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Impression mismanagement: People as inept self-presenters

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Abstract

People routinely manage the impressions they make on others, attempting to project a favorable self-image. The bulk of the literature has portrayed people as savvy self-presenters who typically succeed at conveying a desired impression. When people fail at making a favorable impression, such as when they come across as braggers, regulatory resource depletion is to blame. Recent research, however, has identified antecedents and strategies that foster systematic impression management failures (independently of regulatory resource depletion), suggesting that self-presenters are far from savvy. In fact, they commonly mismanage their impressions without recognizing it. We review failed perspective taking and narcissism as two prominent antecedents of impression mismanagement. Further, we argue that failed perspective taking, exacerbated by narcissism, contributes to suboptimal impression management strategies, such as hubris, humblebragging, hypocrisy, and backhanded compliments. We conclude by discussing how self-presenters might overcome some of the common traps of impression mismanagement.

"All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players;
 They have their exits and their entrances ..."
 —William Shakespeare, "As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII"

1 | INTRODUCTION

Self-presentation is an integral part of social life. From hiring to dating, successfully managing one's public image can influence one's professional or interpersonal prospects. A sizeable literature has illustrated why and how people engage in self-presentation. This literature, on the whole, portrays people as savvy self-presenters who seamlessly tailor their public image to their audiences. Stated otherwise, this literature converges on a basic premise: People, by and large, are successful self-presenters. But is this premise accurate?

Self-presentation may refer to specific tactics, such as ingratiation (soft persuasion in which one overcompliments others in an effort to elicit favors by appearing agreeable) or intimidation (strong persuasion in which one frightens others in an effort to elicit compliance by appearing powerful; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1973). We will refer to self-presentation more generally as behavior that aims to transmit a favorable impression or positive qualities, such as competence or warmth (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980).

Specific self-presentational tactics (e.g., ingratiation or intimidation) might be ineffective in particular situations, such as when people fall short of enacting the requisite behavior—that is, when they fail to be graceful in overcomplimenting or convincing in frightening. More generally, though, self-presentation can be ineffective even when people succeed in enacting the behavior they intended to enact. We consider antecedents and strategies that render self-presentation ineffective. The entrenched view in the literature is that failed self-presentation (i.e., impression mismanagement) typically occurs when regulatory resources are taxed. Recent insights, however, challenge this proposal. Those insights raise the possibility that people are prone to self-presentational gaffes irrespective of regulatory taxation and are thus often inept impression managers—perhaps as often as they are adept impression managers. We review relevant literature by highlighting two antecedents of impression mismanagement: failed perspective taking and narcissism. Failed perspective taking, exacerbated by narcissism, contributes to suboptimal impression management strategies, such as hubris, humblebragging, hypocrisy, and backhanded compliments.

2 | ENTRENCHED VIEW ON IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND MISMANAGEMENT

We first consider the entrenched view on self-presentation, namely, that people are effective impression managers, albeit subject to situational constraints. In this view, impression mismanagement is mostly due to taxed regulatory resources.

2.1 | The adept self-presenter

Motivated by self-enhancement (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Schlenker, 2003; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008), individuals seek to influence others' opinion of them (Bolino, Long, & Turnley, 2016) by presenting themselves in a favorable light (Baumeister & Hutton, 1986; Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Schlenker, 2012). People are thought to be quite skillful at impression management (Baumeister, 1982; Leary & Allen, 2011; Van Boven, Kruger, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2000), and this skillfulness can reap benefits. When successful at conveying impressions of trustworthiness, warmth, and competence, people may be liked or trusted more (Dufner et al., 2012; Helweg-Larsen, Sadeghian, & Webb, 2002; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003), boosting their chances of interpersonal or professional success (Le Barbenchon, Milhabet, Steiner, & Priolo, 2008; Leary, 1995; Proost, Schreurs, DeWitte, & Derous, 2010). Indeed, dating or hiring success depends to a great degree on the ability to manage impressions effectively (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Wayne & Liden, 1995).

