

**The Effects on Self-Esteem of Make-Up Removal**

**A Thesis**

**submitted to the faculty of  
the University of Houston at Clear Lake City**

**by**

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**in partial fulfillment of the  
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**in**

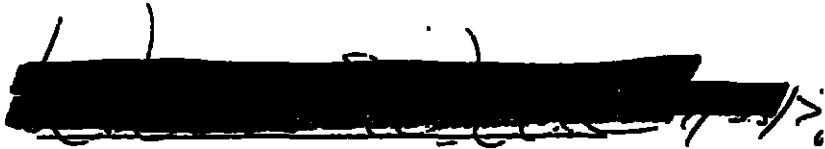
**Behavioral Sciences**

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We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Masters of Arts degree in Behavioral Science.



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### Abstract

Thirty six female psychology students were given Cutich, Diggory, and Shrauger's Self Description Inventory-R (1970). By means of a median split, they were divided into relatively high and low self-esteem groups. Subjects representing each group were then randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions. Two groups were assigned a task to perform in front of a mirror. The third performed without seeing their reflected image. Subjects were then retested with the same self-esteem inventory. Theoretically the self focusing produced in the mirror conditions should have caused low self-esteem individuals to become self critical (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). Since high self-esteem people tend to use avoidance defenses to stay in a subjective self awareness state and avoid self criticism, they should be less influenced by their reflected images. An analysis of variance (2x3 factorial design) performed on the differences between the two test scores produced no significant main or interaction effects.

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## Introduction

Depressed people are thought to be low in self-esteem (Beck, 1967). In a four-factor analysis of depressive syndromes, Grinker (1961) found low self-esteem to be common in "empty" and "anxious" depressives. Beck (1967), known for his measurement of the depth of depression, found low self-esteem in 81 percent of severely depressed patients, 78 percent of moderately depressed patients, 60 percent of mildly depressed patients, and 38 percent of normals.

The mildly depressed patient is continually comparing himself to others and concluding that he is inferior. When confronted with appropriate contrary evidence, he can correct that self-evaluation; however, the moderately depressed individual, on the other hand, has such a sense of inadequacy that he believes he can no longer handle tasks he could in the past. So intense and persistent is the belief in his own inadequacy that any attempt to modify his distorted self-evaluation is met with resistance and any increase in realistic thinking is not lasting. The severely depressed patient's self-esteem is so low that attempts to correct his negative self perception are generally useless. He thinks he is worthless and inept (Beck, 1967).

In spite of its central place in our theoretical understanding of depression, the concept of self-esteem has proved

deceptively slippery and generated considerable confusion and disagreement, in part, because terms such as self-love, self-respect, self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-evaluation, self-worth, ego, or ego strength all denote some basic psychological function which entails self-evaluation or self-affection (Wells & Marwell, 1976). In this investigation, self-esteem has been operationalized as the score achieved by subjects upon the scale developed by Cutich, Diggory, and Shrauger (1970)<sup>1</sup>.

In recent research on depression in the United States and elsewhere, Weissman and Klerman (1977) find twice the incidence of depression in females than males (1:2). Considerably more females are neurotically depressed than males; when psychosis is considered, that sex difference is greatly reduced. As late as pre-World War II the rate of depression was characterized as dramatically increasing after the fourth decade of life. Today, however, depression is most commonly seen in young adults (Akiskal & McKinney, 1975). According to Becker (1977), the highest incidence now occurs in the 18-29 age range. Depression is thought to occur in about 15 percent of the United States population at any given time.

Aaron Beck believes that there are paradoxes in depression which may be used to understand depression. There is "an astonishing contrast between the depressed person's image of himself and the objective facts" (Beck, 1967, p. 3).



Beautiful women may ask for plastic surgery in the belief that they are ugly; a brilliant professor may berate himself for being stupid when a student sees a solution to a problem which he previously tried to solve.

Depression can be defined in terms of the following attributes:

- "1. A specific alteration in mood: sadness, loneliness, apathy.
2. A negative self-concept associated with self-reproaches and self-blame.
3. Regression and self-punitive wishes: desires to escape, hide, or die.
4. Vegetative changes: anorexia, insomnia, loss of libido.
5. Change in activity level: retardation or agitation" (Beck, 1967, p. 6).

Beck sees the depressive episode as secondary to a negative cognitive set. Traditionally the depression has been thought to be the primary disorder with the loss of self-esteem as the central figure in all depression. Beck's cognitive triad—a negative view of the self, the world, and the future—permeates the depressives' waking and sleeping hours. The depressive person views himself as a loser. While stress in the environment may be the exogenous precipitator of depression, without a negative cognitive set the individual

would be unlikely to appraise the situation in a manner which induces depression.

Once an individual becomes depressed, he becomes his own worst enemy. He tends to treat himself as a critical significant other or parent might treat him. The sad affect and lowered self-esteem are brought about by self devaluations and relief is not sought because he feels unworthy of pleasure.

