had to wait to be chosen. At this stage participants waited for a brief moment while other participants allegedly stated their collaborative preferences. Subsequently, a message was displayed on the computer screen indicating that participants were being matched into dyads, after which the characteristics of the participant's partner were displayed. This constituted the manipulation of partner: half of the participants thought they were paired with a student of their own major (ingroup) and the other half of the participants were paired with a student of Art History (outgroup; note that our sample did not include any students of Art History). Participants were not aware of the study majors of any other participants present in the lab. All participants were paired with a partner of the same gender, who was 21 years of age (i.e., around the average age of our student population). To reinforce this manipulation, participants were asked to note down the information displayed about their partner on the task form placed next to the computer.

Once the identity of the partner was revealed, participants were told that this partner had indeed chosen to work with someone of the participant's age and gender group. Additionally, the partner had also chosen to work with a student of Art History. Participants were then led to believe that this was not possible, because there were not enough Art History students present at the laboratory to fulfill that request. At this stage, the manipulation of Passing was introduced: participants in the Passing condition received the suggestion to pretend that they were an Art History student, and were asked to indicate their agreement with this suggestion, before proceeding with the experiment. We suggested to participants in the Reveal condition that they reveal their real study major. Here too, participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed with this suggestion before proceeding with the experiment. Note that no real alternative was presented to participants, besides accepting our suggestion. Of course participants could always choose not to continue the experiment—only one participant made this choice. Although this feature of the manipulations may appear somewhat awkward, this procedure was followed to avoid self-selection of participants into experimental conditions (passing or revealing).

To reinforce this manipulation, once participants had approved of the suggestion that had been made, they were shown a table summarizing the information that the partner would receive about them: their age, gender, and their real or false study major, depending on the experimental condition. Participants were also asked to note down this information on the task form placed next to the computer. An additional consequence of the partner's preference to work with an Art History student, besides serving to introduce the manipulation of passing, was to reinforce the idea that participants' own group membership (study major) was devalued by their partner, in all experimental conditions (thereby controlling for motivations to pass). Note also that although the collective task was never performed, participants in fact passed or revealed their devalued identity from the moment they sent information about themselves to their partner.

Dependent Variables

Perceived Expectation of The Partner correspond to the manipulation check of passing versus revealing and were measured with one item (i.e., how well do you think that your partner expected you to perform?, from (1) 'very badly' to (7) 'very well'). Our core dependent measure, *performance-related self-confidence*, was measured by asking participants to indicate how well they thought they had performed on the individual task (from (1) 'very badly' to (7) 'very well'), how difficult they had found the task (recoded), and to what extent they expected their partner to be better than themselves at the individual task (recoded; all from (1) 'not at all' to (7) 'very much', $\alpha = 0.65$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

All participants indicated correctly on the task form the study major of their partner and which study major they had indicated to their partner to be their own (according to the passing or revealing condition). Only one participant did not agree with the suggestion we made and therefore did not proceed with the study. At that stage, this participant was debriefed, paid, and thanked for participation.

Perceived Expectation of Partner A 2 (Partner) \times 2 (Passing) ANOVA revealed a significant effect of Passing on perceived expectation of partner, $F(1, 141) = 55.59$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.283$. Participants who hid their identity and passed as Art History students indeed felt that their partners expected them to perform better ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1$) than participants who revealed the devalued identity ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.02$). This result indicates that our manipulation of passing versus revealing had the expected and intended effect on perceived expectation of partner.

Performance-related Self-confidence

A 2 (Partner) \times 2 (Passing) ANOVA revealed an effect of Passing, although this effect was only marginally reliable, $F(1, 141) = 2.92$, $p = 0.08$, $\eta^2 = 0.020$. Participants who passed as Art History students reported lower performance-related self-confidence ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.87$) than participants who revealed the devalued identity ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.96$). This result illustrates one negative consequence of passing in performance contexts. Additionally, overall participants felt less self-confident when working with an outgroup partner ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.01$) than when working with an ingroup partner ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.76$), $F(1, 141) = 9.72$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.065$.