An often tempting self-presentation strategy is to flaunt one's assets or accomplishments (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998). Such a strategy, however, can backfire, given that modesty is normatively valued (Ben-Ze'ew, 1993; Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008; Wosinka, Dabul, Whetstone-Dion, & Cialdini, 1996). Unabashed gloating undermines the positive persona that the self-presenter intends to project (Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007; Sedikides, Hoorens, & Dufner, 2015b; Sedikides & Luke, 2008). Thus, successful impression management entails subtly transmitting a favorable but credible depiction of oneself (Bonanno, Rennicke, & Dekel, 2005; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Zell & Krizan, 2014).

Various situational contingencies influence the optimal route to impression management. These include the self-presenter's social interaction goals (e.g., interacting with an authority figure vs. best friend; Gohar, Leary, & Costanzo, 2016), the status or knowledgeability of the self-presenter's audience (Hendricks & Brickman, 1974), accountability to

that audience (Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002b), relationship to the audience (e.g., close vs. distant; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998; Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995), and whether a familiar audience is same-sex or cross-sex (Leary et al., 1994). Cultural norms of conduct constitute another important contingency (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015a).

In sum, according to the entrenched view, individuals are generally successful at presenting themselves effectively. Although they may vary their strategies, depending on circumstances, the will typically come across as they intended to.

2.2 | When the adept self-presenter meets regulatory depletion

Self-presentation requires a twofold process: selecting the image one intends to project upon others and strategically conveying this image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Especially the latter step involves effortful regulation; for example, self-presentation requires self-control. Indeed, engaging in effortful self-presentation depletes regulatory resources on subsequent tasks (Critcher & Ferguson, 2014; Karremans, Verwijmeren, Pronk, & Reitsma, 2009). When resources are depleted, in turn, the self-presenter more likely appears intolerably boastful (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005) or socially repellent (Lalwani, 2009). Self-presentation is particularly demanding when the situation has serious consequences for self-presenters (e.g., implications for subsequent interactions; Tyler & Feldman, 2004) and when self-presenters deviate substantially from their authentic self (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Pontari & Schlenker, 2000; Tyler & Feldman, 2004). Appositely, self-presentation has been characterized as interpersonally oriented self-control for the sake of personal benefits (Uziel, 2010).

Following from the notion that self-presentation requires effortful regulation, impression mismanagement has largely been attributed to regulatory failure (DePaulo, Kenny, Hoover, Webb, & Oliver, 1987). Impression management errors increase when regulatory resources are taxed. For example, participants under cognitive load turn more boastful (Paulhus, Graf, & Van Selst, 1989), as do participants who are distracted by emotional stimuli (Paulhus & Levitt, 1987). Together, this literature suggests that a key reason why individuals fail when actively trying to convey a favorable image is because their regulatory resources are depleted.

3 | RECENT INSIGHTS ON IMPRESSION MISMANAGEMENT: THE INEPT SELF-PRESENTER

Recent findings challenge the notion of the adept self-presenter by turning the spotlight on antecedents and strategies that conduce to impression mismanagement. We consider some (nonexhaustive) antecedents and strategies in order to illustrate circumstances or individual difference, which foster impression mismanagement. First, we turn to failed perspective taking and narcissism as antecedents of impression mismanagement. Then, we discuss hubris, humblebragging, hypocrisy, and backhanded compliments as strategies that people select to convey a positive image, but that often end in failure. As we will argue, such impression mismanagement failures can be (at least partially) attributed to detriments in perspective taking, to high narcissism, or to detriments in perspective taking exacerbated by narcissism.

3.1 | Failed perspective taking

People typically lack full information about other's opinions and beliefs. In fact, perspective taking—anticipating the minds of others—is a surprisingly difficult task (Epley, 2014). Recent research has made a case for the role of failed perspective taking in impression mismanagement (Scopelliti, Vosgerau, & Loewenstein, 2015). In the prototypical experiment, some participants are asked to describe a situation in which they broadcasted their success to someone else. Then, they rate the emotions they thought the other person (the receiver) experienced when hearing the success story. Other participants are asked to recall a situation in which someone told them a success story and then rate the

emotions they experienced when hearing this person's story. The findings showcase misprediction of receivers' emotional reactions. Participants predict that the receiver experiences more positive emotions upon hearing the success story than what the receiver reported experiencing. Instead of the positive emotions that participants predict, the receiver reports negative ones (e.g., envy). Taken together, deficiencies in emotional perspective taking cause individuals to project their own positive emotions associated with their success onto the receiver. However, individuals neglect the receiver's emotions when hearing about others' successes and thus unintentionally elicit negative reactions.

