INTERGROUP INFLUENCES ON THE STEREOTYPE CONSISTENCY BIAS IN COMMUNICATION: DOES IT MATTER WHO WE ARE COMMUNICATING ABOUT AND TO WHOM WE ARE COMMUNICATING?

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Past research in the area of stereotype communication has shown, using various paradigms, a reliable bias toward the communication of stereotype consistent information over stereotype inconsistent information (a *stereotype consistency bias*). One aspect of such communication that has received little attention, however, is the social context in which such communication occurs, and in particular, the group membership of the individuals involved. In the present study, we further unpack the *stereotype consistency bias* by varying the relative group memberships of the communicator, target, and audience of a narrative and examine the effect of the communication of stereotype consistent and inconsistent information. Our results suggest that these group memberships can have a dramatic effect upon stereotype communication, with the *stereotype consistency bias* only being evident in specific communicative contexts. Findings are discussed in terms of theoretical implications for the stereotype communication field, with particular focus on the socially connective functions of stereotypes.

The social cognition literature relating to stereotyping has identified a variety of cognitive processes thought to underlie the formation, maintenance, and change of stereotypes (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Hamilton, Stroessner, & Driscoll, 1994; Hilton &

von Hippel, 1996; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). While this work provides an invaluable insight into the individual cognitive processes involved, there is a growing body of work that has taken a somewhat different approach to the study of stereotypes. This approach focuses on the interpersonal aspects of stereotypes and conceptualizes them as being produced, shared, and maintained through communication.

One approach to the study of the communication of stereotypes focuses on discussions between ingroup dyads about an outgroup, or a member of an outgroup. For example, Harasty's (1997) content analysis of communication among ingroup dyads suggested that discussions about outgroups contained more group-level comments and fewer self-referent comments than ingroup discussions. Moreover, Ruscher and colleagues have suggested that the prevalence of stereotypical descriptions in discussions of outgroups within ingroup dyads may stem from a desire to affirm shared beliefs about the outgroup (for reviews, see Ruscher, 1998; Ruscher & Hammer, 2006). Thus, it would appear that one of the key aspects inherent in the communication of stereotypes is the extent to which they can be used to establish, verify, or demonstrate a shared understanding of outgroups among ingroup members.

In addition to dyad and group discussion paradigms, other researchers have investigated the process of stereotype communication through the study of the ways in which narratives about group members are reproduced between participants. Numerous studies have found that as these narratives are communicated between participants they tend to be stripped of stereotype inconsistent information (SI), with stereotype consistent (SC) information being retained (e.g., Kashima, 2000; Lyons & Kashima, 2001; Lyons & Kashima, 2003; McIntyre, Lyons, Clark, & Kashima, 2004). Moreover, this *stereotype consistency bias* has been shown to be attributable to communication processes (i.e., communication goals) rather than being the result of general memory biases (Lyons & Kashima, 2006). Further studies have also attempted to explain the underpinnings of an *SC* bias in relation to its potentially greater communicability (Schaller, Conway, & Tanchuk, 2002), and its potential for fostering greater social connectivity with a conversational partner (Clark & Kashima, 2007; Ruscher, Cralley, & O'Farrell, 2005) .

One dimension that has tended to be relatively under-theorized in studies of the interpersonal or communicative aspects of stereotypes has been that of variations in intergroup context. That is, the relationship between the group memberships of the communicator, the audience, and target (i.e., the individual being communicated about). The importance of intergroup context in relation to the *cognitive* process of stereotyping has long been highlighted by a number of researchers, especially those adopting a Self Categorization Theory (SCT) perspective (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). Studies conducted within the SCT tradition have demonstrated that stereotypical *cognitive representations* of social groups can be influenced by the comparative contexts in which they are measured (for examples, see Haslam, Oakes, Turner, & McGarty, 1995; Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty, & Hayes, 1992; Hopkins & Murdoch, 1999; Hopkins, Regan, & Abell, 1997). This research provides evidence for the ability of an intergroup context to influence individuals' *cognitive* representations of both outgroups and ingroups. In light of this, it would seem logical to also investigate the influence of intergroup context upon the *communication* of stereotypes about social groups through narratives.