Correlations

To examine whether the relation between perceived expectation and self-confidence differs, depending on whether participants were passing or revealing, we computed the correlation between perceived partner's expectation and performance-related self-confidence separately for the passing and revealing conditions. The results show that when revealing their identity, participants' self-confidence was positively related to perceived partner's expectation ($r = +0.39$, $p < 0.001$). This corresponds to the relationship that is often at the origin of stereotype threat effects. However, the correlation in the passing condition differed significantly from the correlation in the revealing condition ($z = 4.58$, $p < 0.001$). As predicted, when passing, self-confidence was *negatively* related to perceived expectation ($r = -0.35$, $p < 0.005$). This implies that passing simultaneously raises perceived expectations and lowers performance-related self-confidence, suggesting that a loss of self-confidence is one of the psychological costs of an improvement in perceived expectations.

Discussion

This first study demonstrates that hiding a contextually devalued identity and passing as a member of a more valued group can be accompanied by performance-related benefits (the belief that the partner has higher expectations of oneself), but it is nevertheless also associated with performance-related costs (lowered performance-related self-confidence). The beneficial effect of hiding on perceived partner's expectations is in fact one of the reasons why people may choose to hide their identity, as also

indicated by the participants in the pilot study. However, contrary to what could be expected on the basis of research showing that self-confidence is often positively associated to beliefs about other's expectations of the self (and contrary to what participants themselves anticipate), our results show that this benefit of passing is not translated into increased self-confidence. Indeed, the correlations show that perceived partner's expectations only positively relate to self-confidence when participants reveal their identity, but that the opposite is true when participants try to pass.

Although an overall effect of partner on self-confidence was obtained, this effect did not qualify the effect of passing on this dependent variable. That is, although as we anticipated self-confidence was higher across the board when interacting with an ingroup partner (rather than an outgroup partner), passing decreased performance-related self-confidence, *irrespective* of whether participants were paired with an ingroup or an outgroup partner. This is consistent with our reasoning that the effects of passing are primarily driven by self-focused concerns. Now that we have established that passing can undermine self-confidence, the next issue that needs to be examined is which psychological process is responsible for the negative effect of passing on self-confidence. Additionally, we will examine how the beneficial effects of passing on perceived expectations on the one hand and the negative effects of passing on self-confidence on the other relate to actual task performance. These questions are the focus of Study 2.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was designed to examine more closely the psychological process underlying the detrimental effect of passing on performance-related self-confidence. Specifically, we examine whether negative self-directed emotions (guilt and shame) mediate the negative effect of passing on self-confidence, in line with the argument we presented in the general introduction.

A second goal of this study was to examine the effect of passing on actual task performance. Since perceived expectations and self-confidence often go hand in hand, it is often found that conditions which raise the levels of one of these variables are also likely to benefit task performance (e.g., Biernat et al., 1998; Cadinu et al., 2003; Kray et al., 2001; Stangor et al., 1998). However, in the case of passing versus revealing a devalued identity, we predicted and found that this is not necessarily the case. Whereas passing enhances perceived expectations, it undermines performance-related self-confidence. The likely result is thus that overall task performance is similar regardless of whether people hide or reveal their devalued identity, but that performance is related to different variables in these conditions. On the basis of the correlations we observed in Study 1 we predict that when revealing, task performance is not optimal because of lowered *perceived expectations*, whereas those who pass are predicted to perform sub-optimally due to lowered *self-confidence*. In study 2 we designed the experimental task in such a way that we would be able to examine the effect of passing on performance in this study.

Finally, we introduce a small change in our paradigm: this time participants were coupled with two (ingroup or outgroup) partners, rather than only one partner (as in Study 1). This is done to strengthen the idea that participant's identity is more generally devalued, instead of only being devalued by a particular individual (ingroup or outgroup member).

