CURRENT RESEARCH IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Volume 5, Number 3
Submitted: January 9, 2000
Resubmitted: March 4, 2000
Accepted: March 4, 2000
Publication date: March 6, 2000

HISTORY OF EXPOSURE TO AUDIENCES AS A DEVELOPMENTAL ANTECEDENT OF PUBLIC SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Alain Morin
Saint Francis Xavier University

[33]
---
[34]

ABSTRACT

Little is know about factors that influence the development of public self-consciousness. One potential factor is exposure to audiences: being repeatedly aware of one's object status could create a high disposition to focus on public self-aspects. To explore this hypothesis public self-consciousness was assessed in two groups of subjects: 62 professors and actors (high exposure to audiences) and 39 people without audience experience. Analysis show that significant differences exist for public self-consciousness in men only. Also, history of frequent exposure to audience is significantly but weakly correlated with high public self-consciousness in men. This supports previous observations indicating that self-consciousness seems to develop differently for men and women.

[34]
---
[35]

INTRODUCTION

The publication of Duval and Wicklund's book in 1972 marked the beginning of a new era in the study of self-awareness. By defining this concept as the ability to become the object of one's own attention, and especially, by proposing that a state of self-awareness can be created--and thus manipulated--by exposing subjects to self-focusing stimuli, Duval and Wicklund showed that experimental investigations of, as opposed to phenomenological approaches to, self-awareness, were possible. In a state of self-awareness, a person will actively look at and examine any self-aspect that is most salient at the moment. Self-focusing stimuli remind a person of his or her object status in the world; this fosters self-observation. Being confronted to a mirror, an audience or a single observer, or seeing pictures or videotape recordings of oneself, or hearing one's voice on a tape recording, provoke self-focused attention (Carver & Scheier, 1978).

Another major development in this effort to bring the study of self-awareness on empirical grounds was the construction of a scale measuring self-consciousness, the chronic tendency to engage more or less frequently in self-observation. Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975) started with the assumption that people vary in the time they typically spend in a state of self-awareness; these individual differences are supposedly stable and independent of environmental influences (e.g., self-focusing stimuli) (Davis & Franzoi, 1991b). Thus, self-consciousness is considered to be a personality trait. Factor analyses on the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS) consistently showed the existence of two distinct subscales referring to attention focused on two different dimensions of the self. The first one is called private self-consciousness, a natural tendency to think about covert self-aspects such as moods, motives, cognitive processes, desires, sensations, and so on. The second subscale taps public self-consciousness, a tendency to think about one's visible characteristics such as physical appearance, social behavior, or the impression one makes on others.

[35]
---
[36]

The amount of correlational and experimental studies published using either the SCS or self-focusing stimuli is impressive (for reviews, see Carver & Scheier, 1981; Gibbons, 1990). Yet, an issue that did not receive much attention is the question of how individual differences in self-consciousness develop (Davis & Franzoi, 1991a). Little research has tried to identify specific past experiences that are likely to shape people's tendency to reflect on themselves more or less frequently. Buss (1980) proposed a few intriguing hypotheses, some of which have been tested by Klonsky, Dutton and Liebel (1990). Their main findings can be summarized as follows. High private self-consciousness in men seems to be associated with maternal achievement demands, warmth, principled discipline, low body satisfaction and poor health during childhood. In women, maternal principled discipline and/or restrictive practices when growing up are related to high private self-consciousness. Men and women who receive rather important achievement demands and negative parental practices during childhood tend to develop high public self-consciousness. Franzoi, Davis and Markwiese (1990) explored motivational bases underlying differences in private self-consciousness. Their tentative conclusion is that high private self-consciousness is partially a function of one's need for self-knowledge (as long as it out-weighs a need to protect one's self-esteem), whereas low private self-consciousness is the result of a motivation for self-defense that is stronger than a need for self-knowledge.

As far as I know, these two sets of studies represent the only available data on the etiology of self-consciousness. Another hypothesis has been put forward by Rimé and LeBon (1984). Their general premise is that the emergence of dispositions is provoked by the effects of situations. In that perspective, Rimé and LeBon suggest that the disposition to self-focus (self-consciousness) is dependant upon past situational factors, so that highly self-conscious individuals would be characterized by a history of frequent exposure to self-focusing stimuli. In other words, being frequently in a state of self-awareness (induced by self-focusing stimuli) would create a high disposition to self-focus--a tendency that would persist even in the immediate absence of these stimuli. For instance, recent evidence indicates that famous people are highly self-conscious (Schaller, 1997): fame can be seen as a self-focusing stimulus, and for public figures this heighten self-awareness would keep exerting effects even in the immediate absence of its cause--fans.