In contrast to subjects low in self-esteem, Cohen (1959) describes high self-esteem people as avoiding situations which will be detrimental to their self-picture or self-concept. Thus they can ignore or turn away from experiences which would be unfavorable. They have no need to punish themselves for not being perfect.

The theory of self awareness assumes "that the objectively self aware person will focus attention on himself-his consciousness, personal history, or body-but, in contrast, the same person in subjective self awareness will be aware of himself only as the source of forces that are exerted on the environment" (Duval & Wicklund, 1972, p. 14). When a person is reminded of himself by something in the environment, he perceives himself as an object and the state of objective self awareness develops concomitantly with self-reflection and evaluation. When a person is in the objective self awareness state, a negative self evaluation and negative affect

arise when the person finds a discrepancy between the actual state and idealized state. The greater the discrepancy, the more negative the affect, and the more painful the examination will be.

Subjective self awareness directs attention away from the self onto the environment. In this state, attention is focused outward and the person's relationship to the environment will be more a feeling of mastery and control.

Conditions which lead to these self awareness states are nothing more than stimuli which place the focus of attention inward or outward. In normal individuals the subjective self awareness state is assumed to be primary in that the environment is usually a prepotent stimulus. To enter the objective state, the individual needs conditions which remind him of his status in the world. This condition could be looking in a mirror, seeing a photograph of oneself, or any situation where the individual will have reason to reflect upon himself. Confronted with those stimuli, a mirror and the removal of make-up, which trigger objective self awareness, subjects low in self-esteem ought to engage in characteristic self-demeaning cognitions guaranteed to lower self-esteem. High self-esteem subjects on the other hand subjected to the same conditions ought not to be so influenced.

In this study volunteers were administered Cutich. Dig-

gory, and Shrauger's Self Description Inventory-R (Robinson, 1973. p. 119) and divided into relatively high and low self-esteem groups via a median split.

These groups were subsequently randomly assigned to three experimental conditions. Each group was given a task to perform. In the control condition, the self-esteem groups did not perform in front of a mirror. In the experimental condition, both self-esteem groups performed in front of a mirror; one group removing their make-up, the other not.

It was hypothesized that when low self-esteem subjects removed make-up in front of a mirror, self focusing would be greater than in the mirror condition alone and that those individuals would subsequently score lower on the self-esteem test than low self-esteem subjects who just performed a task in front of the mirror.

## Method

### Subjects

Thirty six female graduate and undergraduate psychology students from the University of Houston at Clear Lake City volunteered to participate in this experiment (See Appendix A). They ranged in age from 19 to 54 years (See Appendix B). All used cosmetics.

### Self-Esteem Questionnaire

Cutich, Diggory, and Shrauger's Self Description Inventory-R (Robinson, 1973) was used in a test-retest format to obtain self-esteem scores (See Appendix C).

### Apparatus

One reversible mirror on a stand was placed on a desk in a fairly empty room. The magnifying side of the mirror had been painted with aluminum paint. Tissue paper, paper towels, glass cleaner, and make up remover were placed on the desk beside the mirror.

### Procedure

Each female subject was administered the Self Description Inventory-R (Cutich, et al., 1970) and subjects were divided into relatively high and low self-esteem groups via a median split. All subjects were asked to bring the cosmetics, which they normally used, to class on the day of the experiment.

High self-esteem and low self-esteem subjects were ran-

domly assigned to one of three experimental conditions yielding six groups in all. After entering the room, each subject was told that she was being assigned one of three tasks. Subjects in the control condition were instructed to use glass cleaner and polish the back rim of the mirror then look at the rim and determine that all of the glass cleaner had been removed. Subjects assigned to experimental condition-mirror were instructed to use the glass cleaner, polish the front of the mirror, and look at the mirror to determine that all the glass cleaner had been removed. Subjects assigned to experimental condition-mirror-remove make-up were instructed to use the make-up cleanser, remove all their make-up, and look into the mirror to determine that all the make-up was removed. All subjects were observed to see that they actually self-focused in the mirror conditions. Thus, this experiment is cast in a 2 (high and low self-esteem) x 3 (mirror conditions) format.

After having completed the task instructions and indicating she would be back in just a moment, the experimenter left. After two minutes, the experimenter re-entered the room and administered the Self Description Inventory-R. All subjects scored the scale in front of the mirror as it was turned during their task performance. Subjects were then debriefed.

### Results

A 2x3 analysis of variance was computed on the difference-scores obtained by subtracting the self-esteem scores obtained on administration I (pre-experiment) and administration II (post-experiment). Non-significant results were obtained in this analysis as can be seen from Table I.

Table I  
Self-Esteem: Analysis of Variance

Source	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Total	1363.75	35			
Self-Esteem (High-Low) (H-L)	38.027	1	38.027	.926	ns
Self-Esteem (Mirror-Conditions) (MC)	8.166	2	4.083	.099	ns
Self-Esteem (H-L) x Self-Esteem (MC)	85.722	2	42.861	1.043	ns
Error	1231.834	30	41.061	41.061	

Mean scores among the groups are presented in Table II.

