Self-Consciousness and Strategic Self-Presentation

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ABSTRACT  People who are publicly self-conscious have been characterized as being especially concerned about their social identities and oriented toward gaining approval and avoiding disapproval. In two experiments, it was found that “pure publics” (i.e., those high in public and low in private self-consciousness) were the most concerned about matching their deeds and words. These subjects presented themselves to a partner consistently with their publicly known, prior performance on a supposedly valid test of social sensitivity. However, they presented themselves in a uniformly positive manner if the test could be dismissed as invalid and/or if their performance was unknown. In contrast, subjects low in public or high in private self-consciousness did not display these strategic patterns and presented themselves positively in all cases. Pure publics are thus the most likely to engage in patterns of self-presentation that have been shown to maximize approval and minimize disapproval in social interactions.

People who are publicly self-conscious are especially aware of the self as a social object, report being concerned about the ways they present themselves, and care about how they are evaluated by others (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1985; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). For example, research has shown that subjects who are high rather than low in public self-consciousness (a) are more fashion-conscious and likely to report using clothing and makeup to affect their public image (Miller & Cox, 1982; Solomon & Schopler, 1982); (b) are more accurate in assessing the impression they convey to others (Tobey & Tunnell, 1981); (c)
are more sensitive to interpersonal rejection (Fenigstein, 1979); (d) are more likely to display opinion conformity in group situations (Froming & Carver, 1981); and (e) are more likely to conform to the role expectations of a partner (Schlenker & Weigold, in press). Perhaps because of these concerns about their social identities, publicly self-conscious people also tend to be socially anxious and fearful of receiving negative evaluations from others (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Schlenker & Weigold, in press).

These findings are consistent with the idea that publicly self-conscious individuals are attuned to the impression they are making on others and are motivated to make a good impression, or at least avoid making a bad one. However, prior research has not examined how this motivation translates into the use of self-enhancing versus self-effacing presentational styles. On the one hand, the desire for approval could motivate publicly self-conscious people to try to impress audiences, which might be accomplished by presenting themselves as having socially attractive qualities. On the other hand, the desire to avoid disapproval could motivate them to avoid self-presentational failures, such as being unable to live up to their claims or having their claims contradicted; this might be accomplished by presenting themselves in a more cautious, self-effacing fashion. Whether these competing concerns generate self-enhancement or self-effacement may be determined by whether or not publicly self-conscious individuals think their audience will learn of information that could invalidate their self-presentations.

Research on strategic self-presentation has identified some of the conditions under which self-enhancing versus self-effacing presentations are most likely to be used and make the best impression on audiences (Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Consistency between words and deeds is favorably evaluated by observers, while deviations are condemned (Goffman, 1959; Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971). Schlenker and Leary (1982) found that the greater the deviation between an actor’s claims (e.g., about performance on a test) and the actor’s actual performance, the less positively the actor was evaluated by subjects. Audiences’ preference for consistency is appreciated by actors, as subjects have been found to present themselves consistently with information that is publicly known about them (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975; Schlenker, Miller, & Leary, 1983; Ungar, 1980).

Further, in the absence of explicit reasons to be suspicious, people seem to assume that actors’ claims are truthful (DePaulo, Stone, &
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Lassiter, 1985; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Actors seem to capitalize on this fact when presenting themselves to others. When reputational constraints are absent, people take the opportunity to be self-enhancing. It has been found that subjects’ self-presentations are more self-aggrandizing when potentially contradictory information is invalid, unavailable, or can be hidden from public view (Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Schlenker, 1975; Schlenker et al., 1983; Ungar, 1980).

Finally, people attempt to compensate for negative information that is publicly known about them by boosting their self-descriptions on dimensions that are irrelevant to the damaging data (Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985). Further, public rather than private failures are more likely to produce compensation, presumably because they generate a greater threat to social identity (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985).

We hypothesized that subjects who are high as compared to low in public self-consciousness will be more likely to display these strategic forms of self-presentation, because these forms seem to maximize approval and minimize disapproval. They will be more likely to present themselves consistently with seemingly valid, publicly known negative information; to present themselves enhancingly when relevant information is invalid or unknown; and to compensate for a valid failure by presenting themselves very positively on dimensions that are irrelevant to the failure. Subjects low in public self-consciousness, who are less concerned about how they appear to others, will be less likely to appreciate or capitalize on strategic opportunities.

