

Face-Saving and Entrapment

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Entrapping conflicts are those in which individuals: (1) have made substantial, unrealized investments in pursuit of some goal, and (2) feel compelled to justify these expenditures with continued investments, even if the likelihood of goal attainment is low. It was hypothesized that entrapment (i.e., amount invested) would be influenced by the relative importance individuals attach to the costs and rewards associated with continued investments. Two experiments tested the notion that entrapment would be more pronounced when costs were rendered less important (and/or rewards were made more important). In Experiment 1, half of the subjects were instructed beforehand of the virtues of investing conservatively (Cautious condition), whereas half were informed of the advantages of investing a considerable amount (Risky condition). Investments were more than twice as great in the Risky condition. Moreover, consistent with a face-saving analysis, (1) the instructions had a greater effect on subjects with high rather than low social anxiety, and (2) individuals with high social anxiety who participated in front of a large audience were more influenced by the instructions than were individuals with low social anxiety who participated in front of a small audience. In the second experiment, the importance of costs and rewards were varied in a 2×2 design. As predicted, subjects invested significantly more when cost importance was low rather than high. Contrary to expectation, reward importance had no effect. Questionnaire data from this study also suggested that entrapment was at least partially mediated by the participants' concern over the way they thought they would be evaluated. Theoretical implications are discussed.

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In many everyday examples of goal-directed behavior, people invest their resources in the hope of attaining some desirable outcome. If, however, they have not achieved their goal after a substantial investment has been made, they may very well experience conflict over whether to continue to invest or to withdraw from the situation. The choice of continued investment is often made even when the likelihood of goal attainment is low, perhaps in part because of the individual's need to justify all that has been expended up to that point. In other words, decision makers in such conflict situations may believe that they have "too much invested to quit" (Teger, 1980).

The studies reported here are part of a more general research program devoted to the development of a theoretical analysis of such entrapping conflicts. In prior research (Brockner, Shaw, & Rubin, 1979; Rubin & Brockner, 1975; Teger, 1980), examples and common characteristics of entrapping conflicts have been described, and several factors that influence the extent to which an individual becomes entrapped have been identified. The present experiments were designed to illustrate further the importance of face-saving in the study of entrapment. As Teger suggests, the degree of entrapment (i.e., the amount of resources individuals expend to justify unrealized investments) may depend upon the kind of self-presentation that people make by either continuing to invest or quitting. If certain cues suggest that continuing is more socially appropriate than quitting, entrapment is more likely to occur. Viewed from this perspective, many variables could influence subjects' perceptions of appropriate investment behavior. For example, if the potential importance of the costs associated with continued investments is made less apparent (and/or the importance of potential rewards is made more apparent), subjects may be less likely to conclude that quitting is socially desirable. As a result, they should become more entrapped (e.g., Rubin & Brockner, 1975).

In both studies to be reported, subjects received information that highlighted the importance of the potential costs and rewards associated with remaining in the conflict. Based on previous research (Rubin & Brockner, 1975), it was predicted that entrapment would be greater when cost importance was low and/or reward importance was high. Additional independent and dependent variables (described below) were included in the two studies to determine if self-presentational or face-saving needs mediated the participants' behavior.

EXPERIMENT 1

In this study, the perceived importance of costs and rewards associated with continued investments was manipulated through instructions given to subjects before they entered the potentially entrapping conflict. Half of the subjects were urged to focus on the virtues and ignore the costs

associated with continued investments (Risky condition) whereas the remaining half were instructed to attend to the costs and ignore the rewards (Cautious condition). To the extent that entrapment is a result of a desire to look good in the eyes of others, the effect of the instructions should be enhanced when: (1) other persons, including the experimenter, have knowledge of the subjects' behavior, and (2) participants are concerned over how they are evaluated. Because the experimenter remained present after giving subjects the instructions, it was expected that entrapment would be greater in the Risky than in the Cautious condition. To study the mediating role of face-saving more directly, however, additional situational and personality variables were included in the design. For example, if subjects are concerned with their self-presentation then increasing the size of the audience to include observers in addition to the experimenter should amplify the effect of the instructions. Thus, half of the subjects performed the experiment in view of two additional observers (Large audience condition) whereas half did not (Small audience condition). Previous research has also shown that the personality variable of social anxiety is directly related to concern with self-presentation (Turner, 1977). Accordingly, it was expected that subjects with high social anxiety would be more influenced by the experimenter's instructions than would those with low social anxiety.

