



Social facilitation: sources of arousal

You are learning how to...	In the context of...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess psychological models against research findings Use psychological theories to make predictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social facilitation Sources of arousal

Why do audiences & co-actors increase arousal?

We have seen that others, either as audience or co-actors, affect people's ability to perform on a task. This happens because they increase the performer's **arousal level**. We must ask, therefore, *why* other people affect arousal. Psychologists have put forward several **theories** to explain the relationship. As scientists, we need to examine each theory to see how far the **evidence** agrees with it. The evidence comes from research studies of social facilitation. Read each of the explanations below, then indicate whether the findings of each research study are consistent (✓) or inconsistent (✗) with it.

Theory	Explanation	Jajonc	Triplett	Michaels
Mere presence	The presence of others increases an animal's arousal because it needs to be alert to the possibility that they will do something the animal needs to respond to. This is an innate, biological, evolved tendency.			
Evaluation apprehension	The presence of others makes people worried about how they will be judged because they might be embarrassed if they do badly. This anxiety has the effect of increasing their arousal levels.			
Distraction	The presence of others serves to distract people. This distraction creates conflict between paying attention to the task and paying attention to the others. This conflict has the effect of increasing arousal levels.			

Which of the three explanations gives the best account of why others increase our arousal levels? Write a brief explanation of your conclusions. Make sure you refer to the evidence.

Making predictions to test theories

Sometimes psychologists find that there are several different theories that all try to explain the same thing. Assuming the different theories cannot all be correct, psychologists must use evidence to decide which theory is best.

In the case of social facilitation, all three of the theories above (mere presence, evaluation apprehension and distraction) have some evidence to support them. We need some evidence that will show that one of the theories is more correct than the other two.

Imagine a study in which groups of people do a simple task. One set of people (the *audience* group) does the task with an audience watching them. Another set (the *distraction* group) does the same task on their own but with a light flashing in the room in a way that will distract them. If we compare the performance of the two groups on the task, we will find that one of the following things has happened:

- The audience group has performed better than the distraction group.
- The distraction group has performed better than the audience group.
- The performance of the two groups is about the same.

Make a prediction of the results of this study based on each of the three theories. Think about what each theory says about the reason *why* an audience causes an increase in arousal. Bear in mind that different theories can make similar predictions. Briefly explain each of your predictions.

Theory	What does it predict and why?
Mere presence	
Evaluation apprehension	
Distraction	

Baron (1986) found that in studies like this, there is no difference in performance between the audience group and the distraction group. Which of the three theories does this support? Write a brief explanation of your conclusion. Make sure it is clear *why* you have drawn that conclusion.