In addition, private self-consciousness was included to see how it would affect self-presentation. Private self-consciousness refers to the dispositional tendency to be aware of covert aspects of the self that are not directly observable by others, such as attitudes and affective states (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Fenigstein et al., 1975). People who are privately self-conscious are more likely to behave in accord with private beliefs rather than succumb to social pressures (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1985), and to regard themselves (and want to be regarded by others) as independent and autonomous (Schlenker & Weigold, in press). As such, they may be less willing to shift their self-descriptions in response to public information. A potentially interesting situation arises, however, when people are high in both public and private self-consciousness. These individuals might be caught in a conflict between public pressures and private beliefs, as they attempt to satisfy both an external audience
and themselves (cf. Schlenker, 1980; Tetlock, 1985). Consequently, it was tentatively hypothesized that subjects who are high in both public and private self-consciousness will engage in an intermediate amount of strategic self-presentation (i.e., less than subjects who are both high in public but low in private self-consciousness, but more than subjects who are low in public self-consciousness).

We report the results of two studies below. The first examined the relationship between public self-consciousness and strategic self-presentation. Experiment 2 used a larger sample of publicly self-conscious subjects to replicate the major findings from Experiment 1. In addition, the larger sample in Experiment 2 permitted a more careful examination of the possible interactive relationship between public and private self-consciousness and self-presentation.

**Experiments 1 and 2**

**METHOD**

**Subjects**

Introductory psychology students participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement (Experiment 1: 107 students, 51 males and 56 females; Experiment 2: 81 students, 32 males and 49 females). Subjects were run individually in Experiment 1. In Experiment 2, subjects were scheduled in groups of four or less and seated in individual cubicles that prevented visual contact; each subject in a session was assigned to a different treatment condition.

**Procedure**

The procedure was identical in both experiments except as noted below. The studies were described as investigations of how information is used during the acquaintanceship process. Subjects were told that they and a partner, supposedly another participant, first would exchange information about themselves (which provided the opportunity for a self-presentation), and then would interact on a task involving a mix of cooperation and competition. It was explained that in order to control the amount and type of information that the participants had about each other, the subject and his or her partner would be separated during the information exchange phase and would communicate via written materials. They supposedly would meet their partner face-to-face only during the final interaction phase. The latter phase, which did not actually take place, was introduced in order to make subjects think they would continue to interact, thereby increasing the importance of the impression they would create.
Before beginning the information exchange phase, subjects were asked to complete two booklets that assessed characteristics that were supposedly important to interpersonal behavior. The first questionnaire contained a bogus but face-valid Social Sensitivity Test (Ungar, 1980). The test consisted of either 63 items (valid test condition) or 31 items (invalid test condition). After finishing the test, the experimenter collected the materials and gave subjects a second booklet that contained some personality scales. In Experiment 1, the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975) was administered as part of this booklet; in Experiment 2, the Self-Consciousness Scale had been administered during a mass-testing session held in classes. While subjects worked on the second booklet, the experimenter pretended to score the Social Sensitivity Test.

When subjects finished the personality scales the experimenter began the information exchange phase. Subjects were told that two types of information were being exchanged: (a) self-descriptive information on several trait dimensions, and (b) scores from one or more of the personality tests they had just completed. The experimenter said that in order to simulate facets of the acquaintanceship process, it was necessary to vary the types and amounts of information exchanged between participants; different pairs and subjects within pairs would receive different kinds and quantities of information. In the success and failure feedback conditions, subjects were told that in their case, the other person would receive (a) their score on the Social Sensitivity Test, and (b) self-descriptive information that the subjects would soon provide on an Information Exchange Questionnaire. In the no feedback conditions, subjects were told that the only information the other person would receive would be from the Information Exchange Questionnaire; the experimenter did not mention the Social Sensitivity Test or lead subjects to think they would learn their score. In all cases, subjects expected to be given the same types of information about their partner that he or she received about them.

In the context of explaining more about the personality measures subjects

1. In Experiment 1, the booklet also contained a Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974). Aside from some main effects of self-esteem and self-monitoring (subjects generally presented themselves more positively if they were high in self-esteem or self-monitoring), there were no systematic patterns moderated by these two variables. Only the self-esteem scale was used in Experiment 2, and similarly revealed main effects of self-esteem on self-ratings. These measures will not be discussed further.