Even under explicit impression management instructions, people do not anticipate accurately how others judge their positive qualities. In particular, receivers express higher liking for a self-presenter who claims that success is due to hard work than for a self-presenter who claims that success is due to natural talent (Steinmetz, 2017). They like the former self-presenter better, because they judge "hard work stories" as warm and relatable. However, when individuals imagine being in a job interview or on a date—two situations highly prone to impression management—they fail to predict the receiver's reactions and downplay their efforts more than the receiver deems desirable or appropriate. In all, individuals make the impression management error to evaluate effortless versus effortful success based on costs and benefits for the self, and then to project these idiosyncratic evaluations on others.

Interestingly, actors mispredict an observer's reactions not only to their successes but also to their failures. They believe that an observer will judge them more harshly for mishaps or debacles than is actually the case (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). Specifically, they expect that an observer will rate their competence and intelligence much lower after making mistakes on performance tasks, whereas the observer's judgments are more benevolent and less affected by these mistakes. This misprediction occurs because actors fail to adopt the perspective of the observer, who usually has more information available than the mishap or debacle witnessed.

It has been argued that successful perspective taking, just like successful impression management, requires regulatory resources (Fennis, 2011). Hence, failed perspective taking might be one mechanism by which regulatory depletion results in impression mismanagement (Lalwani, 2009; Vohs et al., 2005). Our thesis, however, is that failed perspective taking can foster impression mismanagement even in the presence of regulatory resources. That is, regulatory resource depletion is not necessary for impression mismanagement.

3.2 | Narcissism

An individual's self-presentational tactics are shaped by his or her personality characteristics, including public self-consciousness (Tunnel, 1984), approval-seeking (Paulhus & Reid, 1991), and self-monitoring (Snyder, 1979), as well as self-esteem, authenticity, Machiavellianism, and agreeableness (Leary & Allen, 2011). Recent research has highlighted the role of another individual difference, narcissism. Given rising levels of narcissism (Cai, Kwan, & Sedikides, 2012; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), we consider this literature below.

Narcissism, conceptualized as a normally distributed personality trait, is characterized by a self-centered, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and scheming interpersonal orientation (Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011; Thomaes, Brummelman, & Sedikides, in press). Narcissists are disagreeable and power-seeking (Horton & Sedikides, 2009), responding aggressively to criticism (Bushman & Baumeister, 2002). Crucially, they seek admiration as a means of augmenting the positivity of their self-views (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Campbell & Campbell, 2009), and self-presentation offers such a means. Indeed, narcissists are characterized by a forceful and glorifying self-presentation style both in person-to-person interactions (Akehurst & Thatcher, 2010; Sedikides et al., 2015b) and on social media (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman, & Campbell, 2012; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013). Their pomposity is unrestrained even in settings that require modesty, such as when interacting with friends (Campbell, Sedikides, Reeder, & Elliot, 2000) or when accountable to an audience (Collins & Stukas, 2008).

The narcissistic self-presentational style has social repercussions. In the short term, narcissists come across as energetic, interesting, and entertaining (Back et al., 2010; Paulhus, 1998). With the passage of time, however, their arrogance and antagonism come to the fore (Küfner, Nestler, & Back, 2013) and their acquaintances begin to dislike

them and may end up rejecting them altogether (Back et al., 2010; Ong, Roberts, Arthur, Woodman, & Akehurst, 2016; Paulhus, 1998). The narcissistic self-presentational style has unintended consequences for close relationships as well. On the one hand, observers perceive narcissists as physically attractive (Holtzman & Strube, 2010) due to their extensive grooming (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008) and social boldness (Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013). As such, narcissism may contribute to partner satisfaction in the early relationship stages (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006). On the other hand, narcissists consider themselves superior to their partners (Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002), make downward social comparisons in reference to them (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), and derogate them (John & Robins, 1994). In addition, narcissists are low on empathy or perspective taking (Hepper, Hart, Meek, Cisek, & Sedikides, 2014a) and manifest excessive flirting, decreased accommodation of relational conflict, and high levels of infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Campbell & Foster, 2002). It is not surprising, then that their dating partners (Lam, 2012) as well as married partners (McNulty & Widman, 2013) report relational dissatisfaction.

