

Effect of Private Self-Consciousness and Success Outcome on Causal Dimensions

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ABSTRACT. Recent research has shown that individuals high in private self-consciousness generally make more self-attributions following hypothetical outcomes than those low in private self-consciousness. The purpose of this study was to replicate and extend past research in assessing the attributional responses of such individuals in real outcome and no-outcome conditions. French-Canadian female college students ($N = 62$) performed an achievement task and were then informed that they had done well (success outcome) or were not informed at all (no outcome). The subjects then rated the perceived causal dimensions of the attributed cause of the outcome. Results of an ANOVA revealed the presence of an interaction. Subjects high in private self-consciousness who had been informed that they had done well (success outcome) made more internal, stable, and controllable attributions than subjects low in private self-consciousness. Subjects low in private self-consciousness tended to make more internal, stable, and controllable attributions than subjects high in private self-consciousness in the no-outcome condition.

DUVAL AND WICKLUND (1972, 1973) argued that causal attributions are in part determined by the focus of attention and that self-attribution should increase when the self is the primary focus of attention. Buss and Scheier (1976) postulated that private, self-conscious individuals are self-reflective and closely attend their inner thoughts, plans, and motives. Buss and Scheier's findings effectively indicated that subjects high in private self-

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consciousness were more likely to attribute responsibility to themselves for both positive and negative outcomes than those low in private self-consciousness. However, three studies by Franzoi and Sweeney (1986), each of which was an almost exact replication or a conceptual replication of the Buss and Scheier experiment, have been unable to replicate these results.

In light of these inconsistent findings, our primary aim was to replicate the study of Buss and Scheier (1976) on the effect of private self-consciousness on self-attributions and to add a certain number of methodological improvements. Our first improvement dealt with the task to be performed by subjects. Federoff and Harvey (1976) argued that the hypothetical situations used by Buss and Scheier may have influenced subjects' responses by diminishing their psychological involvement in the events. They suggest that a paradigm that uses involving situations should overcome this limitation. Our outcome manipulation was designed to provide a test of the "focus of attention" hypothesis in such an involving behavioral setting.

Second, some studies have demonstrated that the effect of self-focus on attributions depends on the specific outcome (i.e., success/failure) and the level of self-focus (e.g., Federoff & Harvey, 1976; Nadler, 1983; Wigfield, 1988). Specifically, these results revealed that self-attribution was greater in the positive than in the negative outcome conditions, and this effect was much more pronounced for the high relative to the low self-focus individuals. However, none of these studies used control groups (i.e., a no-outcome condition) in their design. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain the outcome effect on attribution in these studies.

In addition, there seemed to be grounds for thinking that a no-outcome condition would affect attributions differently for individuals of high and low private self-consciousness. Individuals with low private self-consciousness rely on external information to assess their performance (Carver & Scheier, 1981). When they have no such information (e.g., a no-outcome condition), they may focus on private sources of information to determine how well they did. In so doing, they may finally rely on recall of self-behaviors and eventually make more self-attributions than individuals high in private self-consciousness, because high self-focus individuals engage in self-attributions mainly when the outcome is successful (e.g., Federoff & Harvey, 1976; Nadler, 1983; Wigfield, 1988). To test that hypothesis, the design of the present study included a success outcome condition and a no-outcome condition.

A third methodological improvement dealt with the need to broaden the attributional perspective used until now in self-focus research. Past research has mainly studied causal responsibility. The stability and controllability dimensions proposed in Weiner's (1985) theory of attribution have received almost no attention. Using the Buss and Scheier (1976) theoretical statement, we reasoned that individuals high in private self-consciousness, biased toward

internal explanations of their behavior, should also be biased toward stable and controllable attributions for their behavior.

The purpose of the present research was to study the effects of induced success outcome on the locus, stability, and controllability dimensions of persons high and low in private self-consciousness. We hypothesized that individuals high in private self-consciousness would make more internal, stable, and controllable attributions in the success outcome condition than those low in private self-consciousness. On the other hand, in the no-outcome condition, we expected that individuals low in private self-consciousness would make more internal, stable, and controllable attributions than those high in private self-consciousness.

Method

Subjects and Design

Subjects were 62 French-Canadian female college students (M age = 18.3) divided on the basis of a median split on the Private subscale of the French-Canadian version (Pelletier & Vallerand, in press) of the revised Self-Consciousness Scale (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The median score was 19, and the means for the two private self-consciousness groups were as follows: high private self-consciousness, $M = 21.3$; low private self-consciousness, $M = 15.4$.

The study used a 2×2 (Success Outcome/No Outcome \times High Private Self-Consciousness/Low Private Self-Consciousness) design in which subjects were randomly assigned to outcome conditions. In the high private self-consciousness group, 12 students were assigned to the success-outcome condition, and 13 to the no-outcome condition. In the low private self-consciousness group, 19 were assigned to the success-outcome condition, and 18 to the no-outcome condition.