In addition to responding to the social anxiety scale subjects completed measures of private self-consciousness (the extent to which one attends to inner thoughts and feelings) and public self-consciousness (awareness of the self as a social object that has an effect on others; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). These measures were included to provide potential information about the mediating effect of the audience on behavior. That is, the presence of an audience produces a number of effects, two of which are germane to the present study. Audiences can cause increased self-focused attention (Carver & Scheier, 1978) and increased evaluation apprehension (Rubin & Brown, 1975). The private and public self-consciousness measures refer to *processes* of self-directed attention, whereas the social anxiety factor measures *a reaction* to the process of self-focused attention (e.g., evaluational concern). If the effect of the audience is mediated by a process of self-focused attention, then one should find similar results associated with the private and/or public variables and the audience. If, however, the audience's effect is mediated by evaluational concerns, then the social anxiety factor should produce an effect similar to that of the audience.

Method

Participants. Ninety-two (56 female, 36 male) undergraduates at SUNY College at Brockport received extra course credit for taking part in the study. All were randomly assigned to Instructional set and Audience conditions and studied individually.

Procedure. Upon entering the laboratory, subjects were told that this study of "decision

making'' would consist of several parts. In the ''first part,'' participants were asked to complete the Self-Consciousness Scale developed by Fenigstein et al. (1975). Subjects had to indicate on 6-point scales how much each of the 10 private and 7 public self-consciousness items as well as the 6 social anxiety items was characteristic of them. The scores for each component were summed, and median splits were employed to classify subjects as high or low on each of the three dimensions.¹

After completing the personality measures, subjects were escorted to a different cubicle whereupon they were seated in front of a table. On the table were five one-dollar bills and parts of the experimental apparatus. This equipment included: (1) an electronically controlled counter and power supply, (2) an audio oscillator and speaker, and (3) two push buttons that were connected to the counter, speaker, power supply, and oscillator so that the experimenter could manually operate the counter by depressing one button and produce the necessary sound through the speaker by depressing the other. The counter and speaker were placed on the subjects' desk. The experimenter maintained possession of the push buttons.

In the *Large audience* condition the experimenter then casually mentioned that a few students, who were working for some psychology professors, were interested in watching the procedures because they might be using them in a future experiment. At this point two confederates were led into the room. They remained present for the duration of the experiment, during which time they silently observed the subject. No confederates were introduced in the *Small audience* condition.

All subjects then read the instructions, which emphasized that the \$5.00 was their payment for coming to the experiment and that they were free to do with it as they wished, but that if they were willing to invest some of their money they would have the opportunity to win an additional \$3.00 jackpot. Subjects were then given detailed instructions concerning the operation of the counter:

The counter runs from the number 0 up to 500. If you decide to take part in the study, the experimenter will start your counter and it will begin to count off numbers from 1 to 500. Before the study begins, the experimenter will generate a number using a small computer. This number will be a multiple of 25, such as 25, 50, 75, etc. If and when that number is reached on the counter, it will stop automatically and a tone will sound—indicating that you have won the \$3.00. *Whether or not you end up winning the jackpot, it will cost you one cent each time the counter increases by one unit.* You will not be allowed to invest more than \$5.00 to win the jackpot. While you do have a good chance of winning the jackpot if you remain in the experiment long enough, you will not be told exactly what your chances are. There is a possibility that the winning number will be greater than 500, in which case no jackpot would be awarded and you would be forced to forfeit your entire initial stake. If you decide to go for the jackpot, the experimenter will start your counter and let it run until it reaches the number 25. If the tone sounds at this point you have won the jackpot. If the tone does not sound there will be a short pause and decision point, during which you must decide what you would like to do. If you want to go on, do not say anything; if you want to quit announce out loud the

¹ It could be argued that any relationships between the personality measures and behavior were at least partially attributable to demand characteristics. That is, upon completing the scales subjects may have considered the possibility that the purpose of the experiment was to study the relationship between self-focused attention and behavior. To reduce the likelihood of this possibility, the experiment was described as consisting of several parts, each of which occurred in separate cubicles. Moreover, subjects' written and verbal responses to questions concerning their perceptions/suspicious about the study failed to reveal any evidence of demand characteristics.

word STOP. Unless you say STOP, the experimenter will re-start the counter and set it in motion until it reaches the number 50. The same procedure will be followed as before if the tone does not sound at this point.

