REVISITING ZAJONC’S SOCIAL FACILITATION THEORY AND BOND’S SELF-PRESENTATION APPROACH
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Introduction
A number of theories have attempted to explain the effects of audience on performance (Strauss, 2002). The drive theory of social facilitation proposed by Zajonc (1965) advocates that the presence of audience increases arousal and therefore, impairs the acquisition of new responses and facilitates the emission of well-learned responses. However, later studies (Cottrell et al, 1968) have emphasized the role of evaluation apprehension and indicated that the mere presence of audience is not sufficient to influence performance. Recently, Al-Nakeeb et al. (2006) investigated the effects of audience and competition on a novel skill. Results suggested that while performance of skilled participants improved in the presence of audience and competition, performance of the less-skilled deteriorated under these conditions. The results were explained according to Cottrell et al.’s (1968) hypothesis but it was suggested that they may be explained using Bond’s (1982) self-presentation approach as an alternative method of explanation. Hence, the current study was designed to investigate the self-presentation approach in explaining the social facilitation phenomenon.

Methods
Eleven national level basketball players (age 16.8 ± 0.40yrs) performed two tasks under alone and audience conditions. The first task was a novel dart-aiming task and the second was a familiar basketball free-throw shooting task. Each player performed five blocks of six attempts under each condition. Participant’s anxiety level was assessed using Jones et al.’s (2005) Sport Emotion Questionnaire and continuous heart rate monitoring.

Results
The paired-samples t-test revealed a significant difference (T (54) = -2.591, p = .012) between performance of the free-throw under the alone and audience conditions (16.05 ± 4.30 and 17.69 ± 3.19 respectively). However, there was no significant difference in performance of the dart-throwing task under the two conditions (p > 0.05). No significant differences in anxiety levels were evident under the two conditions (p > 0.05).

Discussion
While performance of a well-learned task improves significantly in the presence of an audience, performance of a novel task is not influenced. This result provides further support for the self-presentation theory which assumes that an easy or familiar task is performed well in the presence of others, because performers deduce that they can appear to be competent and present themselves in a positive light. However, if the task is difficult or unfamiliar, performers will not feel competent and hence their performance deteriorates.

References

Keywords: Anxiety, Basketball, Motor Skills

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