As with perspective taking, it has been argued that narcissistic self-presentation requires regulatory resources; in fact, when such resources are depleted, narcissistic self-presentation deteriorates (i.e., skyrockets) into excessive talking, inappropriate self-disclosure, and higher-than-typical signs of arrogance (Vohs et al., 2005, Studies 5–8). As in the case of perspective taking, however, regulatory resource depletion is not necessary for impression mismanagement. In fact, narcissism precipitates impression mismanagement even in the presence of regulatory resources, especially due to narcissists' empathy deficits and proclivity toward downward social comparisons (Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014b; Krizan & Bushman, 2011).

Taken together, failed perspective taking and narcissism qualify as antecedents of impression mismanagement. We engage next in a selective coverage of ineffective self-presentation strategies that can be traced, in part, to failed perspective taking, narcissism, or failed perspective taking accentuated by narcissism.

3.3 | Hubris

Impression mismanagement occurs when people are oblivious to hubris, namely, the impact that their self-aggrandizing displays can have on the audience's self-views. A program of research systematically varied an actor's self-presentations (using different types of self-enhancing and non-self-enhancing claims) and assessed the inferences that observers make about the actor (e.g., liking) and also the inferences that they make about the actor's opinion of others in general as well as of observers in particular (Hoorens, Pandelaere, Oldersma, & Sedikides, 2012; Hoorens, Van Damme, Helweg-Larsen, & Sedikides, 2017; van Damme, Hoorens, & Sedikides, 2016).

In this research program, observers read vignettes in which an actor presents himself or herself in a self-enhancing manner. In some studies, these self-enhancing claims are in the domain of academic ability only (i.e., studentship), and in other studies, they are in the domain of ability or relationships (i.e., friendship). In particular, the actor's self-enhancing claims can be socially comparative (e.g., "I am a better person to be friends with than others," "I am more optimistic than others"), socially comparative accompanied by a disclaimer (e.g., "I don't mean to say that I am a better person to be friends with than others, but ..."), or temporally comparative (e.g., "I am a better person now to be friends with than I was in the past"). Alternatively, the actor presents himself or herself in a non-self-enhancing manner. Specifically, the actor makes noncomparative claims (e.g., "I am a good person to be friends with"), self-equality claims (e.g., "I am as good a person to be friends with as others are"), or other enhancing claims (e.g., "she is a better person to be friends with than others").

Observers dislike the self-enhancing actor who makes socially comparative claims more so than any other type of claim, regardless of whether the actor's claims pertain to the domain of studentship or friendship. Observers' disapproval of a socially comparative self-enhancing actor is not as much due to their inference that the actor has a low opinion of others in general, but rather to the inference that the actor has a low opinion of them. Observers disfavor the actor for self-protective purposes (Sedikides, 2012), as they are threatened by the actor's unfavorable view of them or gloomy perspective on their future—a state that sparks antagonism or hostility (i.e., distancing; Kowalski, 1997).

Narcissists are especially likely to engage in the kind of ostentatious and downward social comparisons that characterize displays of hubris (Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015; Krizan & Bushman, 2011). Yet, narcissists are particularly likely to be perpetrators of hubris for another reason. Being low on empathy or agreeableness (i.e., communion; Sedikides, Campbell, et al, 2002a), narcissists are unlikely to perspective take and thus to care for the audience's self-views. In all, hubris may be one (failed) strategy through which narcissism, or narcissistic lack of perspective taking, precipitates impression mismanagement.

3.4 | Humblebragging

Impression mismanagement occurs when people attempt to conceal their self-presentation intent. An example of such a strategy is humblebragging (Sezer, Gino, & Norton, 2017). This refers to irksome efforts to mask bragging in the guise of complaining or appearing humble, as in the following example of a social media user: "Hair is not done, just rolled out of bed from a nap, and still get hit on, so confusing!" Given that bragging, complaining, and looking humble afford self-presentational benefits, people combine them to achieve the "sweet spot" for self-presentation: Humblebragging allows them to highlight their positive qualities while disguising these qualities in complaint or humility.