Previous research shows that temporary manipulations of self-awareness (using self-focusing stimuli) do not influence self-consciousness (Davies & Fixter, 1988; Knapp & Deluty, 1987). This does not preclude the possibility that extended exposure to self-focusing stimuli in natural settings might affect self-consciousness on the long run. Morin (1997) tested this hypothesis by using scales to measure self-consciousness and past exposure to self-focusing stimuli. Although weak, correlations between past exposure to self-focusing stimuli and the level of self-consciousness were significant. Specifically, significant results were found between past exposure to self-focusing stimuli and private self-consciousness in men and public self-consciousness in women.

A major limitation in Morin's (1997) study was the use of a pilot self-report questionnaire to assess past exposure to self-focusing stimuli. The goal of the present study was to get round this limitation by selecting subjects on the basis of an objective, real extensive history of exposure to self-focusing stimuli rather than on a retrospective, subjective evaluation of such an exposure based on subjects'(possibly biased) recall. While one could certainly identifying groups of people that had extensive contact with mirrors or audio and video devices for example, I reasoned that finding people with experience of speaking or performing in front of audiences would be easier. Two such groups of people are professors and actors--both spend hours in front of students or a public. Since all self-focusing stimuli, with the exception of small mirrors, have been shown to induce a state of public self-awareness (Buss, 1980; Carver & Scheier, 1981), extensive exposure to audiences should primarily be related to high public self-consciousness. Also, as results found by Klonsky et al. (1990) and Morin (1997) suggest, the routes to the development of self-consciousness appear to differ for the two sexes. Past exposure to audiences is thus likely to have a different impact on public self-consciousness in men and women.

METHOD

Subjects

Thirty-six Saint Francis Xavier University professors (20 men and 19 women, M age = 43 yr.), 26 professional actors from a local theatre (7 men and 19 women, M age = 24.6 yr.), and 39 subjects with no experience with audiences (20 men and 19 women, M age = 32 yr.) participated in the study.

Procedure and Measures

The private and public subscales of the SCS were administered to all subjects. Three different questionnaires, one for each group of subjects, were also used to assess past exposure to audiences. All material was distributed in envelopes to ensure confidentiality. It was given to professors at their office and picked up the following day; the same material was distributed to actors personally or through a member of the local theater and picked up the following day. The third group of subjects with no experience with audiences were recruited at local mails and were asked to fill-in the measures immediately.

The SCS consists of 17 items. The private self-consciousness subscale contains 10 items; a sample item is "I'm generally attentive to my inner feelings". The public self-consciousness subscale is made up of 7 items; a sample item is "I'm usually aware of my appearance". Subjects are asked to evaluate each item on Likert-type scales ranging from extremely uncharacteristic of myself (0) to extremely characteristic of myself (4). A total score is obtained by adding up each rating. Extensive research has repeatedly indicated that the SCS is an highly reliable and valid instrument. Fenigstein et al. (1975) obtained high reliability coefficients for private self-consciousness (.79) and public self-consciousness (.84).

Three different questionnaires were developed to assess subjects' history of exposure to audiences. The subjects with no obvious experience with audiences were asked if they had ever been in plays, performing music in a band or an orchestra in front of an audience, or had given any lectures. Nine subjects that indicated so were discarded from the present study. The questionnaire given to professors assessed the amount of time they spent in front of students. It was estimated that the average professor teaches three full courses per year; a full year course involves approximately 60 hours of teaching in class, and this was multiplied by three for a total of 180 hours per year. The total number of hours teaching in front of a class was calculated by multiplying this amount of hours by the number of years professors reported they had been teaching. Since a professor may also give conferences at scientific meetings and teach summer courses, this additional exposure to audiences was taken into account. Thus subjects were asked to evaluate the approximate number of hours they spent presenting papers at conferences each year; this was multiplied by the number of years they had been teaching. The number of hours spent teaching summer courses was also calculated. The length of a summer course was estimated to be 60 hours; this was multiplied by the total number of summer courses given over the years, as reported by the subjects.

Some professors may also be involved in artistic activities--namely, performing music in a band or an orchestra in front of an audience or acting in plays. This too was considered to be pertinent experience with audiences, and it was calculated in the following way. For performing music, subjects were asked to estimate the number of years they had been in a band or an orchestra; this was multiplied by the number of concerts presented each year, and by the approximate length of a concert, which was estimated to be approximately two hours. For possible involvement in acting, subjects were asked to estimate the number of years they had been in plays; this was multiplied by the number of plays per year, and by the average length of a play, which was also estimated to be approximately two hours. All of the hours were added up to get a total amount of time spent in front of an audience.

For actors, the total amount of time spent in front of an audience in plays was calculated by multiplying the number of plays subjects estimated they were in with the number of times each play was presented, with the average length of a play. Since some actors reported also performing music and giving lectures, this additional time spent in front of an audience was calculated as indicated above. The total amount of hours in front of an audience was calculated by adding up all of the hours.