Procedure

On arriving at the laboratory, the students were told that they would work on a new cognitive task and then be asked to complete several questions concerning their reactions and thoughts about the task. They were asked to sign a consent form and to complete the French-Canadian version of the revised Private Self-Consciousness Scale (Pelletier & Vallerand, in press). The students then worked on a hidden-figure puzzle in which the name NINA was embedded several times. They were instructed to circle as many NINAs as they could find in the 1 min allotted, after which they were told that they would be working on a series of three similar puzzles with 1 min allotted for each puzzle. After each puzzle task, subjects in the success-outcome condi-

tion were given positive feedback about their performance (e.g., "Very good. You found more NINAs than average."). In the no-outcome condition, no feedback was given.

Immediately after the puzzles task, the students completed a questionnaire that included items concerning the effectiveness of the outcome manipulation and a French-Canadian version of the Causal Dimensions Scale (Russell, 1982). The purpose of the study was then explained and questions were answered.

Questionnaires

The revised Private Self-Consciousness Scale contains nine items on a 4-point scale measuring individual differences in the capacity to be generally attentive to inner thoughts, feelings, and motives. The French-Canadian version of this scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity with French-Canadian college students (Pelletier & Vallerand, in press). In our study, the Cronbach alpha of the revised Private Self-Consciousness Scale was .70, which is near that reported by Pelletier and Vallerand for French-Canadians ($\alpha = .73$), and by Scheier and Carver (1985) for Americans ($\alpha = .75$).

The Post-Questionnaire included two items significantly correlated, $r(61) = .87, p < .001$, which evaluated the effectiveness of the outcome manipulation (e.g., "How would you evaluate your performance on the puzzles?") and the French-Canadian version of the Causal Dimensions Scale (CDS). With respect to the CDS, the students were asked to attribute their performance on the task to a major cause and to rate that perceived cause on 9-point unipolar scales (instead of the bipolar scales used in the original version of the CDS; Russell, 1982) assessing each of the locus, stability, and controllability dimensions proposed in Weiner's theory of attribution (1985). The locus dimension was represented by three items, for example, *It doesn't reflect an aspect of me* (1) to *It reflects an aspect of me* (9); the stability dimension by two items, for example, *It isn't stable with time* (1) to *It's stable with time* (9); and the controllability dimension by one item, *It isn't controllable by me* (1) to *It's controllable by me* (9). The reliability (Cronbach alpha) of the locus items was .79, and the correlation between the stable items was $r(61) = .39, p < .001$.

Results

A manipulation check on the outcome independent variable was provided through the students' ratings of their performance. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a significant outcome main effect, $F(1, 61) = 32.77, p < .001$. As expected, students in the success-outcome condition ($M = 13.75$)

felt that their performance was more successful than did those in the no-outcome condition ($M = 10.34$). No other significant effect was found. This result indicates that the outcome manipulation was highly successful.

Each causal dimension (internal, stable, controllable) was analyzed in a 2×2 (Success Outcome/No-Outcome \times High Private Self-Consciousness/Low Private Self-Consciousness) factorial ANOVA. For the internal dimension, a private self-consciousness main effect was found, $F(1, 61) = 3.83, p = .05$, with the high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 20.32$) rating the attributed cause of the outcome more internally than the low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 17.59$). The Outcome \times Private Self-Consciousness interaction was also significant, $F(1, 61) = 8.24, p < .006$. The cell means for this interaction are presented in the upper portion of Table 1. Simple main effect analyses indicated that the high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 22.83$) made more internal attributions in the success outcome condition, $F(1, 58) = 11.68, p < .001$, than low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 16.05$). On the other hand, although not significant, $F(1, 58) = 0.39, p < .54$, in the no-outcome condition, low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 19.22$) tended to make slightly more internal attributions than high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 18.00$).

For the stable dimension, only the Outcome \times Private Self-Consciousness interaction was significant, $F(1, 61) = 5.59, p < .02$ (all other F s < 1). The cell means for this interaction are presented in the middle portion of Table 1. Simple main effect analyses revealed that high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 13.50$) made more stable attributions in the success-outcome condition, $F(1, 58) = 4.81, p < .03$, than low private self-

TABLE 1
Means for Attributions as a Function of Private Self-Consciousness and Outcome Conditions

Attribution	Private self-consciousness	Success outcome	No outcome
Internal	High	22.83	18.00
	Low	16.05	19.22
Stable	High	13.50	9.69
	Low	10.32	11.33
Controllable	High	7.42	4.85
	Low	5.74	5.56

Note. Scores ranged from 1 to 27 for internal attributions, from 1 to 18 for stable attributions, and from 1 to 9 for controllable attributions; higher scores indicated that the cause of performance was rated as more internal, more stable or more controllable, respectively.

consciousness individuals ($M = 10.32$). On the other hand, although not significant, $F(1, 58) = 1.31$, $p < .26$, in the no-outcome condition, low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 11.33$) tended to make more stable attributions than high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 9.69$).