An account of stereotype communication derived from an SCT perspective (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994) suggests that an intergroup (as opposed to intragroup) context would be likely to result in an interpretation and communication of information in more stereotypical, group-level, terms. In line with this, Wigboldus, Spears, and Semin (2005) invoked the concept of the *social communicative context* to draw a theoretical distinction between "intragroup" and "intergroup" communicative contexts. The former refers to a situation in which the communicator, target, and audience are all members of the same social group (e.g., male communicator, male target, male audience), while the latter refers to a situation where the communicative context is not homogenous in relation to group membership. Specifically, Wigboldus et al. (2005) assessed the influence of an intergroup context on participants' tendencies to show a bias toward the description of *SC* information at a higher level of linguistic abstractness (Semin & Fiedler, 1988) than SI information, that is, a *Linguistic Expectancy Bias* (LEB) in communication (Maass, 1999; Wigboldus et al., 2000). Wigboldus et al. (2005) found this *linguistic expectancy bias* only occurred when the communicative context was *inter*group, with no LEB effect occurring in an *intragroup* context.

 Wigboldus et al.'s (2005) proposed model for explaining these findings centers around the notion that an *inter*group context leads to the activation of relevant stereotypes, "which reveals itself in an LEB effect" (p. 226), with the *intra*group context less likely to lead to such activation, and thus no LEB effects. What is implicit in this model is a fairly direct correspondence between *cognitive activation* of stereotypical information and its *communication*.

However, as suggested by Higgins (1981; McCann & Higgins, 1992), as well as many researchers working from within a discursive social psychological perspective (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), communication should not necessarily be thought of as simply a direct transmission of information between minds, but, rather, as a purposeful social interaction that occurs within a particular social context. From Higgins's perspective, communication achieves multiple goals that are determined by numerous features of any given interaction. Two such features include (a) the characteristics of the audience and (b) the type of relationship participants wish to establish or maintain between themselves. We would therefore expect the *specific nature* of an intergroup communicative context to have an important effect on the extent to which stereotypes are communicated. For example, the intergroup context defined by Wigboldus et al. (2005) as an ingroup member (e.g., male) communicating about an outgroup member (e.g., female) to an ingroup member (e.g., male) is likely to follow very *different* communication rules to an alternative intergroup context where an ingroup member (male) communicates about an outgroup member (female) *to* a member of that same outgroup (female). In other words, communicating stereotypes, especially negative stereotypes, about an outgroup member to an ingroup member may serve to foster camaraderie and social connectivity, whereas communicating stereotypes of an outgroup to a *member of* that outgroup, or of a fellow ingroup member, may have an opposite effect.

We posit that one explanation for Wigboldus et al.'s failure to find such differential and nuanced effects between different types of *inter*group contexts may stem from the particular paradigm and dependent measures adopted, namely the level of linguistic abstraction. While recent research has demonstrated that communicators may, under certain circumstances, be able to consciously inhibit the LEB effect

(Douglas, Sutton, & Wilkin, 2008), it would seem unlikely that *audiences* would be consciously aware of the communication of *SC* and SI information at different levels of abstraction, thus potentially removing the need for the communicator to monitor his or her LEB as a function of the group membership of the audience. However, one might predict different results using measures of the amount of *SC* and SI information reproduced, which is more likely to be noticed by an audience than would be the case for abstractness levels, and therefore would be more likely to be manipulated by communicators according to specific features of the intergroup context.

THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The aim of the present research was to extend past work in the stereotype communication literature by examining whether the social communicative context influences the tendency toward a *stereotype consistency bias* in the reproduction of narratives about a target. More specifically, we investigate whether, following Higgins's (1981; McCann & Higgins, 1992) multiple goals account of communication, participants vary the level of stereotypicality of their communication depending on different types of intergroup contexts. We hypothesized, following Clark and Kashima (2007), Ruscher, Cralley, and O'Farrell (2005), and also Higgins (1981), that the intergroup context that creates the greatest social connectivity (ingroup members communicating with ingroup members about outgroup members) is likely to produce the greatest *SC* bias. The *intra*group context, on the other hand, would be predicted to produce an SI bias because of a desire to avoid ingroup stereotypes. The intergroup contexts involving ingroup communicators and outgroup audiences were predicted to produce either no *SC* bias or an SI bias because of politeness goals, that is, not wanting to offend the outgroup or portray one's own group in a better light.