The tone never did sound in any condition. Hence, subjects were faced with decision points every 25 units until they either had quit or had invested all \$5.00. After a "practice trial," which was intended to familiarize subjects further with the procedure and to enhance the credibility of the existence of the tone, the experimenter administered the instructional set manipulation, in an impromptu manner. In the *Risky condition* subjects were told:

Before we begin, let me offer you some advice. People often wonder what the best thing to do is in this situation. Probably the smartest thing to do is to invest a good portion of your initial stake to win the jackpot. There are probably a few reasons why investing is the intelligent thing to do. First, by doing so you may end up winning the \$3.00 jackpot. Second, it really doesn't cost too much to invest—only a penny for each number that the counter ticks off. In fact, one question that people often ask us before they begin is, "what do other people do in this situation?" Obviously, not everyone does the same thing, but most people who have done this experiment have been willing to spend a considerable portion of their \$5.00. Of course, what you do is entirely up to you.

In the *Cautious condition* the first two statements were identical to those in the *Risky condition*. The experimenter then continued by saying:

Probably the smartest thing to do is to not invest too much of your initial stake to win the jackpot. There are probably a few reasons why not investing too much is the intelligent thing to do. First, even if you invest there is no guarantee that you will win the \$3.00 jackpot. Second, if you invest it will cost you money regardless of whether you win the jackpot. In fact, one question that people often ask us before they begin is, "what do other people do in this situation?" Obviously, not everyone does the same thing, but most people who have done this experiment have not been willing to spend much of their \$5.00. Of course, what you do is entirely up to you.

It should be noted that in the *Large audience condition* the observers were present when the experimenter offered her "advice." Thus, subjects knew that the observers were aware of the recommended "smart" behavior in both the *Risky* and *Cautious* conditions.

After allowing subjects 30 sec to ponder this advice, the experimenter asked them if they wished to go for the jackpot. Those who declined completed a questionnaire which included an instructional set manipulation check ("Before you were asked if you wanted to invest, the experimenter may have given you some suggestions on how much you should invest. What, if anything, did the experimenter seem to be recommending?"), to which subjects responded on a scale from 1 (invest a small amount) to 41 (invest a large amount). It also included an audience manipulation check ("How much did you feel like you were being observed?") and two measures of observation anxiety ("How much did the experimenter's presence bother you?" and "How much did the feeling of being observed bother you?"), to which subjects responded on scales from 1 (not at all) to 41 (very much). Several open-ended questions also probed subjects for possible suspicions.

Those subjects who invested at least some of their \$5.00 completed the same questionnaire. In addition, these participants were asked to indicate the importance of various reasons underlying their decision to invest the amount that they did. Of these, one was designed to assess the extent to which subjects experienced the feeling of entrapment. This item read, "I had already invested so much it seemed foolish not to continue." This and

other items were responded to along a scale from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 41 (applies to me a great deal). Finally, all participants were fully debriefed and requested not to speak to future participants about the study.

Results

Manipulation checks. Unweighted-means analysis were performed on each dependent variable as a function of Instructional set, Audience presence, and Social anxiety. Subjects rated the experimenter as advising them to invest a greater amount in the Risky ($M = 30.8$) than in the Cautious condition ($M = 6.00$; $F(1,83) = 263.22$, $p < .001$). Participants also reported feeling like they were being observed more in the Large audience ($M = 24.31$) than in the Small audience condition ($M = 7.70$; $F(1,83) = 25.31$, $p < .001$). No other results were significant.