Successful impression management is undermined when suspicion of ulterior motives arises (Crant, 1996; Nguyen, Seers, & Hartman, 2008; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). When self-presenters aim to achieve the best of both worlds by humblebragging, they overlook the impact of perceived sincerity. Indeed, humblebragging backfires, because it is seen as insincere (Sezer et al., 2017). Disguising a brag with a complaint (expression of dissatisfaction or annoyance; Kowalski, 1996) or humility (moderation in assessment of one's abilities or strengths; Davis, Worthington & Nook, 2010) generates unfavorable impressions. Perceived insincerity is so critical for actors' interpersonal appeal that humblebragging is less effective than simply complaining or bragging; that is, both complainers and straightforward braggers are regarded as more sincere and thus more likeable than humblebraggers. Moreover, humblebragging is ineffective even in signaling competence; that is, actors who humblebrag are perceived to be less competent than those who simply brag (Sezer et al., 2017).

Taken together, perceived sincerity is key in impression management success. More generally, the success of impression management tactics depends on whether self-presenters are able to hide their ulterior motives (Eastman, 1994; Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982). When observers infer that a self-presenter has a calculated goal (i.e., that self-presentation is intentional; Lafrenière, Sedikides, van Tongeren, & Davis, 2016), they consider his or her claims as fake (Crant, 1996; Nguyen et al., 2008; Turnley & Bolino, 2001), resulting in unflattering impressions.

Humblebragging is a particularly miscalibrated case of self-presentation, given that actors take the risk of bragging in belief that their ulterior motives will remain under wraps. Narcissists, being prone to risk-taking (Sedikides & Campbell, 2016), may be particularly likely to humblebrag. Also, as noted above, the humblebraggers neglect their audience's perspective. Narcissists, then, may humblebrag for another reason. Given their self-preoccupation and disregard for others (Morf et al., 2011; Sedikides et al., 2002a), they are not particularly likely to bother with the effort required to perspective take.

3.5 | Hypocrisy

Generally speaking, hypocrisy involves attempts to transmit a certain image (e.g., being a moral person) while failing to live up to behavioral standards that this image prescribes (Batson, Thompson, Seuferling, Whitney, & Strongman, 1999; Lönnqvist, Irlenbusch, & Walkowitz, 2014). Hypocrisy can be effective as long as the discrepant behavior is covert. Once the discrepancy between the proclaimed positive image and the divergent behavior becomes public, the hypocrite is judged more harshly than individuals who engage in the same behavior without having previously

claimed the behavior-incongruent image (Laurent, Clark, Walker, & Wiseman, 2014; Powell & Smith, 2013). Hypocrisy and its related tactic, moralizing (Heck & Krueger, 2016), have a low threshold of observer tolerance.

Narcissists may be particularly likely to engage in hypocrisy, as they are low on shame and guilt (Gramzow & Tangney, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Hypocrisy entails failed perspective taking, that is, lack of realization that the audience will detest the discrepancy between words and deeds. As such, narcissists may be particularly likely to be hypocritical: Not only will they be low on shame or guilt, but they will also be deficient in perspective taking (Hepper et al., 2014b).

3.6 | Backhanded compliments

Impression mismanagement also occurs when people strive to achieve two somewhat conflicting self-presentational goals: eliciting liking and attaining status. An example is the delivery of backhanded compliments (Sezer, Brooks, & Norton, 2016), that is, compliments that draw a comparison with a negative standard from both the flatterer's and the recipient's perspective (e.g., "You are smart for an intern"). People often give compliments to gain favorable impressions (Liden & Mitchell, 1988), as recipients view those who pay compliments in favorable light (Gordon, 1996; Jones, Stires, Shaver, & Harris, 1968). At the same time, people are deeply concerned about their status and relative ranking (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & De Waal-Andrews, 2016).

Actors deploy backhanded compliments to communicate superior status and garner liking (Sezer et al., 2016). However, recipients of these backhanded compliments and third party evaluators grant the actor neither, because they view these compliments as subtle but strategic put-downs through which the actor attempts to assert or relay their superiority. Individuals can gain respect when they are perceived to be unconcerned with others' evaluations of them (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Hollander, 1958). Delivering backhanded compliments signals evaluative concern (i.e., a concerted effort to achieve or maintain superiority), hence the backfiring.