   Our research used stereotypes about social class in the United Kingdom and experimentally manipulated social communicative context on the basis of this social category. We did not, in the present study, adopt the *serial* reproduction paradigm commonly used in past research, in which the narratives are passed through multiple reiterations (retellings) along a "chain," opting instead for a single-reiteration paradigm. With the exception of one study (Kashima, 2000),[1] past studies using serial reproduction chains have found a significant *SC* bias (or at least tendency toward it) at the first point in the chain (Clark & Kashima, 2007; Lyons & Kashima, 2001, 2003, 2006). Given our focus on the social communicative context, we therefore chose not to investigate whether the observed effects would be amplified across multiple positions in a serial reproduction chain.

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   1. The Kashima (2000) study found an SI bias at the first link in the chain, which later became an *SC* bias further down the chain. The difference, however, between this study and subsequent studies (that showed *SC* biases from start to finish) was the likelihood that Kashima (2000) was picking up basic *memory* biases. Kashima found no difference between "memory" and "communication" instruction conditions, potentially on account of the weakness of the operationalization of the communication instructions. Subsequent studies, however, more strongly emphasized interpersonal communication in their instructions to participants.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The study involved 80 male (non-psychology) undergraduate students who participated voluntarily and were paid £5 (U.S. $9) for their time. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 46 years, with a mean age of 19.77 ($SD = 3.34$) years. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions (created by the 2-level manipulation of the target and audience of the communication). All participants self-identified as "middle class."

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The study employed a 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial design with Target (Working Class vs. Middle Class) and Audience (Working Class vs. Middle Class) as between-subject factors, and Stereotypicality (SC vs. SI) as a within-subject factor. Participants were evenly divided between all conditions.

MATERIALS

Three main stimulus materials were used in this study. The first was a story about a fictitious character (target) called "Steve." The second item was a background description of "Steve," which portrayed him as either working or middle class. Third, an audience description of a fictitious participant ("Michael") was used, which portrayed him as either working or middle class.

The Story. The story stimulus contained 685 words. To create a story that participants would believe had been written by another participant, an attempt was made to ensure that the sentence structure was relatively naturalistic and complex (see appendix for the full story used). The story contained 16 stereotype-relevant items. Half (8) of these items were stereotype consistent with regards to the working class (WC-SC) and, at the same time, stereotype *in*consistent with regards to the middle class (MC-SI). The other half (8) of the items were stereotype consistent with regards to the middle class (MC-SC), and, at the same time, stereotype *in*consistent with regards to the working class (WC-SI). As such, half of the items were always *SC* and half were always SI, whether the target ("Steve") was described as being working class or middle class. The consistent/inconsistent status of the items, however, was obviously reversed when switching from a working class to a middle class target and vice versa. Within each of the two sets of 8 SI and *SC* items, half of these items (4) were controlled to be positive in valence and half were negative in valence.

  The story was pilot tested with a sample of 15 undergraduate students who rated each of the 16 items in terms of how stereotypical they felt that the actions, thoughts, or emotions of the target depicted in the item were of both the working class and the middle class. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (not stereotypical at all) to 7 (extremely stereotypical) for both working and middle class. The mean ratings for each item were found to fall on the appropriate ends of the scale (i.e., 1.0 to

3.5 for SI items and 4.5 to 7.0 for *SC* items) with regards to both working class and middle class stereotypicality. Pilot participants also rated the extent to which they believed that the actions, thoughts or emotions displayed by the target in each item would be generally thought of as being positive or negative. Mean ratings for each item were again found to fall on the appropriate ends of the scale.

Manipulation of Demographic Variables for the Target. At the top of the page above the story, participants were provided with "some background information about Steve" that was said to have been written using information provided by "Steve" himself. This description was manipulated to depict Steve as either working or middle class by varying information such as which schools he had attended, his current occupation, and place of residence. In the pilot testing, all 15 respondents correctly identified "Steve the doctor" as middle class and "Steve the forklift driver" as working class when asked to categorize the descriptions.

Manipulation of Demographic Variables for Audience. In the space above the blank lines upon which participants wrote their retelling of the story was a brief description of the person who would ostensibly be reading it. This description was manipulated in a similar way to the target description, such that the audience ("Michael") was depicted as either working or middle class. All 15 respondents correctly identified "Michael the cleaner" as working class and "Michael the architect" as middle class when asked to categorize the descriptions in pilot testing.

PROCEDURE

Before reading the story, participants read instructions informing them that they were about to read an account of a weekend in the life of a particular individual (Steve), which ostensibly came from a diary entry made by someone who participated in some previous research looking at how people write diaries. Participants were told they were about to read a retelling of the original diary entry, which had been written by an earlier participant in the current study.