Method

Design and Participants

The study followed a 2 (Passing: passing or revealing one's true identity) \times 2 (Partners: ingroup or outgroup) between participants factorial design. A total of 110 university students with a mean age of

22 took part in this study (71 females and 40 males, proportionally distributed across conditions). A minimum of one and a maximum of eight participants were present at each experimental session. Because each participant was seated in an isolated cubicle, participants were unaware of how many other participants were present in the laboratory. Sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes, after which all participants were fully debriefed, and received 7.5 Dutch guilders (3.4 Euro or 3.7 USD) for their participation.

Procedure

The procedure followed in this study was similar to that of the first study, except that participants were now paired with two partners, rather than with only one partner. All participants were allegedly paired with a 22 year old male and a 24 year old female student (i.e., both around the average age of our participant pool). Participants were told that their partners would be focusing on different aspects of the paintings during the individual task (one would be noting down similarities between the paintings and the other would be focusing on their color). This time we explicitly indicated what would be regarded as 'good performance' on the individual task: participants were told that the more differences between the paintings they noted down, the better their individual performance would be considered. Task performance is thus operationalized as the number of differences noted down by each participant.

Dependent Variables

Perceived Expectation of Partners and Performance-related Self-confidence ($\alpha = 0.69$) were measured in the same way as in Study 1. *Negative self-directed emotions* were measured by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they felt ashamed and guilty ((1) 'not at all' to (7) 'very much'; $r = 0.50, p < 0.01$). A factor analysis confirmed that performance-related self-confidence and negative self-directed emotions referred to different concepts: 2 factors explained 68% of variance, the first factor included the items used to measure self-confidence (loadings > 0.70) and the second factor included the items used to measure negative emotions (loadings > 0.82). Task performance was assessed by recording the total amount of differences participants generated in three rounds of the task.

Results

Manipulation Checks

On the task form, all participants correctly indicated the identity of both partners as well as the identity they had presented to the partners.

Perceived Expectation of Partner A 2 (Partners) \times 2 (Passing) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Passing on perceived expectation of partners, $F(1, 108) = 37.66, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.259$. Participants passing as Art History students felt that their partners expected them to perform better ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.17$) than participants who revealed the devalued identity ($M = 4.14, SD = 0.98$). This finding indicates that our manipulations had the intended effects on perceived partner expectation. In addition, participants working with an outgroup partner felt that their partners had a lower expectation regarding their performance ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.23$) than participants working with ingroup partners ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.16$), $F(1, 108) = 10.41, p < 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.088$. It is important to note that this effect did not qualify the effect of Passing on perceived partners' expectation.

Self-confidence

A 2 (Partners) \times 2 (Passing) ANOVA on performance-related self-confidence only revealed a significant main effect of Passing, $F(1, 108) = 5.96, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.052$. As predicted, participants who hid their identity and passed as Art History students reported lower self-confidence ($M = 3.89, SD = 0.92$) than participants who revealed the devalued identity ($M = 4.31, SD = 0.92$), replicating our observations in Study 1.

Correlation Between Partners' Expectation and Self-confidence

As in Study 1, to further examine our predictions we computed the correlations between perceived partner's expectation and self-confidence, separately for the passing and the revealing conditions. We again found that these two variables were positively correlated when participants revealed their identity ($r = 0.27, p < 0.05$), whereas they were negatively correlated in the passing condition ($r = -0.22, p = 0.10$). Although the negative correlation in the passing condition did not reach conventional levels of significance, it differed significantly from the correlation obtained in the revealing condition ($z = 2.58, p < 0.01$). That is, in line with our predictions, and consistent with the results observed in Study 1, when revealing, lower perceived expectations covaried with lower self-confidence, but when passing, the same participants who perceived their partners to hold an increased expectation of the self, were those who showed lowered self-confidence.¹

Negative Self-directed Emotions

A 2 (Partners) \times 2 (Passing) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Passing on feelings of shame and guilt, $F(1, 108) = 6.29, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.055$. In line with our predictions, participants who passed reported more shame and guilt ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.27$) than participants revealing their identity ($M = 1.73, SD = 1.05$).