Finally, the 2×2 factorial ANOVA for the controllable dimension yielded a feedback main effect, $F(1, 61) = 3.88$, $p < .05$, with subjects in the success-outcome condition ($M = 6.39$) rating the attributed cause of the outcome as more controllable than the subjects in the no-outcome condition ($M = 5.26$). The Outcome \times Private Self-Consciousness interaction was also significant, $F(1, 61) = 4.07$, $p < .05$. The cell means for this interaction are presented in the lower portion of Table 1. Simple main effects analyses indicated that high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 7.42$) made more controllable attributions in the success-outcome condition, $F(1, 58) = 3.98$, $p < .05$, than low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 5.74$). On the other hand, although not significant, $F(1, 58) = 0.73$, $p < .40$, in the no-outcome condition, low private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 5.56$) tended to make slightly more controllable attributions than high private self-consciousness individuals ($M = 4.85$).

Discussion

The results replicate the internal attributional bias effect on the part of individuals high in private self-consciousness found by Buss and Scheier (1976). Specifically, individuals high in private self-consciousness made more internal attributions than those low in private self-consciousness, following success outcome. These results suggest that high private self-consciousness individuals demonstrate a self-serving bias when accounting for a successful outcome.

According to Duval and Wicklund (1973), this self-serving bias occurs mainly because the focus of the person's attention determines the locus of attribution. Given the enduring or relatively stable self-focus of individuals high in private self-consciousness, they should then attribute more causality to themselves than would persons low in private self-consciousness. Our results did indicate that subjects high in private self-consciousness were more likely to engage in internal attribution following a success outcome than those low in private self-consciousness.

However, in the no-outcome condition, no significant differences between high and low private self-consciousness individuals were found. In fact, a close look at the means revealed a tendency for individuals low in private self-consciousness to make more internal explanations of their behaviors than those high in private self-consciousness when no performance information was provided. Thus, contrary to expectations from self-consciousness

theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981), individuals high in private self-consciousness did not always make more internal attributions than those low in private self-consciousness, and there might even be situations wherein individuals low in private self-consciousness make more internal attributions than those high in private self-consciousness.

A possible interpretation of these results is that low private self-consciousness individuals customarily rely on external information. However, in a no-outcome condition they cannot use this type of information to assess their performance. Consequently, to assess their performance they reflect upon their own behaviors. In so doing, individuals low in private self-consciousness must finally focus on themselves and consequently make more internal attributions than those high in private self-consciousness. However, our results failed to reach the conventional level of statistical significance.

Another implication of the present findings concerns the causal dimensions evaluated here. Individuals high in private self-consciousness not only made more internal attributions in the success-outcome condition, but also made more stable and controllable attributions for their behavior as well. Individuals high in private self-consciousness were not only biased toward internal explanations of their behaviors, but toward stable and controllable attributions as well (see Valleraud & Richer, 1988).

This study also provides cultural validity for self-consciousness theory's (Carver & Scheier, 1981) analysis of the effect of private self-consciousness on attribution. It replicates findings by Buss and Scheier with American individuals. Thus, the "focus of attention" hypothesis seems to generalize to the French-Canadian culture. Our findings revealed an interaction between private self-consciousness and outcome conditions, suggesting that researchers must consider both the nature of the situation and the level of private self-consciousness of the individual when studying causal attributions of achievement behaviors.

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Gender and Dishonesty

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ABSTRACT. Prior studies have shown that women are less likely than men to be dishonest when confronted with opportunities to cheat. The most common explanation for this finding is sex-role socialization theory: Women are socialized to obey the rules, whereas socialization for men is less binding in this respect. Even so, some women do cheat when given the opportunity. Hence, a theory is needed that accounts for the fact that women engage in dishonest behavior in spite of the restraining forces of internalized normative expectations. Using American college student subjects, the study examined the relationship between excuse-making tendencies and actual cheating, while controlling for sex. The findings showed that women were significantly more likely to engage in excuse making prior to cheating than were men.

IN AT LEAST THREE prior studies in the United States, sex differences in dishonest behavior have been reported (Eisen, 1972; Mussen, Rutherford, Harris, & Keasey, 1970; Ward, 1986). In each case, sex-role socialization theory has been invoked either directly or indirectly to account for the differences: Women have been socialized to obey the rules, whereas the socialization of men is less insistent in this regard. Sex-role socialization, then, is thought to influence tendencies toward dishonesty through differences in internalized role requirements. A substantial proportion of women, however, do in fact cheat when confronted with temptation. A theory is needed that identifies the social psychological processes that operate allowing women to cheat despite the deterrent force of internalized role expectations. One answer

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