Participants were then handed the story to read. At the top of this page was a heading, "Background," under which was placed the target description (either the working class version or the middle class version). Below this was a second heading which read "Summary of diary entries made over one weekend," after which came the story itself.

Once the participant had read the story and handed it back to the experimenter they were asked to perform a filler task for ten minutes. They were then asked to rewrite the story in their own words on a blank sheet of paper that was headed with instructions that informed them that their account would be read by "Michael," another participant in the study, for whom a brief description was also provided (either the working class or middle class version). Participants were told that in a later version of the study the researchers hoped to use face-to-face interaction, but that since this was not possible in the current study, participants were at least being provided with some information about the person who would be reading their retelling of the story, so that they could visualize their audience.

No time limit was given for reproducing the story. Afterward, participants were thoroughly debriefed, thanked for their participation, and reimbursed for their time.

RESULTS

CODING THE REPRODUCTIONS

Each reproduction was coded by two expert coders in relation to whether or not the 16 stereotype relevant items (8 WC-SC/MC-SI and 8 WC-SI/MC-SC) were present. An item was judged to be present if the stereotype meaning of the original item was retained. It was not necessary for the item to be reproduced verbatim. A high level of inter-rater reliability was obtained, Kappa = .93.

PRIMARY ANALYSES

The reproduction coding data was analyzed using a 2 x 2 x 2 (Stereotypicality x Target x Audience) mixed model ANOVA, with Stereotypicality as a within-subjects variable and Target and Audience as between-subjects variables.

No significant main effect was obtained for Stereotypicality, $F(1, 76) = 2.32$, $p = .13$) with only a very slight SC bias being observed ($M = 59.69$ vs. $M = 55.93$). In addition, no significant two-way interaction was obtained between Stereotypicality and Audience, $F(1, 76) = 0.40$, $p = .53$. However, the reason for the absence of these effects becomes apparent when one examines the way in which both effects were moderated by significant interactions with Target.

The Moderating Effect of Target. First, a significant Stereotypicality x Target interaction occurred, $F(1, 76) = 38.61$, $p < .001$. When the middle class participants communicated a story about a working class person they reproduced more SC ($M = 63.43$) than SI ($M = 44.38$) information, $t(39) = 5.20$, $p < .001$, however when they were communicating about a fellow middle class person, they reproduced more SI ($M = 76.5$) than SC ($M = 55.94$) information, $t(39) = 3.06$, $p = .004$. This effect was subsumed, however, under a significant 3-way Stereotypicality x Audience x Target interaction, $F(1, 76) = 12.61$, $p = .001$. As Figure 1 shows, when the Audience was a fellow middle class person and the Target was working class, communicators reproduced more SC ($M = 69.38$) than SI ($M = 40.00$) information, $t(19) = 6.20$, p < .001 but more SI ($M = 66.88$) than SC (48.12) information when the Target was middle class, $t(19) = 3.52$, $p = .002$. However, when the Audience of the communication was a working class person, no statistically significant biases were found for either the middle class Target, $t(19) = 0.88$, $p = .39$ or the working class Target, $t(19) = 1.88$, $p = .07$.

DISCUSSION

Our results demonstrate the importance of considering the specific nature of the social communicative context when studying interpersonal communication of stereotypes. In the current study, the SC bias commonly observed in the reproduction of narratives (e.g., Kashima, 2000; Lyons & Kashima, 2001; Lyons & Kashima, 2003; McIntyre, Lyons, Clark, & Kashima, 2004) was found to be dependent upon the specific intergroup or intragroup communicative context. When communicating to another ingroup member about an outgroup member, participants displayed a clear SC bias. However, when communicating to an ingroup member about an-
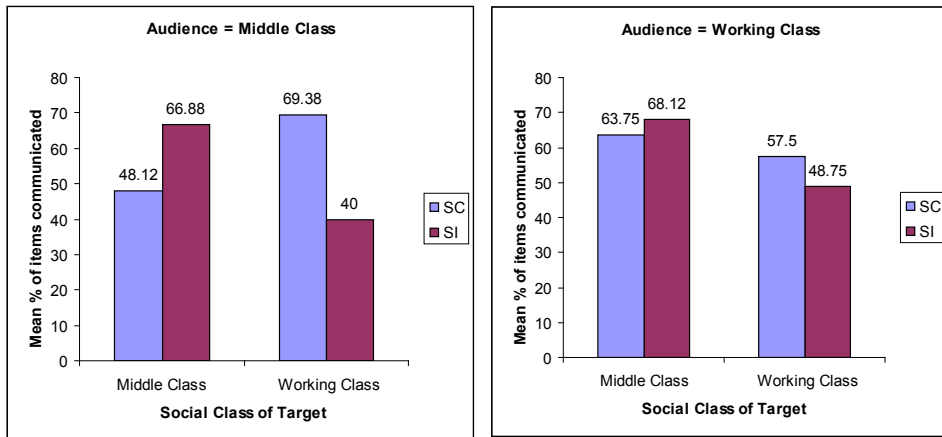
FIGURE 1. The mean percentage of SC and SI items communicated according to Target for each Audience condition.