Negative Self-directed Emotions as Mediators of the Effect of Passing on Self-Confidence

We examined whether negative emotions (which were affected by the manipulation of Passing) mediated the effect of Passing on self-confidence. Following Baron and Kenny (1986), the test of whether negative emotions mediate the effect of Passing on self-confidence, involves demonstrating that: a) the manipulation of Passing reliably affects self-confidence, b) the manipulation of Passing reliably affects negative self-directed emotions, and c) when negative self-directed emotions are controlled for, the effect of Passing on self-confidence decreases reliably. Accordingly, we found that Passing (which was dummy coded as: revealing = -1, passing = +1) reliably predicted self-confidence ($\beta = -0.21$), $F(1, 110) = 5.96, p < 0.05$. Furthermore, Passing also predicted negative

¹To examine whether or not the effects of passing on self-confidence can be generalized to feelings of self-confidence that do not directly relate to the task, we also measured self-confidence with two items from the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale: I am as clever as others, and I trust my abilities ($r = 0.20, p < 0.05$). Similar results were obtained as reported in the main text: a main effect of Passing, $F(1, 108) = 6.81, p < 0.010$, reveals that participants report higher self-confidence when revealing ($M = 4.90, SD = 0.98$) than when passing ($M = 4.44, SD = 0.88$). Mediation analyses reveal that negative emotions also mediate the effect of Passing on self-confidence as measured by these items. In addition, this self-confidence scale also correlates positively with performance in the passing conditions ($r = 0.32, p < 0.05$), while it does not significantly correlate with performance in the reveal conditions ($r = 0.01, ns$), and these two correlations differ significantly from each other ($z = 1.64, p < 0.05$). This measure demonstrates that our results are generalizable to feelings of self-confidence that do not directly relate to the task.

self-directed emotions ($\beta = 0.24$), $F(1, 110) = 6.48$, $p < 0.01$. Finally, when negative emotions were included in the regression equation these reliably predicted self-confidence, ($\beta = -0.32$), $F(2, 109) = 9.65$, $p < 0.001$, whereas the direct effect of Passing on self-confidence was no longer significant ($\beta = -0.15$, *ns*). The reduction in the direct effect of Passing on self-confidence after accounting for negative emotions is significant (Sobel $t = 2.15$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the effect of passing on self-confidence is *mediated* by negative emotions, as predicted. In other words, when participants passed as Art History students, they experienced negative self-directed emotions (i.e., guilt and shame), which in turn lowered their performance-related self-confidence (see Figure 1). We conducted similar analyses to rule out the possibility that passing affects self-confidence through perceived expectation of partners. In line with our reasoning, these further analyses confirm that perceived partners' expectation does *not* qualify as a mediator of the effect of Passing on performance-related self-confidence. That is, there was no significant reduction in the direct effect of Passing on self-confidence due to the inclusion of the perceived expectation of one's partners about the self in the equation (Sobel $Z = 1.14$, $p = 0.25$).

Performance

No effects of the manipulations were revealed for performance. In particular, there was no effect of Passing on the amount of differences that participants generated, $F(1, 108) = 0.09$, *ns*. There was also no reliable main effect of partner, $F(1, 108) = 2.16$, *ns*, and no reliable interaction between the two factors, $F(1, 108) = 0.96$, *ns*. Overall, participants generated an average of 5.50 differences per round ($SD = 1.65$).

Correlates of Performance

We argued that performance was likely to be associated with different variables in the passing and revealing conditions. This is in fact what we found: in the Revealing condition, performance was reliably associated with perceived expectations of the other ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), but less clearly so with self-confidence ($r = 0.20$, *ns*), indicating that under these conditions lower performance was primarily associated with lower perceived expectations (akin to a stereotype-threat effect). By contrast, in the passing condition, performance was only reliably correlated with self-confidence ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$), but not with perceived partners expectation ($r = 0.06$, *ns*). The latter two correlations differ from each other ($z = 1.50$, $p < 0.066$), indicating that when passing, lower performance is only associated with lower self-confidence. However, the perception that the partner's will hold a more positive expectation of the self does not relate to task performance in the passing condition, which is in line with our theoretical reasoning.