RESULTS

Calculations indicated that professors spent an average of 2370.32 hours in front of an audience; for actors the estimated means of hours was 198.92. Comparisons of t tests between groups were calculated, revealing significant sex differences for public self-consciousness, $t(99) = -3.86$, $p < .001$ (women got higher public self-consciousness scores); no significant difference was found for private self-consciousness. Given these differences, separate analyses were performed for public self-consciousness.

Independent sample t-tests were also used to determine if history of exposure to audiences had an impact on the level of public or private self-consciousness of actors, professors, and subjects without audience experience. Means were higher for actors and professors but differences did not reach statistical significance. No significant differences were found between actors and professors. Results for professors and actors were thus combined, forming one larger group with extensive experience with audiences.

[39]
---
[40]

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for private and public self-consciousness as a function of group and sex. Independent sample t-tests were used again and significant differences were observed for public self-consciousness in men, $t(45) = -2.78$, $p < .008$. No significant differences were found for public self-consciousness in women, or for private self-consciousness both in men and women.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of private and public self-consciousness as a function of group and sex.

Group	Audience		No Audience	
	Men (N=27)	**Women (N=38)**	**Men (N=20)**	**Women (N=19)**
Private Self-Consciousness				
M	21.04	21.43	19.62	17.58
SD	5.59	5.96	5.95	7.27
Public Self-Consciousness				
M	17.15	19.23	13.60	19.16
SD	3.81	4.39	4.95	5.19

A significant correlation was found between public self-consciousness and the total number of hours spent in front of an audience for men, $r = .33$, $p <. 01$. There was no correlation found between these same variables in women. A significant correlation was observed between private self-consciousness and the total number of hours spent in front of an audience for all subjects, $r = .30$, $p <. 003$.

[40]
---
[41]

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis tested in the present study was that frequent past exposure to audiences should be related to a high tendency to focus on public self-aspects. The prediction thus was that individuals with a extensive history of exposure to audiences (professors and actors) would have a higher level of public self-consciousness in comparison to individuals with no audience experience. It was also expected that there should be a significant correlation between the total number of hours spent in front of an audience and the level of public self-consciousness.

A significant difference in the level of public self-consciousness between individuals with and without audience experience was found; also, a significant correlation was observed between exposure to audiences and public self-consciousness. These results only partially supports the hypothesis however, because they were observed in men only and the correlation is rather weak. Rimé and LeBon's original proposition (1984) postulates the existence of a causal relationship between exposure to audiences and the development of a high self-consciousness. The logic behind this link is as follows: being repeatedly aware of one's object status (as a result of being in front of an audience) would create a high disposition to focus on public self-aspects. But obviously, a correlation never entails a causal link between two variables, and the possibility that highly public self-conscious men would somehow actively seek exposure to audiences cannot be ruled out.

It must be acknowledged that some confounding variables might account for the observed relation between audience exposure and public self-consciousness. A potential candidate is age: the university professor group was substantially older than the other subjects, and it is at least conceivable that age itself, or some correlate of it, explains the higher scores of this group on public self-consciousness. However, to our knowledge, the existence of a relation between age and self-consciousness has never been shown in past research. On the contrary, the only available data rather suggests that the stability of scores on the SCS tends to increase with age (Davis & Franzoi, 1991b). Schaller (1997), using a method called "single-case historiometry", measured self-awareness in three famous individuals and found a decrease in self-consciousness with age. Also, it is possible that other dimensions along which professors and actors differ from the average person (the no-audience-experience group) could account for the results. While this cannot be ruled out, it should be noted that no significant differences were found for public self-consciousness in professors and actors. Surely these two groups of subjects are different on many psychological dimensions, and yet these differences did not significantly affect levels of private self-consciousness.

[41]
---
[42]

Some moderating variables can readily be identified, that could partially explain the rather weak correlation obtained in the present study. For one thing, actors' public self-awareness in front of an audience could be minimal since interpreting another character is susceptible to attract attention away from the real self. Also, professors who are teaching familiar class are likely to be

less aware of themselves as social objects as opposed to when they repeatedly encounter a new audience. These factors could have reduced the possible impact of audiences on the development of public self-consciousness for professors and actors.

For some reason, exposure to audiences did not affect public self-consciousness in women. A possible explanation may be that women, being more publicly self-aware than men, think more about their appearance and as being social objects than men do. As a result, women may be immune, so to speak, to the effects of an audience. Men, on the other hand, may think less about public self-aspects, so that being repeatedly confronted to an audience might have more of an impact on them.