Observation anxiety. Since the two items measuring observation anxiety were highly correlated, $r(89) = .71$, $p < .001$, they were summed to provide a single index for each subject. The analysis of this index indicated that subjects were more bothered by being observed if they were high in social anxiety ($M = 24.82$) than if they were low ($M = 13.98$; $F(1,83) = 6.41$, $p < .025$) and more bothered if the audience was large ($M = 25.64$) than if it was small ($M = 14.35$; $F(1,83) = 5.93$, $p < .025$). Thus, as the face-saving model would predict, observation anxiety was highest in the High social anxiety–Large audience condition and lowest in the Low social anxiety–Small audience condition.

Behavioral measure of entrapment. A preliminary analysis revealed that men invested significantly more money than women ($p < .025$) but that sex of subject did not interact with any of the three independent variables. The data were therefore collapsed across the sex of subject dimension in subsequent analyses. A three-factor analysis revealed that subjects invested more money in the Risky ($M = \$2.83$) than the Cautious condition ($M = \$1.21$; $F(1,84) = 27.46$, $p < .001$). This effect, however, was significantly greater among subjects with high social anxiety ($M_s = \$2.93$ vs $\$0.90$) than among subjects with low social anxiety ($M_s = \$2.76$ vs $\$1.88$; $F(1,84) = 4.17$, $p < .05$). Moreover, subsequent analyses revealed that this interaction effect was due mainly to the results in the Cautious condition. Simple effects demonstrated that the amounts invested by high and low social anxiety participants differed in the Cautious condition, $F(1,84) = 5.56$, $p < .025$, but not in the Risky condition, $F < 1$. Furthermore, the only significant within-cell correlation between social anxiety and amount invested appeared in the Cautious–Small audience condition, $r(22) = -.42$, $p < .05$.

Contrary to expectation, no effect involving the audience variable was significant in the analysis of variance. However, as indicated in Table 1, the effect of the Instructional set was greatest in the High social anxiety–Large audience condition and least in the Low social anxiety–

TABLE 1
 MEAN AMOUNT INVESTED AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY, AUDIENCE SIZE, AND
 INSTRUCTIONAL SET

Instructional set	High social anxiety		Low social anxiety	
	Small audience	Large audience	Small audience	Large audience
Risky	\$2.84 (11)	\$3.06 (8)	\$2.94 (12)	\$2.61 (14)
Cautious	\$0.95 (16)	\$0.84 (16)	\$2.34 (8)	\$1.35 (7)

Note. Investments ranged from \$0.00 to \$5.00. Higher investments reflect greater entrapment. Cell *N*'s are in parentheses.

Small audience condition. (In fact, the magnitude of the Instructional set effects was significantly different in these two conditions, $F(1,84) = 4.04$, $p < .05$.) Individual comparisons also showed a significant effect of Instructional set in the High social anxiety–Large audience, High social anxiety–Small audience, and Low social anxiety–Large audience conditions (all p values $< .05$), but not in the Low social anxiety–Small audience cell, $F(1,84) = 1.11$, $p > .25$.² Stated differently, as long as there was a situationally or dispositionally produced source of concern for evaluation, the instructions significantly influenced degree of entrapment.

We then performed several additional analyses, first substituting private self-consciousness and then public self-consciousness for the social anxiety factor. No significant main or interaction effects involving these personality factors emerged. In addition, all of the within-cell correlations between amount invested and each of these measures were trivial. The nonsignificant private and public self-consciousness results suggest that any effect of the audience was not mediated by a simple process of self-focused attention.

It is also noteworthy that subjects in the Risky condition, who spent considerably more money, were more apt to endorse the questionnaire item assessing the experience of entrapment than were participants in the Cautious condition, $F(1,71) = 9.02$, $p < .01$. Moreover, across conditions there was a pronounced correlation between the amount of money that subjects invested and their tendency to endorse this statement, $r(77) = .57$, $p < .001$.

EXPERIMENT 2

The second study consisted of a 2×2 design in which the importance of rewards and costs were orthogonally varied and operationalized in a

² In the absence of a significant triple-interaction effect these comparisons should be interpreted with caution.

manner quite different from Experiment 1. In the High cost importance condition subjects were provided with a chart that reminded them of their costs at various points in the experiment, whereas Low cost importance participants were given no chart. In the High reward importance condition subjects had to plot their "progress" toward the reward, whereas Low reward importance subjects did not. Subjects were expected to become more entrapped when costs were low in importance than when they were high, and more entrapped when rewards were high in importance than when they were low.