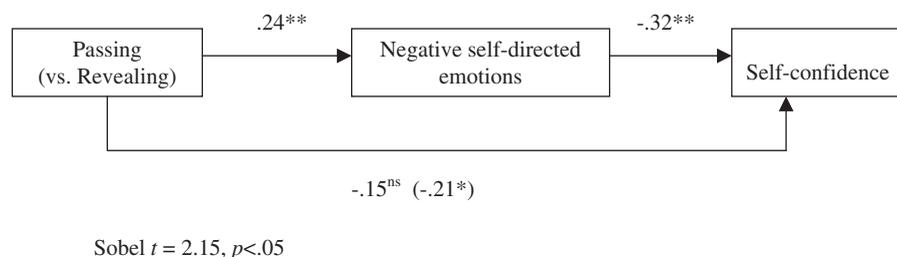


Figure 1. Negative self-directed emotions mediate the effect of passing on self-confidence (Study 2)

Discussion

The results of this study replicate and extend the results of Study 1. We again found that participants who passed assumed that their partners held *higher expectations* for their performance, but at the same time they reported *lower performance-related self-confidence*. In addition, we found that passing was associated with negative self-directed emotions (guilt and shame), and that these negative self-directed emotions mediated the effect of passing on self-confidence. These results thus clarify why the potentially beneficial effect of passing on perceived expectations is not necessarily positively associated with self-confidence—i.e., because passing is also associated with emotional strain (connected to the act of deceit). Thus, the emotional costs of secrecy lower self-confidence in this condition. This effect is absent when people reveal their identity, but revealing can have the cost of lowering perceived expectations, consistent with what we know from the literature on stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

This study also shows that task performance was neither diminished nor benefited by passing, when compared to revealing a devalued identity. Closer examination of the correlations between variables in the different experimental conditions reveals that when passing, lower performance is associated with lower self-confidence, whereas the perception that the other has improved expectations about the self is unrelated to task performance in this condition.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Theory and research examining how people deal with devalued group memberships and negative expectations usually focus on the different strategies that people use to cope with this predicament. The research we report in this paper goes one step further by examining the performance related *consequences* of the choice of a particular identity management strategy. In particular, we examined whether or not passing as a member of a more positively evaluated group serves to protect performance-related self-confidence. The results of these studies demonstrate that although passing may successfully raise perceived expectations, the emotional strain it creates undermines performance-related self-confidence. It seems thus that, in the type of context we examined here, people with a devalued identity find themselves in a 'no-win' situation: if they reveal their devalued identity they are vulnerable to low expectations and the negative effect on performance this can have. This is consistent with prior findings within the stereotype-threat literature, showing that negative group-based expectations are often associated with low self-confidence and poor performance (e.g., Biernat et al., 1998; Cadinu et al., 2003; Kray et al., 2001; Stangor et al., 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The novelty of our findings lies in demonstrating that passing can simultaneously have divergent effects on different variables that relate to task performance. That is, if members of devalued groups actively hide this identity and try to pass as member of a more valued group, on the one hand this raises the perceived expectations of others. On the other hand, however, passing makes them vulnerable to negative self-directed emotions that lower their self-confidence and thus undermines their performance. Thus, we argue that while it may help protect from stereotype threat, passing elicits a different form of threat, namely secrecy threat. Our findings thus show that even though passing can successfully raise perceived expectations, it does not constitute a promising identity management strategy for devalued group members who wish to protect their self-confidence and optimize their task performance.

It is important to stress that even though past research had documented the negative effects of passing on emotions and some aspects of the self-concept, this was mainly done with correlational methods (e.g., Croteau, 1996; Frable et al., 1998; Holmes & River, 1998; Lee & Craft, 2002; Paxton,

2002). Those methods do not allow for the inference of causal relationships. For example, with correlational methods it is not possible to establish whether negative emotions constitute a reason to pass (a cause) or a consequence of passing (an effect). The results of our pilot study actually suggests that both causal paths are likely to be valid. However, only an experimental approach can clearly demonstrate whether or not this is the case. Focusing on the consequences of passing, this important feature of our studies allows us to conclude that—instead of alleviating negative emotions—passing intensifies negative self-directed emotions (guilt and shame). We also go further than prior research on this topic by demonstrating that these negative emotions in turn undermine performance-related self-confidence.