Surprisingly, a significant correlation was found between exposure to audiences and private self-consciousness for all subjects. Recall that only small mirrors have been shown to induce a state of private self-awareness in past research. Thus extensive exposure to audiences was not expected to be related to high private self-consciousness. One possible explanation is to postulate that professors are characterized by a higher level of intellectual development that would foster cognitive activities like self-reflection--and thus private self-consciousness. Indeed, it was found that private self-consciousness in professors is significantly higher than for actors and individuals with no audience experience, $t(99) = -2.33$, $p < .02$. Also, people high in private self-consciousness report themselves to be generally reflective and philosophically inclined (Turner, Scheier, Carver & Ickes, 1978), which somewhat supports the hypothesis of a link between intellectual development and private self-consciousness. It is conceivable then that audience experience would not be responsible for the observed correlation.

Note that Morin (1997) found opposite results in his study: significant (but modest) correlations were observed between past exposure to self-focusing stimuli and private self-consciousness in men and public self-consciousness in women. The major difference between this study and the present one, that might account for this, is the measure used to assess past exposure to self-focusing stimuli. The present study exclusively focused on audience exposure, whereas Morin's study (1997) also evaluated past exposure to mirrors, audio and video devices, and cameras. Maybe these other self-focusing stimuli are specifically related to high public self-consciousness in women and to private self-consciousness in men--whereas audience exposure in particular is not.

CONCLUSION

The empirical identification of specific past experiences that are likely to shape people's tendencies to reflect on themselves more or less frequently represents a new and exciting avenue of research. It is an important one because individual differences in self-consciousness have powerful effects on behavior (Davis & Franzoi, 1991a). Surely, the question of the origin of these differences is a highly complex one. In that perspective, it would have been naive to expect a strong relation between past experience with audiences and public self-consciousness. Clearly, the present results indicate that this particular experience represents only one possible factor

among many others. But I would like to think that the identification of yet another factor draw us towards a better understanding of the developmental process of self-consciousness.

[43]
---
[44]

REFERENCES

Buss, A. H. (1980). *Self-consciousness and social anxiety*. San Francisco: Freeman.

Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1978). "Self-focusing effects of dispositional self-consciousness, mirror presence, and audience presence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36:324-332.

Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1981). *Attention and self-regulation: A control-theory approach to human behavior*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Davis, M. H. & Franzoi, S. L. (1991a) "Self-awareness and self-consciousness." In Derlega, V. J., Winstead, B. A. & Jones, W. H. (Eds), *Personality: Contemporary theory and research.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall, pp. 314-347.

Davis, M. H. & Franzoi, S. L. (1991b). "Stability and change in adolescent self-consciousness and empathy." *Journal of Research in Personality,* 25:70-87.

Davies, M. F. & Fixter, J. (1988). "Self-focusing effects on self-consciousness." *Psychological Reports*, 62:482.

Duval, S. & Wicklund, R. A. (1972). *A theory of objective self awareness.* New York: Academic Press.

Fenigstein, A, Scheier, M. F. & Buss, A. H. (1975). "Public and private self-consciousness: Assessment and theory." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 36:1,241-1,250.

Franzoi, S. L., Davies, M. H. & Markwiese, B. (1990). "A motivational explanation for the existence of private self-consciousness differences." *Journal of Personality*, 58(4):641-659.

[44]
---
[45]

Gibbons, F. X. (1990). "Self-attention and behavior: A review and theoretical update." In Zanna, M. P. (Ed), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 23, pp. 249-303). New York: Academic Press.

Klonsky, B. G., Dutton, D. L. & Liebel, C. L. (1990). "Developmental antecedents of private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety." *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 116(3):273-297.

Knapp, P. A. & Deluty, R. H. (1987). "Private and public self-consciousness in clinical and non-clinical samples." *Social behavior and Personality,* 15(1):43-51.

Morin, A. (1997). "History of past exposure to self-focusing stimuli as a developmental antecedent of self-consciousness." *Psychological Reports,* 80:1,252-1,254.

Rimé, B. & LeBon, C. (1984). "Le concept de conscience de soi et ses opérationnalisations" [The concept of self-consciousness and its operationalizations]. *L'Année Psychologique,* 84:535-553.

Schaller, M. (1997). "The psychological consequences of fame: Three tests of the self-consciousness hypothesis." *Journal of Personality,* 65(2):291-309.

Turner, R. G., Scheier, M. S., Carver, C. S. & Ickes, W. (1978). "Correlates of self-consciousness." *Journal of Personality Assessment,* 42:285-289.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I thank Shelley Maldre for her help during data collection.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Alain Morin received his Ph.D in psychology from Laval University (Quebec, Canada) in 1992. He has been teaching and doing research on self-awareness at many different French and English speaking institutions. He is currently a lecturer at the Universite de Montreal. E-mail: morina@upc.qc.ca. Web page: www.upc.qc.ca/~morina. Mailing address: 823 Nouvelle-Orléans, Ste-Foy, (Québec) G1X-3J4 CANADA.