Given their low agreeableness, manipulativeness, and callousness (Miller et al., 2009, 2011), narcissists may be especially prone to delivering backhanded compliments, and thus engaging in impression misfiring. There is another reason why narcissists are likely to dispatch backhand compliments: Such compliments disregard the audience's perspective—a disregard that partially defines narcissism.

4 | IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

As the opening quote by The Bard implies, people almost always self-present in public settings. Similarly, Goffman (1959) posited that, when facing an audience, people always behave like actors in a theatrical performance: They have multiple "masks" to choose from in different social encounters. As such, it would do them service to select their impression management strategy optimally. The established literature converges in advocating that people are, for the most part, adept impression managers. Despite the complexity of situational contingencies and the nuance of personality characteristics, people can sculpt a desirable and effective image of themselves given time or resources. In fact, insufficient regulatory resources are the root cause of impression mismanagement.

We argue that the alternative conclusion is also warranted: People are fairly inept impression managers. Burgeoning evidence has fleshed out antecedents and strategies that produce impression mismanagement, in the seeming absence of regulatory taxation. In particular, people mismanage their impressions when they fail to adopt the audience's perspective, such as when they neglect anticipating the audience's emotional reactions (Scopelliti, Loewenstein, & Vosgerau, 2015). Also, they mismanage their impression under the influence of high levels of narcissism, boomeranging into social or relational awkwardness (Sedikides et al., 2015b). These antecedents are associated,

independently or jointly, with implementation of suboptimal impression management strategies, such as (a) miscalculating the negative consequences of their self-presentation tactics on the way an observer would think about himself or herself (Hoorens et al., 2012); (b) trying to combine bragging, complaining, and appearing humble (humblebragging), thus ending up with a disapproving audience (Sezer et al., 2017); (c) behaving in a hypocritical manner, thus risking that their cover is later blown (Laurent et al., 2014); and (d) delivering backhanded compliments, and consequently engendering audience disapproval (Sezer et al., 2016).

We discussed these strategies because of the striking discrepancy between the intention behind them and their likely outcome. Even when the intention is to communicate a specific desirable trait (e.g., competence as in humblebragging), these strategies often transmit neither the specific trait nor any other positive trait, thus rendering them unsuccessful on all fronts. Furthermore, we identified failed perspective taking and narcissism as antecedents that are particularly likely to foster (alone or in synergy) impression mismanagement, because of their focus (i.e., mispredicting, which behavior elicits favor in the case of failed perspective taking) and underlying motivation (i.e., garnering admiration in the case of narcissism). Whereas other antecedents might also be socially problematic (e.g., extreme shyness or introversion) and precipitate social anxiety or uneasiness, they are less conducive to impression mismanagement. We next discuss theoretical and empirical implications of our review.

On a theoretical level, we integrated existing findings portraying people as savvy impression managers with newer evidence depicting people as clumsy impression managers in the absence of regulatory depletion. Thereby, we drew a more complete picture of the literature on impression management in general, while splitting the newer evidence into antecedents and strategies of impression mismanagement. Future research could capitalize on this evidence classification to clarify further the circumstances that help or hinder impression management success, and to explore additional antecedents and counterproductive strategies of impression management failure.

Future research could also distinguish between impression mismanagement in the presence of a specific goal to communicate a desirable trait (e.g., managerial competence in a job interview) versus a general goal to appear likable to others. In many cases, the goal of impression management is to convey a specific trait (e.g., competence in a domain), and, hence, lack of high levels of likability does not necessarily suggest impression mismanagement. In our analyses, we focused on cases where people mismanage their impressions while attempting to transmit the specific trait demanded by the situation. For example, humblebragging does not even convey the competence the humblebragger would like to convey, over and above reducing likability (Sezer et al., 2017). Another example refers to participants being instructed to maximize an impression of themselves on a date versus in a job interview. Although these two situations render different traits and behaviors desirable, people show the same pattern of impression mismanagement by downplaying their efforts (Steinmetz, 2017). In our article, then, we highlighted some of the most striking strategies of impression mismanagement that undermine not only liking but also the transmission of the desired trait.