other member of the ingroup, participants showed the reverse effect, an SI bias. Interestingly, *both* the outgroup *SC* bias and the ingroup SI bias failed to occur (to a level of significance) when the audience of the communication was an outgroup member.

These results offer an interesting comparison to those in Wigboldus et al.'s (2005) study in which an *LEB* effect occurred in their *inter*group contexts and a reversed LEB or no LEB effect in an *intra*group context. As we predicted, we also found a reverse *SC* (i.e., SI) bias in an intragroup context but a more complex pattern of results was obtained for intergroup contexts using our reproduction paradigm. Our results show an *SC* bias in the intergroup context in which an ingroup member communicated about an outgroup member to another ingroup member. However, we did *not* find significant stereotype-related communication biases in the intergroup condition in which ingroup members were communicating to outgroup members, regardless of the group membership of the target involved.

Following Higgins (1981), this suggests that when it comes to reproducing narratives, communicators tailor their communication to specific features of an intergroup context rather than simply emphasizing the stereotypical in *any* intergroup context, as might be expected from an SCT perspective (e.g., Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). In other words, the presence of an outgroup *audience* inhibited a communicator's usual tendency to favor the transmission of *SC* information. Moreover, our results suggest that measures based on the amount of reproduced *SC* and SI information may be more sensitive to specific features of intergroup contexts than LEB effects, given that Wigboldus et al. (2005) were unable to detect these differences.

In line with Clark and Kashima (2007) and Ruscher, Cralley, and O'Farrell (2005), we suggest that the socially connective functions of stereotype communication best explains our results. For example, Ruscher, Cralley, and O'Farrell demonstrated that newly acquainted dyads that were manipulated to perceive a greater level of "closeness" between themselves and their ingroup partner were more likely to engage in stereotypically biased communication about an outgroup member than

dyads who did not receive the closeness manipulation. Also, as mentioned earlier, Clark and Kashima (2007) demonstrated that participants perceive *SC* information as more useful than SI information when it comes to the *formation or maintenance of* social relationships. That is, stereotypes are potentially used to *create* closeness, or social connectivity, rather than merely being a *product* of closeness or social connectivity. So in relation to the present findings, communicating stereotypes about an outgroup member to an ingroup member may help foster greater social connectivity. Moreover, because communicating stereotypes of the ingroup to other ingroup members or of the outgroup to members of that outgroup is likely to seem offensive and therefore result in reduced connectivity, communicators avoid favoring *SC* information and communicate more SI information in these contexts.

One limitation of the present study that should be considered relates to our use of social class as the social category in question. While social class was specifically chosen due to its real-world significance (especially in a British context; cf, Argyle, 1994), it is worth considering how "hot" or socially contentious this social category really is when considered in the wider spectrum of categories such as race. As Ruscher et al. (2005) suggest, the socially connective functions of a particular stereotype are likely to be highly influenced by social norms regarding the social acceptability of communicating stereotypes of that particular social group. A consideration of this possibility would, to our mind, suggest two important avenues for future research. First, at a theoretical level, it would appear pertinent for future studies to examine the communication of stereotypes relating to *highly* contentious social categories such as racial, religious, or ethnic stereotypes. Second, future research should also take into account the beliefs communicators have about the social appropriateness of communicating *particular* stereotypes in *particular* communicative contexts. While we have examined here the specific effect of group membership, future work should consider *other* variables that may influence a communicator's perceptions of how receptive an audience is likely to be to the communication of particular stereotypes.

