

Using the Self-Consciousness Scale to Predict Student Discussion Group Participation

One improvement in the teaching of psychology is the addition of small discussion groups to the traditional lecture format. Non-solicited student participation is perhaps the major factor in the success or failure of these discussion groups, with failure usually being related to the absence of student participation. Instructors having experience with student discussion groups have probably noticed that there are usually only a few students who consistently discuss while the remaining students are content to listen to their more vociferous classmates. It would be optimal for the discussion group to contain only those individuals who are willing to discuss. However, it seems unfair to weed out the non-discussants as the semester progresses. A more viable option might be the advance selection of those individuals willing to participate. An attempt to do this was made by Carskadon (1978) using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The findings indicated that students scoring higher on intuitiveness participated in the discussion groups to a greater degree than students scoring high on sensing.

Another potentially useful predictor of student willingness to discuss is the Self-consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). A factor analysis of that instrument indicated three rather independent components; private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety. An individual high in private self-consciousness habitually attends to his/her inner thoughts and feelings; a high public self-conscious individual has a general awareness of the self as a social object; and an individual with high social anxiety is uncomfortable in the presence of others and is easily embarrassed. It is private self-consciousness and social anxiety which seem most relevant to discussion group participation.

Research has shown that subjects high in social anxiety tend to be subject to anticipatory belief change (Turner, 1977), to make more anxiety related remarks in a social presentation situation (Aamodt & Crawford, Note 1) and, in relation to individuals low in social anxiety, take longer to report the self-relevance of socially undesirable traits (Turner, 1978a). This inhibition and lack of self-confidence would seem detrimental to discussion group participation.

The opposite is true for persons high in private self-consciousness. Several studies (Turner, 1978b; Turner & Peterson, 1977; Scheier, Carver, & Gibbons, 1979) indicate that individuals high in private self-consciousness are more consistent in their beliefs and less concerned with social evaluation than individuals low in private self-consciousness. This type of person should do well in a discussion group because of an awareness of his or her own beliefs and the lack of concern with social evaluation which could inhibit the expression of these beliefs.

It was expected that because the socially anxious person desires to avoid possible embarrassment caused by social evaluation, he/she would do poorer in a discussion group than would an individual low in social anxiety. People high in private self-consciousness were predicted to perform better than people low in private self-consciousness be-

cause the high private self-conscious individual lacks concern for social evaluation. A final prediction was that a low socially anxious/high private self-conscious individual would participate more in a discussion group than a high socially anxious/low private self-conscious individual.

To test these hypotheses, students enrolled in eight General Psychology discussion groups were administered the Self-Consciousness Scale (labeled California Inventory) during the first week of class and were subsequently evaluated on their discussion group performance during the final week of the semester. The instructors doing the evaluations were blind to the students scores on the Self-Consciousness Scale.

An analysis of the data yielded two scale scores for each student and supported all three hypotheses. *T*-tests for independent groups were calculated and the results indicated that individuals scoring high on private self-consciousness ($M=6.63$) discussed more than did students scoring low in private self-consciousness ($M=5.43$), $t(80)=2.27$, $p<.03$; students low in social anxiety ($M=6.93$) discussed more than students high in social anxiety ($M=5.80$), $t(82)=1.92$, $p<.06$; and subjects who scored both high in private self-consciousness and low in social anxiety ($M=7.72$) participated in the discussion group to a greater degree than subjects who scored both high in social anxiety and low in private self-consciousness ($M=5.15$), $t(36)=3.39$, $p<.002$.

Table 1. Instructor Ratings of Discussion Contributions of Students

Type	<i>n</i>	Mean	Comparison
High SA/Low Private S-C	20	5.15	$t(36)=3.39^{***}$
Low SA/High Private S-C	18	7.72	
High Private S-C	41	6.63	$t(80)=2.27^{**}$
Low Private S-C	41	5.43	
High Social Anxiety	41	5.80	$t(82)=1.92^*$
Low Social Anxiety	43	6.93	

Note. The higher the mean, the greater the discussion.
 $^{***}p<.002$; $^{**}p<.03$; $^*p<.06$.

The results indicate that the Self-Consciousness Scale may be useful in predicting student discussion group behavior. A department wishing to optimize the use of discussion groups in the various course offerings could use the scale in one of three ways. First, the scale could be used as a discrimination measure. Students who score low in private self-consciousness and/or high in social anxiety would be strongly encouraged to not enroll in courses which are supplemented by discussion groups. Instead they should be strongly encouraged to sign up for the more traditional courses. This suggestion may seem drastic at first, but would best serve the interests of the students without actually barring a student from a course.

Second, the scale could be used to ensure balance across a number of discussion groups. If more than one discussion group is available and it is not the policy of a department to discourage certain students from enrolling in a class with a discussion group format, then an effort can be made to ensure that each group has an equal number of high

and low discussion individuals. The discussion leader should then make a special effort to encourage the predicted low discussion students to actively participate in the discussions. Thus, participation could perhaps be accomplished by directly asking the predicted low discussion students their opinions or asking them to explain difficult concepts to the class.

A third possible use would be to segment the predicted low and high discussion individuals into homogeneous groups. This segmentation would require the discussion leader to prepare for and solicit discussion within the separate groups using different approaches. A particular approach would be designed in reference to the composition of the particular discussion group to be engaged. A similar segmentation with particular reference to academic ability was explored by Aamodt (Note 2) when he looked at student preference for various discussion group activities. This third possibility would require further empirical investigation before any inference can be proposed regarding the utility of this alternative.

References

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Notes

1. Aamodt, M. G. and Crawford, K. J. Self-monitoring, Self-consciousness, and the use of impression management skills in a social presentation situation. Unpublished manuscript, University of Arkansas, 1979.
2. Aamodt, M. G. Academic ability and student preference for discussion group activities. Manuscript submitted for publication to *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 1981.

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