Subjects in Experiment 1 completed the Self-Consciousness Scale prior to the manipulations of feedback and validity, and thus scores on the scale should not be systematically related to the manipulations. To insure that this was the case, analyses of variance containing performance feedback and validity as independent variables were conducted on public and private self-consciousness scores. As desired, no effects approached significance.
had just completed, the experimenter described the concept of social sensitivity and introduced the validity manipulation. The experimenter said that social sensitivity reflects "one's ability to understand others and to have mature interpersonal relationships." Further, social sensitivity involves appreciating the feelings and motivations of others and depends in part on one's ability to understand one's own feelings and motivations. In the valid test condition, subjects were told they completed the full version of the Social Sensitivity subscale of the Feldman-Collier Personality Inference Test, which had been shown to have a high level of validity. The test supposedly provided a "reasonably accurate" measure of social sensitivity that is superior to other comparable measures. In the invalid test condition, subjects were told that they had completed only a small sample of items from the Social Sensitivity subscale of the Feldman-Collier Personality Inference Test (the test booklet had included the label "Sample Items"), that the subscale had been shown to have inadequate validity, and that scores therefore did not necessarily reflect actual social sensitivity. The subscale was supposedly included in order to assist researchers in revising it. The other person supposedly also knew about the validity or invalidity of the test.

Subjects in the success and failure conditions then received written feedback about their performance on the Social Sensitivity Test. In the success condition, the feedback indicated they did very well, scoring in the 92nd percentile of college students. In the failure condition, the feedback indicated they did poorly, scoring in only the 21st percentile of college students. In the invalid feedback conditions, the feedback sheets again stressed that the validity of the sample items they completed was questionable. In the no feedback condition, the experimenter did not mention having scored the Social Sensitivity Test nor indicate that subjects might receive their scores. In Experiment 2, the no feedback condition was omitted.

Subjects were then asked to complete the Information Exchange Questionnaire that supposedly served as the self-descriptive information to be shown to the partner. The questionnaire included self-ratings on 22 bipolar attributes, some of which were relevant to social sensitivity as it had been described previously (e.g., socially sensitive vs. insensitive; interpersonally deep vs. shallow) and some irrelevant (e.g., intelligent-unintelligent, strong-weak). After completing the questionnaire, subjects were given a sheet containing manipulation checks, with written instructions indicating that the partner would not see responses to these items. Except as otherwise noted, items were on 13-point scales in Experiment 1 and 9-point scales in Experiment 2. Finally, subjects were informed the experiment was over and were fully debriefed.

**Designs**

The design of Experiment 1 was a $3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Performance: success, failure, no feedback $\times$ Validity: high, low $\times$ Public Self-Consciousness:
high, low × Private Self-Consciousness: high, low) factorial. Median splits were used to divide subjects on public (M = 22) and private (M = 31) self-consciousness. Because the cell size of the highest order interaction in Experiment 1 averaged only 4.5, questions could be raised about the reliability of higher order effects (of course, lower order effects, such as main effects and two-way interactions, would have large cell sizes owing to the pooling of subjects). Given some suggestive findings in Experiment 1 for subjects who were high in public self-consciousness, Experiment 2 was conducted to focus on the reactions of publicly self-conscious subjects. Only subjects who scored high on public self-consciousness (above 26) were contacted for participation. The design of Experiment 2 was a 2 × 2 × 2 (Performance: success, failure × Validity: high, low × Private Self-Consciousness: high, low) factorial. Due to unequal cell sizes, the data from both studies were analyzed using least squares analyses of variance.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

The manipulations of performance and validity were successful in both experiments. In Experiment 1, subjects reported doing much better on the Social Sensitivity Test after success than failure, with the no feedback condition falling intermediate, F(2, 79) = 85.71, p < .0001 (Ms = 10.7, 3.8, and 8.0, respectively; all means differ by at least p < .05, Duncan's Multiple Range test; 13-point scale). The only other effect obtained on the item was a main effect of public self-consciousness, p < .05, with subjects saying they did better if they were high rather than low in public self-consciousness. In Experiment 2, subjects similarly said they performed much better on the Social Sensitivity Test when they received success rather than failure feedback, Ms = 8.0 and 2.8, F(1, 73) = 431.09, p < .0001; 9-point scale.