In conclusion, the current research provides strong support for considering the *social communicative context* when examining processes surrounding stereotype communication in the reproduction of narratives. On the basis of our findings, the *stereotype consistency bias* that has been commonly observed in past research (e.g., Brauer, Judd, & Jacquelin, 2001; Harasty, 1997; Kashima, 2000; Lyons & Kashima, 2001; Lyons & Kashima, 2003; McIntyre, Lyons, Clark, & Kashima, 2004; Ruscher, 1998; Ruscher & Hammer, 2006) becomes far more complex, nuanced, and multifaceted when one considers the social context in which the communication of stereotypes takes place. Specifically, we have demonstrated, using a narrative reproduction paradigm, that the tendency to reproduce stereotypical information about a target individual can be greatly influenced by the relative group memberships of the communicator, the target, and the audience of that communication. Furthermore, our results point to a need to theorize the influence of intergroup context on the *communication* of stereotypes in a potentially more nuanced way than is currently offered by accounts of the *cognitive activation* of stereotypes.

APPENDIX: THE STORY STIMULUS

Steve had been catching the train to work each day for years, but rarely bothered to buy a ticket (since he had never had his ticket checked) **(WC-SC/MC-SI, negative).** On this Friday, he had been running late for work when he got caught without a ticket on the Metro by one of the ticket inspectors. Not only did he receive a fine, but the inspector kept lecturing him for what seemed like forever about how irresponsible it was to not buy a ticket, making him even later for work.

Although he was furious, he tried to stay calm and just repeatedly said he was sorry and that he wouldn't do it again, knowing that getting angry would only make things worse **(WC-SI, MC-SC, positive).** Before leaving work that afternoon he had to ring the local council to find out why they seemed to have been under-charging him on his council tax for the previous few months **(WC-SI, MC-SC, positive).** His wife had asked him to buy some cleaning products on his way home from work. Tesco was more on his way home but Steve decided to catch the train into the city and go to Morrisons, because he knew that he would save a bit of money there. **(WC-SC, MC-SI, positive).** He liked shopping at Morrisons better anyway as it was less pretentious than some of the more expensive supermarkets like Sainsburys **(WC-SC, MC-SI, positive).** He liked to always shop at the same supermarket as well because he tended to see the same staff at the checkout. He felt like he had some things in common with them and enjoyed a good chat when they weren't too busy **(WC-SC, MC-SI, positive).** Steve and his wife were having Steve's friend Bill and his wife Alison around for dinner on Saturday night. Steve had worked with Bill for the past 2 years. Although he found Bill pretty boring and annoying, Steve had to admit that he kind of enjoyed spending time with him because Bill was a bit of a loser really and it made him feel better about himself because he earned more money than Bill and was clearly more interesting **(WC-SI, MC-SC, negative).** On Saturday he went into town during the day and bought some expensive wine glasses so that he could impress Bill **(WC-SI, MC-SC, negative).** Steve thought it would be a good idea not to get *too* drunk in front of his friends, so he just had a couple of glasses of wine with dinner **(WC-SI, MC-SC, positive).** Bill had been making a big deal of how good the wine he had brought was supposed to be, but Steve started to get frustrated over this because he couldn't make out a single thing on the label, as it all seemed to be written in French **(WC-SC, MC-SI, negative).** On Sunday night Steve went to a pub-quiz at a local pub near his house. He really didn't like the pub they went to because people he didn't know kept coming up and trying to talk to him **(WC-SI, MC-SC, negative).** He also didn't like the fact that people at that pub were always really shabbily dressed and generally lacked style **(WC-SI, MC-SC, negative).** To make matters worse, it was a mission to get to the tiny bar in between each round of the quiz to get a drink. Whilst Steve was lining up at the bar to get served some bloke pushed in front of him. He was so furious that he shoved the guy out of the way and yelled at him. The two of them got into a bit of a shoving match before the other guys friends pulled him away telling him to leave it alone **(WC-SC, MC-SI, negative)**. The quiz itself was quite fun though as there were lots of questions on topics that Steve knew a lot about such as history and science **(WC-SI, MC- SC, positive).** Because he did so well, his team won. The prize was a Newcastle United Football scarf. Steve was overjoyed and started cheering like he does at the football. Steve loves football and is a huge fan of Newcastle United **(WC-SC, MC-SI, positive).**

After the quiz ended Steve and his friends moved on to another bar. He ended up getting so drunk that the night ended with him getting thrown out of the bar for being too intoxicated **(WC-SC, MC-SI, negative).**

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