Our analysis is also generative on an empirical level. We discussed failed perspective taking and narcissism as antecedents of impression mismanagement. It would be relevant to investigate whether strategies that improve perspective taking or dampen narcissism facilitate impression management. For example, people are better at taking the perspective of similar than dissimilar others (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005), which might allow them to avoid impression mismanagement when interacting with similar (vs. dissimilar) others. Most individuals have a measure of perspective-taking ability but do not necessarily use it consistently (Epley & Caruso, 2008; Wu & Keysar, 2007). Instead of asking oneself how to best broadcast one's successes while maintaining a modest image, a self-presenter could ask how the recipient of the broadcasting would feel. Furthermore, perspective taking may curtail narcissists' tendency to project an inflated persona. Perspective taking can backfire, however, when an individual feels threatened (e.g., due to fear of negative evaluations; Sassenrath, Hodges, & Pfattheicher, 2016). When a positive self-image is undermined, the typical prosocial consequences (e.g., forgiveness, Okimoto & Wenzel, 2011) of perspective taking take a back seat. Under such circumstances, one may develop negative attitudes toward the audience. Yet, even when one holds negative

attitudes toward the audience, one may still benefit from using perspective taking to avoid impression mismanagement in the presence of that audience.

Similar to perspective taking, increasing accountability for one's self-enhancing claims can reduce impression mismanagement (Sedikides & Herbst, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2002) at least among nonnarcissists (Collins & Stukas, 2008). Accountability means having to explain and justify one's evaluations. It keeps self-presenters from zooming in on their positive characteristics and fosters a broader focus on a more objective view of themselves that incorporates their weaknesses, making self-presentation more grounded or less prone to illusion. However, accountability alone is not enough to curb impression mismanagement, as the examples of humblebragging and backhanded compliments illustrate.

Given the low success of the four impression management strategies that we highlighted, one may wonder why people keep using them. A reason is that people's accuracy in estimating others' perceptions of them is limited (Vazire & Carlson, 2010). Deficits in concrete insight may be due to the absence of feedback regarding their impression management efforts. When an individual engages in impression mismanagement, perceivers may be unwilling to flag his or her self-presentational blunders. However, feedback is crucial to improving one's performance (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009). Another reason has to do with psychological benefits that people derive from self-presentation, such as positive emotions and higher self-esteem (O'Mara, Gaertner, Sedikides, Zhou, & Liu, 2012; Scopelliti et al., 2015). A final reason is that people prefer (Sedikides, Luke, & Hepper, 2016; Sedikides & Strube, 1997) or solicit (Hepper & Sedikides, 2012; Sedikides, 1993) positive (i.e., self-enhancing) than improving feedback. Absence of feedback, intrapersonal benefits, and preference for or active solicitation of positive feedback could explain why individuals engage in counterproductive impression management strategies despite facing interpersonal risks.

Lack of feedback about one's self-presentation attempts might stem from a paradox: People receive *negative* feedback mostly in close relationships, whereas they receive *positive* feedback mostly in superficial relationships (Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2012). However, if an individual mismanages his or her impression when interacting with an acquaintance (i.e., coming across as conceited; Tice et al., 1995), that acquaintance will likely withdraw from the self-presenter instead of deepening the relationship. Most likely, the acquaintance will not volunteer negative feedback. To remedy this predicament, a self-presenter might solicit feedback from close others about the quality of her or his self-presentational tactics. Future research might examine whether, given accurate feedback, self-presentation could be a learnable skill, or whether personality characteristics (e.g., narcissism) or motives (e.g., self-enhancement and self-protection) prevent people from using such feedback to improve their impression management.

Impression mismanagement is a relatively common, sometimes amusing and other times socially harmful, part of daily attempts to influence what others think of oneself. Earlier literature has suggested that, all things considered, individuals are effective impression managers, albeit they may commit self-presentational faux pas when they lack adequate regulatory resources. However, recent evidence challenges this view and paints a complementary, or perhaps different, picture. People have the potential to be poor-impression managers and may routinely underestimate the damaging impact that their self-presentational maneuvering has both upon them and upon others.

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