Subjects perceived the test to be a more valid measure of social sensitivity in the valid than the invalid test conditions, Experiment 1: Ms = 7.0 and 5.9, F(1, 79) = 14.19, p < .0003; Experiment 2: Ms = 6.1 and 3.5, F(1, 73) = 34.69, p < .0001. Also, in Experiment 1, a main effect of performance, F(2, 79) = 28.78, p < .0001, and a two-way interaction of performance by validity, F(2, 79) = 4.65, p < .01, were obtained on perceptions of validity. Subjects perceived the test to be more valid if they performed better, Ms = 8.0, 4.4, and 6.9 for the success, failure, and no feedback conditions. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that subjects account for their test performance by exaggerating the validity of success and the invalidity
of failure (Eagly, 1967; Schlenker & Miller, 1977; Schlenker, Soraci, & McCarthy, 1976; Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990; Steiner, 1968), thereby enhancing and protecting their self-images. The interaction indicated that the manipulation of validity had a more pronounced effect in the no feedback condition, Ms = 8.7 and 5.6 for the high and low validity conditions, than after subjects received success or failure feedback, which became dominant concerns and attenuated the impact of the validity manipulation. In Experiment 2, performance feedback similarly affected perceptions of the test’s validity, Ms = 5.8 and 3.4 for success and failure, $F(1, 73) = 30.49, p < .0001$.

**Self-Presentations of Social Sensitivity**

In order to reduce the 22 self-rating items to a smaller number of meaningful dimensions, the data from Experiment 1 were subjected to a principal components factor analysis with an orthogonal varimax rotation. A social sensitivity factor emerged that represented primarily the characteristics that were supposedly being measured by the Social Sensitivity Test. The social sensitivity factor was marked by the items social sensitivity (rotated factor loading = .65), emotional depth (.83), interpersonal depth (.82), and warmth (.48). (A factor analysis of the data in Experiment 2 also revealed a social sensitivity factor with comparable items.) To provide a common measure in both experiments, an average score on these four traits was calculated for each subject and comprised the measure of test-relevant self-presentations of social sensitivity. (Other factors that emerged from the factor analysis will be described shortly.)

**Experiment 1.** Mean self-presentations of social sensitivity are presented in Table 1 for all cells of the design. An analysis of variance revealed only a three-way interaction of Performance Feedback × Validity × Public Self-Consciousness, $F(2, 83) = 4.26, p < .02$. Personality differences had their greatest effect on self-presentations after failure, where a significant Validity × Public Self-Consciousness simple interaction was obtained, $F(1, 83) = 4.03, p < .05$. As expected, an invalid failure was discounted by subjects high in public self-consciousness, $M = 10.9$, who presented themselves as more socially sensitive than subjects low in public self-consciousness, $M = 8.8, F(1, 83) = 9.72, p < .01$. In fact, when the test was invalid, subjects who were high in public self-consciousness presented themselves as positively
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Table 1
Experiment 1: Mean Self-Ratings of Social Sensitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-consciousness and validity</th>
<th>Performance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High public–low private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>11.8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>11.1 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High public–high private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>11.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>10.9 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low public–low private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>9.2 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>11.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low public–high private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>9.3 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>8.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher scores indicate self-presentations of greater social sensitivity on a 13-point scale. Numbers in parentheses are cell sizes.

after failure as after success, $M_s = 10.9$ and 11.4, respectively, $F < 1$. The interaction of public self-consciousness and validity was not significant after success, $F(1, 83) = 2.39, p < .15$, or no feedback, $F < 1$. However, a simple main effect of public self-consciousness was found after success, $F(1, 83) = 7.56, p < .01$, as successful subjects presented themselves more positively if they were high rather than low in public self-consciousness, $M_s = 11.3$ and 9.6.