Method

Participants. Eighty-six people (44 male, 42 female) who responded to an ad for a "decision-making study" in a local Boston newspaper took part in the experiment. Almost all of the subjects were 30 years of age or younger, and all had completed at least 1 year of college.

Procedure. The procedure was virtually identical to that employed in Experiment 1, although no personality measures were collected. In the *High cost importance* condition a chart was affixed to the wall adjacent to the subject. The relevant instructions were:

Take a look at the chart on your wall. This chart shows you what your actual earnings would be at each point. For example, you can see that if you spent 50 cents (\$.50, first column) and the jackpot were awarded at this point (\$3.00, second column), your actual earnings would be $\$3.00 - .50$, or $\$2.50$ (third column). We would like you to keep track of your actual earnings by consulting this chart at each decision point.

In the *Low cost importance* condition there was no chart and the above instructions were omitted.

In the *High reward importance* condition, subjects were provided with a sheet of paper labeled "Progress Toward Jackpot." A thermometer-shaped figure had been drawn on the paper, with calibrations indicated in multiples of 25 (running from 0 at its base to 500 at the top). The instructions given to subjects were:

We would like you to keep track of your progress toward the jackpot. In order to do this, please take a moment during each decision point to fill out the diagram on your table labeled "Progress Toward Jackpot." During each decision point simply ink in the space corresponding to the decision point you are at. In this way you will be able to continually follow your progress toward the jackpot goal.

In the *Low reward importance* condition no "Progress Toward Jackpot" sheet was provided and the preceding instructions were omitted.

After subjects had either quit or spent their entire \$5.00 stake, they completed a questionnaire, asking them to explain why they invested the amounts that they did. All questionnaire measures were completed on 11-point scales. They included: (1) "The longer I remained in the experiment the more certain I felt that I would" (endpoints: "win" and "lose"). (2) "I thought that it would look good if I" (endpoints: "quit" and "kept going"). (3) "I had already invested so much that it seemed silly" (endpoints: "not to invest a little more" and "to spend another penny"). and (4) "I was finding the experiment" (endpoints: "interesting" and "boring"). Several manipulation checks also appeared on the questionnaire. The cost importance check was, "As the experiment progressed to what extent did you find

yourself thinking about the money you were spending?," and the reward importance item was, "As the experiment progressed, to what extent did you find yourself thinking about the jackpot you could win?" Eleven-point scales were employed, with "did not think about it at all" (1) and "thought about it a lot" (11) serving as endpoints.

Results

Because the important aspects of the Cost and Reward importance manipulations occurred during the decision points, only the data of the 61 subjects (31 female, 30 male) who spent at least some of their initial stake were included in the analyses. The 25 subjects who quit at the outset were quite evenly distributed across the four experimental conditions. Two-factor unweighted-means analyses of variance were performed on all measures.

Behavioral measure of entrapment. A preliminary analysis revealed no main or interaction effects involving the sex of subject variable. As predicted, a two-factor analysis indicated that subjects in the Low cost importance condition became more entrapped ($M = \$3.09$) than those in the High cost importance condition ($M = \$2.20$; $F(1,57) = 4.00$, $p < .05$). The main and interaction effects involving reward importance were not significant.

Questionnaire data. Subjects did not report having thought significantly more about the money they were spending when costs were high in importance ($M = 6.45$) than when they were low ($M = 6.89$). Other questionnaire data, however, did suggest that the former subjects were more attentive to costs than the latter. Thus, in explaining why they invested the amounts that they did, High cost importance subjects were more apt to say that they were certain that they would lose ($p < .05$). There was absolutely no evidence, though, that subjects spent different amounts of time thinking about rewards when their importance was high ($M = 5.72$) or low ($M = 5.73$).

There were several additional Cost importance effects in the analyses of subjects' explanations for their behavior. Specifically, those in the High cost importance condition were more likely to report that it would look good if they quit ($p < .05$) and that they were finding the experiment boring ($p < .05$). The questionnaire results suggest that the behavioral effect produced by the Cost importance variable may have been mediated by any or all of the following processes: (1) subjects' greater attentiveness to the costs associated with remaining in the High cost importance condition, (2) subjects' concern with the way they presented themselves in the experimental situation, and (3) subjects' lack of interest in the High cost importance condition.