Table II  
Means for the Difference-Scores on  
the Self Description Inventory-R

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	Groups		
	No Mirror	Mirror	Mirror-Remove Make-up
High Self-Esteem	3.99	3.66	1.00
Low Self-Esteem	4.99	2.99	7.33

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## Discussion

The hypothesis that low self-esteem females who remove make-up in front of a mirror will score lower on a self-esteem inventory than low self esteem females who perform a task in front of a mirror was not supported.

It is far from clear why this investigation did not produce significant effects. One explanation revolves around the fact that, in this study, unlike other studies in which the experimenter is present during the task performance period of the experiment; the experimenter was not present during task performance. Subjects may be expected to have some evaluation apprehension when they do not actually know what the experiment is or in what manner the experimenter will be evaluating their performance.

Henchy and Glass (1968) suggest "that the mediating mechanism for social facilitation effects is the apprehension created by the anticipated evaluation, which in turn bolsters drive level or behavioral arousal" (Duval & Wicklund, 1972, p. 158). Their study limits the arousal-generating conditions to the anticipation of a positive or negative outcome by the evaluator. The study found that expertness or status of the other present had a marked effect on the amount of social facilitation or a positive change in behavior as the result of the presence of another organism.

To the extent that audience presence causes the subject to attempt to close discrepancies, the greater speed and precision which the individual uses in the attempt to attain correctness, may cause more errors to occur. This would have an inverse affect on task performance for less competent subjects and task performance might go down.

If audience presence is a catalyst for the arousal of objective self awareness (Henchy & Glass, 1968), then the lack of such an audience in the present investigation may have accounted for the lack of significant results.

Since most subjects in this experiment were of normal or high self-esteem, another possibility is that further research using subjects who are actually low and high in self-esteem might produce significant effects on this experiment.

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### Footnotes

Reprints of this masters thesis are available upon request from the author. Any correspondence concerning this thesis should be sent to Marguerite L. Stone, Behavioral Sciences, University of Houston at Clear Lake City, 2700 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, Texas, 77058.

<sup>1</sup>This scale was originally conceived by Cutich (1960), revised by Cutich and Diggory (1966), and revised again by Shrauger (1970). The items used by Cutich and Diggory fall into the areas of winning respect from others, making decisions, and performing efficiently, while Shrauger added items about physical skills, appearance, and school.

**Appendix A****University of Houston at Clear Lake City****Instrument to Obtain Informed Consent**

The tests we are giving you are given in two different sessions. Physical risk is not involved; however, some subjects may be frustrated by the instructions. Questions about the tests and procedures will not be answered as they might interfere with the results of the experiment. Subjects will be debriefed as to their purpose in the study at a later date.

The data obtained from you will be confidential. Obtaining test statistics is the only purpose for the study. Your name will not appear in the results of the investigation.

I have read the above document and am satisfied with its terms.

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**Signature**

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**Date**

---

**Witnessed**

---

**Date**

Appendix B  
Pretest Questionnaire

Code \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status (Check one)      Single\_\_\_\_ Married\_\_\_\_

Age (Check one)    (Under 20 years)\_\_\_\_    (20-24 years)\_\_\_\_

(25-29 years)\_\_\_\_    (30-34 years)\_\_\_\_    (35-39 years)\_\_\_\_

(40-44 years)\_\_\_\_    (45-49 years)\_\_\_\_    (50-54 years)\_\_\_\_

(55-59 years)\_\_\_\_    (Over 60 years)\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

## Self Description Inventory-Form R

The following questions ask you to assess your competence in various areas of performance. Indicate your responses to the following questions in the blank to the left of each question. Just give a number from 0 to 100 that shows how you feel about your ability. Zero would be "never" and a hundred would be "all the time". You can pick any number you want, just so it is closest to how you feel.

It is important that you try to answer each item frankly and honestly. Please read each question carefully and try to answer all the questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When you try some new sport or physical activity, what percent of the time do you feel you have not mastered the skill as well as the average person?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. When you face new situations which require fast decisions, what percent of the time can you make them effectively?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When you try to reach important goals of any kind, what percent of the time do you feel you have really succeeded?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When you are required to direct the activities of others, in what percent of the cases can you feel that you fail to receive the cooperation and respect of those directed?



- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When you are attempting to get someone of the same sex to form a favorable impression of you, what percent of the time do you think you are unsuccessful?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What percentage of people of your own age and sex have a more pleasing personal appearance than you?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. In situations where it is necessary for you to speed up your performance in order to meet a deadline, in what percent of the cases can you do so without sacrificing the quality of your work?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When you enter a new college course, what percent of the time do you feel uncertain that you will do as well as the average student?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When doing things that interest you most, what percent of the time are you satisfied with your performance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. When you are part of group activities, what percent of the time do your ideas and opinions influence the group?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. When put in a situation which is new and unfamiliar, what percent of the time do you feel you are not able to function adequately?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. When you have to take the initiative and act independently of others, what percent of the time can you handle things on your own?

\_\_\_ 13. When wise, careful judgement is needed about something, what percent of the time do you make sound judgement?