It had been expected that publicly self-conscious subjects would present themselves consistently with their performance (i.e., more positively after success than failure), but only when the performance was based on a valid test. Overall (collapsing across levels of private self-consciousness), subjects who were high in public self-consciousness tended to present themselves somewhat more positively after a valid success than a valid failure, $M_s = 11.0$ and 9.9, but the contrast failed to reach significance. As can be seen in Table 1, however, the effect was pronounced for subjects who were the most “pure” publics—those who were high in public and low in private self-consciousness, $M_s = 11.1, 6.3$, and 10.3 for the success, failure, and no feedback conditions, respectively, $F(2, 83) = 3.85, p < .05$. In contrast, this effect was at-
tenuated for subjects who were high in both public and private self-consciousness, $M$s = 10.9, 10.3, and 9.8 for the success, failure, and no feedback conditions, respectively, $F < 1$. (The effect was also insignificant for subjects who were low in public self-consciousness; $M$s = 9.6, 9.4, and 9.8 for the success, failure, and no feedback conditions.) Thus, publicly self-conscious subjects apparently were concerned about appearing to be consistent, but the effect was pronounced only for the most pure publics. Experiment 2 was conducted to see if this pattern could be replicated. Because no significant effects were obtained on self-presentations of social sensitivity for subjects who were low in public self-consciousness, Experiment 2 only recruited subjects who were high in public self-consciousness (scores above 26); these were divided into those who were high or low in private self-consciousness, $M = 35$.

Experiment 2. Table 2 displays mean self-presentations of social sensitivity in Experiment 2. As can be seen, the pattern in Table 2 is identical to that displayed by subjects high in public self-consciousness in Experiment 1. Once again, effects were obtained only for subjects who were high in public but low in private self-consciousness. Planned comparisons revealed that the interaction of Performance Feedback $\times$ Validity was significant for public subjects who were low in private self-consciousness, $F(1,73) = 5.63, p < .03$. As predicted, when the test was high in validity, these subjects presented themselves more positively after success than failure, $F(1,73) = 18.42, p < .001$. High public, low private subjects were also quick to override an invalid failure, in that those who failed an invalid test presented themselves more favorably than those who failed a valid test, $F(1,73) = 6.71, p < .02$, and nearly as favorably as those who succeeded on an invalid test, $F(1, 73) = 2.26, p > .10$. Thus, the generally positive self-presentation of these subjects were constrained only when they experienced a valid failure. The combination of high public and low private self-consciousness comprises the group most unequivocally concerned with making a good impression on others (Carver & Scheier, 1981). Apparently, this group is especially sensitive to concerns about consistency between deeds and words.

In contrast, the Performance Feedback $\times$ Validity interaction was not significant for subjects who were high in both public and private self-consciousness, $F < 1$. Although they displayed a tendency toward consistency under high validity conditions, the trend was insignificant,
### Table 2
Experiment 2: Mean Self-Ratings of Social Sensitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private self-consciousness and validity condition</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>7.2 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>7.4b (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low validity</td>
<td>7.2 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High validity</td>
<td>7.5 (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Higher means indicate self-presentations of greater social sensitivity on a 9-point scale. Means sharing a common letter in the superscript differ by at least $p < .05$ by tests of simple effects. Numbers in parentheses are cell sizes. All subjects are high in public self-consciousness.

$F(1,73) = 1.82, p > .25$. As in Experiment 1, subjects high in both private and public self-consciousness showed a general disregard for the test feedback when describing themselves to their partner.

For an overall test of the effect, the data from Experiments 1 and 2 were combined in a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Performance: success, failure × Validity: high, low × Private Self-Consciousness: high, low × Experiment: 1, 2) factorial (using only the subjects who were high in public self-consciousness from Experiment 1). The analysis revealed the expected three-way interaction of Performance × Validity × Private Self-Consciousness, $F(1, 100) = 4.46, p < .05$. Thus, consistency effects were obtained, but primarily for subjects high in public but low in private self-consciousness.

### Self-Presentations on Performance-Irrelevant Dimensions

The factor analysis of the data from Experiment 1 revealed four additional dimensions that consisted of traits unrelated to social sensitivity. These included: (a) social authenticity (e.g., honest, trustworthy, sincere, reliable); (b) intelligence (e.g., intelligent, intellectually deep, self-confident); (c) power (e.g., strong, influential, forceful, self-confident); and (d) friendliness (e.g., friendly, kind, warm, pleasant). These
four factors were also obtained from the separate factor analysis conducted on the data from Experiment 2.  