The failure of the Reward importance variable to influence subjects' responses on the questionnaire measures may help explain why it had no effect on degree of entrapment. That is, the process of keeping track of

their "progress" toward the jackpot may have sensitized subjects to costs as well as rewards, thereby canceling the effect of the reward importance variable.

As additional evidence that greater investments were associated with the internal experience of entrapment, there was a significant relationship between the amount of money subjects spent and their endorsement of the statement, "I had already invested so much that it seemed silly not to invest a little more," $r(57) = .89, p < .001$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In summary, both studies demonstrated that entrapment was reduced to the extent that individuals were led to attend to information concerning the costs of their participation. By contrast, none of the attempts to increase entrapment was effective. In Experiment 1 it was subjects in the Cautious condition, told why it would be advantageous to conserve money, who spent significantly less than those who were told the virtues of investing. Of course, in the absence of a no-advice control group it is unclear if the Cautious advice reduced entrapment, or if the Risky advice enhanced it, or both. The simple effect and correlational analyses from Experiment 1, however, suggested that subjects were relatively more influenced by the experimenter's instructions in the Cautious condition than in the Risky condition. In Experiment 2 it was those subjects who had a chart reminding them of their costs who became significantly less entrapped. The reward importance variable had no effect in this study. The common theme in these results is that subjects may have a natural tendency to invest a considerable portion of their resources; thus, attempts to increase entrapment even further may be difficult. It is possible, though, to reduce entrapment by increasing the impact of the perceived costs of investing.

Both studies, in different ways, suggested that the effect of perceived costs is not only mediated by the importance that subjects themselves attach to costs, but also by their concerns about how their investments would make them appear in the eyes of others. More specifically, if subjects in Experiment 1 were motivated to "look good," then subjects who are more concerned with looking good should have been more responsive to the Cautious instructions. Indeed, subjects high in social anxiety, who are more concerned with self-presentation (Turner, 1977), were more influenced by that factor. There was also evidence that the effect of the instructional set was greater in the High social anxiety–Large audience condition (when observation anxiety was highest) than in the Low social anxiety–Small audience condition (when observation anxiety was lowest). Furthermore, the instructional set variable, which was otherwise quite powerful in its effect on behavior, did not produce a significant effect when evaluational concerns were lowest (i.e., in the Low

social anxiety—Small audience condition). Experiment 2 provided additional evidence that self-presentational concerns influenced the participants' behavior. That is, subjects in the High cost importance condition not only quit earlier but were also more likely to explain their behavior by saying, "I thought that it would look good to quit." In essence, these subjects were explicitly saying that they became less entrapped in order to make a desirable self-presentation. The findings of the two studies are of theoretical importance, because they allow for predictions concerning the likelihood of entrapment. Specifically, individuals will become more or less entrapped to the extent that doing so will portray them in a more favorable light.

Of course, this is not to say that face-saving motives will always be the chief mediators of entrapment. For example, if the conflict is inherently nonsocial (as in the example of a commuter waiting for a bus to transport him to a destination to which he could just as easily have walked), or if the others present are not of psychological significance to the entrapped individual, or if the economic stakes are greater, then subjects' *own* concerns with costs and rewards may have a greater impact on behavior. Moreover, as Teger (1980) as skillfully shown, it is primarily in the later, rather than the earlier, stages of entrapping conflicts that the need to save face is an important component of participants' beliefs that they have "too much invested to quit."

Personality variables and entrapment. The data from Experiment 1 highlight the potential importance of personality variables in the entrapment process. In previous research, Teger (1980) found that individual difference measures (e.g., risk-taking, machiavellianism, and tolerance for ambiguity) were correlated with subjects' level of physiological arousal during the course of the conflict. However, Teger did not find any relationship between personality measures and behavior. Although we did not measure *physiological* arousal, the present data did demonstrate that the personality variable of social anxiety is correlated with the subjects' *self-reported* feeling state. Moreover, for the first time there was evidence that an individual's personality (in interaction with a situational variable) was related to degree of entrapment.

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