It is however important to note some specific aspects of the context studied here, which limit the generalizability of our findings. *First*, we were interested in the effects of passing in a context where it offered protection for negative group-based expectations. Clearly, however, people can also pass for other motives, and they can pass as members of groups which are equally or even less positively evaluated than the ingroup. This was not the focus of our research, and thus our findings do not generalize to these contexts. *Second*, although we examined the effects of passing to ingroup versus outgroup members, we did not examine the possibility that passing to these two different sources may be guided by different motivations (e.g., protection from negative stereotypes or search for acceptance). Because the studies reported here focused on the effects of passing it was important to control for people's *reasons* to pass, irrespective of the identity of the partner, while still examining the potential effect of partner on the *consequences* of passing. We found that, although the (anticipated) interaction with an outgroup partner can result in lower perceived expectations (Study 2) or lower self-confidence (Study 1), this did *not* qualify the effects of passing. Nevertheless, future research should build on these findings to experimentally unveil the effects of passing when guided by different motives. In fact, although in this research we showed that the costs of passing outweighed its benefits (for the specific outcome we examined, i.e., performance-related self-confidence), it is well possible that other motives to pass can invert this relationship. For example, the benefits of passing are clearly likely to outweigh its costs when the consequences of a devalued group membership are more extreme. This is the case for example, for those who pass as heterosexuals in societies where homosexuality is considered a criminal offence, as well as for those who fear losing a job if they reveal their physical illness.

Third, despite the undeniable advantages of examining these processes experimentally, this method makes it difficult to examine some of the factors that may crucially modify the effects of passing. For example, to experimentally study the effects of passing we developed a methodology that combined an explicit suggestion (by the experimenter) with an illusion of choice (as participants expressed agreement with this suggestion). Similar processes may operate when people are advised (e.g., by superiors or mentors) not to reveal their homosexual orientation or history of (mental) illness in the work context. In fact, in reality passing is by definition inspired by external pressures, such as social norms and stereotypes, even though these may be more or less explicit. Although ideally a naturalistic examination of the effects of passing would require participants to actually choose to pass (rather than reveal their identity), this would introduce a serious problem with self-selection into experimental conditions, which would offer no better insight into causal relationships than a correlational study. This highlights the need not to restrict our analyses to one type of method of research, but to continuously complement experimental analyses with correlational methods and vice-versa. In addition, field experiments in which real-life experiences with passing are examined in controlled conditions can constitute a promising contribution to this area of research.

Finally, although we demonstrated that passing had no direct effect on performance, future research should replicate this effect with different types of performance tasks. For example, future research should distinguish between tasks where performance is dependent on motivation or effort and tasks where it is dependent on (cognitive) ability. It is possible that while passing impairs performance on

tasks that depend largely on ability (since self-perceived ability may be strongly impaired by lack of self-confidence), it may actually improve performance on tasks that depend more on motivation, especially in contexts where motivation is driven by external expectations. In fact, it is possible that the task we used in Study 2 depended to similar extents on ability and motivation, which can have produced two simultaneous effects that cancelled each other out.

In sum, whereas passing is theoretically considered an important identity management strategy for members of devalued groups, our results indicate that the harmful effects of passing on negative emotions and self-confidence are likely to outweigh the possible benefits of improving the (perceived) expectations others have of the self. Moreover, these results suggest that in certain task contexts passing may in fact perpetuate the negative experience, and ultimately even reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with devalued groups. Clearly, this illustrates the need to further examine the consequences of this and other coping strategies, in an effort to establish which identity management strategies can break this negative cycle and successfully offer protection to members of devalued groups.

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