Average scores on the traits comprising each dimension were calculated. Because the four dimensions pertain to test-irrelevant traits and there was no theoretical reason to expect compensation or some other pattern to occur on any particular irrelevant trait, these scores were entered as four dependent variables in multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) conducted for each study. Using MANOVAs controlled for the overall error rate. In Experiment 1, the MANOVA yielded no significant effects (all \( p > .10 \)). In Experiment 2, the MANOVA revealed only a significant main effect of performance feedback, \( F(4, 70) = 3.32, p < .02 \). Significant univariate performance feedback main effects were obtained on the social authenticity and friendliness factors, \( F(1, 73) = 12.09, p < .001 \), and \( F(1, 73) = 5.07, p < .03 \), respectively. Subjects rated themselves more positively on these dimensions after success than after failure. This pattern is opposite what would be expected if subjects tried to compensate for a failure by presenting themselves positively on irrelevant dimensions (cf. Baumeister & Jones, 1978).

**DISCUSSION**

People who are high in public and low in private self-consciousness (whom we will call “pure publics” for brevity) have been portrayed as singularly concerned with their social identities (Carver & Scheier, 1985). Our results suggest that their desire to gain approval and avoid disapproval translates into the use of self-presentation strategies that accommodate publicly available information about their performances. In two experiments, pure publics presented themselves consistently with their prior performance on a valid test by describing themselves self-effacingly after failure and self-enhancingly after success on the trait supposedly tapped by the test. Prior research has shown these strategies to be effective in producing favorable audience responses (Schlenker &

2. In Experiment 1, a sixth factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 also emerged from the factor analysis and seemed to tap general competence and creativity (e.g., competent, creative, reliable). This factor was not obtained in the factor analysis in Experiment 2, however, and so will not be discussed further (the items in this factor loaded elsewhere in Experiment 2, particularly in the intelligence and friendliness factors).
Leary, 1982), and our findings indicate that pure publics are the most likely to incorporate the pattern into their self-presentations.

The willingness of the pure publics to accommodate damaging but supposedly valid information about their identities suggests that they are cautious in social interactions when a possible strong challenge looms. Instead of attempting to ignore or repudiate the supposedly valid failure feedback, pure publics limited their claims. It has been suggested that publicly self-conscious people are oriented toward self-protection rather than self-assertion during social interactions (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1987). They have been portrayed as more concerned with avoiding disapproval than gaining approval. Our findings support this characterization, but only in part. Pure publics are not merely cautious across the board, otherwise they would not have presented themselves as being highly socially sensitive after success, when performance feedback was unavailable, and even when a failure occurred on an invalid test. Under the latter conditions, their self-presentations seemed designed to create an attractive social identity and gain approval. In fact, subjects who were high rather than low in public self-consciousness (irrespective of their standing on private self-consciousness) were significantly more self-glorifying after success or an invalid failure. Pure publics became cautious only when potentially valid information could dispute their claims. They then took the moderate course of adjusting their self-presentations to incorporate the damaging evidence. Self-consciousness has been associated with social insecurities (Fenigstein et al., 1975; Schlenker & Weigold, in press), so it may be that pure publics doubt their ability to rebut damaging, seemingly valid, information.

The fact that consistency between deeds and words, that is, between performance on a supposedly valid test and relevant self-descriptions, was found primarily for the pure publics suggests that social pressures play an important role in creating and maintaining consistency. During socialization children are trained to match their words and deeds, and thereby become reliable social participants (Tedeschi et al., 1971). If consistency occurs in large part because of people’s concerns about how

3. Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1987) questioned the validity of the Self-Consciousness Scale as a measure of distinct private and public forms of self-attention. They argued that public self-consciousness is not associated with attentional focus but instead represents social dependency. Rebuttals defending the distinction between private and public forms of self-attention have been provided by Carver and Scheier (1987) and Fenigstein (1987). Our experiments were not designed to address this debate.
they will be evaluated if they appear to be inconsistent, then it follows that pure publics, who are most concerned about how they appear to others, will be most likely to try to look as if they are being consistent. We know from prior research that pure publics will vary their behavior from audience to audience in response to social norms and expectations (Carver & Scheier, 1985), and thus show greater inconsistency over time. Yet it is reasonable to suggest that, while they are actually more inconsistent over time, they are more concerned about appearing to be consistent during their interactions with any particular audience.

The self-presentations of subjects who were low in public self-consciousness or high in private self-consciousness were largely uninfluenced by the performance feedback and validity manipulations. Although the means were usually in the direction of a consistency effect (with the sole exception of subjects who were low in public and high in private self-consciousness and received valid feedback), these trends were weak and insignificant. Three possible explanations for this unresponsiveness seem reasonable based on the existing literature. These explanations are complementary and all may have played a role.

First, these unresponsive subjects may have been less desirous of gaining the approval or avoiding the disapproval of the partner. People low in public self-consciousness have been portrayed as relatively unconcerned about the approval of the average other person, and people high in private self-consciousness have been characterized as placing personal agendas above normative influences (Carver & Scheier, 1985). As such, they would be less likely to vary their self-descriptions to conform to patterns that maximize approval.

Second, these subjects may have been less willing to accept the conclusion, privately or publicly, that a poor score on even the supposedly valid test indicates they have low ability. They may be willing to admit the overall validity of the test and the fact of their poor score, but will not endorse the interpretation that their score indicates they personally have a low standing. In other words, they may have been more likely to maintain their prior self-beliefs and exhibit resistance to contradictory information, especially failure feedback. This possibility is consistent with the idea that privately self-conscious individuals are more likely to be guided by preexisting beliefs and will resist pressures to change (Carver & Scheier, 1985). It is also consistent with the finding that privately self-conscious people describe themselves as autonomous and act in ways designed to maintain this self-image (Schlenker & Weigold, in press).
Third, and related to the above, Carver and Scheier (1985) suggested that people who are privately self-conscious may be motivated to present the private self to others as accurately as possible. The motivation to present an authentic portrait of self, instead of one that merely maximizes approval, may be strongest for privately self-conscious individuals who are also high in public self-consciousness. In a related vein, Schlenker and Weigold (in press) found that publicly and privately self-conscious subjects had different self-presentational objectives. After learning their partner’s initial impression of them, publicly self-conscious subjects presented themselves consistently with their partner’s expectations whereas privately self-conscious subjects presented themselves in ways designed to bring the partner’s impression in line with their own preferred self-view (even if they had to misrepresent their opinions to do so). These analyses suggest that private and public self-consciousness are not simply additive but may often interact to influence social motivation and interpersonal behavior. Subjects high in public self-consciousness may be more motivated to impress the average other than those low in public self-consciousness, but the type of impression they want to convey may depend in part on whether they are low or high in private self-consciousness. If they are also low in private self-consciousness, they look to the other person to determine what will gain approval and avoid disapproval; whereas if they are also high in private self-consciousness, they turn to their own self-images and agendas to determine the “best” impression to create.

Finally, we had expected that subjects, particularly those who were publicly self-conscious, would attempt to compensate for a valid failure by inflating their claims on test-irrelevant dimensions (cf. Baumeister & Jones, 1978). This hypothesis was not supported. In Experiment 1, the MANOVA revealed no reliable overall effects on the irrelevant dimensions. In Experiment 2, the MANOVA (followed by univariate analyses of variance) revealed an opposite effect: Subjects presented themselves as friendlier and more socially authentic (e.g., sincere, truthful) when they had succeeded than when they had failed. Thus, the feedback generalized to produce elevated self-appraisals on dimensions that were irrelevant to the feedback. Perhaps this generalization was mediated by global shifts in mood, self-esteem, or self-efficacy that were temporarily created by their performance. In any case, our procedure would seem to have included the necessary conditions for compensation to occur: Subjects received feedback, in some cases feedback that was supposedly very valid, indicating they had a low standing on an impor-
tant social attribute. Further, the failure was publicly known by their partner (Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985), and the subjects had the opportunity to provide information about themselves on other important but failure-irrelevant attributes. Further, 188 subjects were run in the two experiments, making it difficult to dismiss the findings as due to an inadequate sample size. Given that at least three studies have found evidence for compensation (Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985), it seems reasonable to conclude that the effect is real. However, our findings suggest that the necessary conditions for compensation to occur have not been adequately specified. In addition, it is clear that feedback can produce a generalization effect to irrelevant dimensions instead of, and perhaps in addition to, any compensation effect.

In sum, public self-consciousness was associated with self-glorification after a success or a failure that could be dismissed as invalid. Further, people who are the most unequivocally focused on how they appear to others—people who are high in public and low in private self-consciousness—were most likely to present themselves consistently with their publicly known, prior performance on a supposedly valid test of social sensitivity. They described themselves self-enhancingly after a valid success and self-effacingly after a valid failure. Thus, publicly self-conscious people seem more concerned about the impression they create on others, and pure publics seem to be the most likely to engage in patterns of self-presentation that have been shown to maximize approval and minimize disapproval in social interactions.

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