

# Hiding Success

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Self-promotion is common in everyday life. Yet, across 8 studies ( $N = 1,687$ ) examining a broad range of personal and professional successes, we find that individuals often hide their successes from others and that such hiding has relational costs. We document these effects among close relational partners, acquaintances, and within hypothetical relationships. Study 1 finds that targets feel less close to and more insulted by communicators who hide rather than share their successes. Study 2 finds that hiding success harms relationships both when the success is eventually discovered and when it is not. Studies 3 and 4 explore the mechanism underlying these relational costs: Targets infer that communicators have paternalistic motives when they hide their success, which leads them to feel insulted. Studies 5–7 explore the contextual cues that elicit inferences of paternalistic motives, such as private (vs. public) settings (Study 5), direct (vs. indirect) questions (Study 6), and close (vs. distant) relationships (Study 7). Across our studies, we also explore the emotional and impression-management consequences of hiding success. Although the relational consequences of hiding success are universally negative, the emotional and impression-management consequences are mixed. Whereas previous research highlights the negative consequences of sharing one's accomplishments with others, we find that sharing is superior to hiding for maintaining one's relationships. Thus, we shed new light on the consequences of paternalism and the relational costs of hiding information in everyday communication.

*Keywords:* interpersonal communication, success, deception, hiding information, paternalism

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Effective communication is an integral aspect of social life. Communication is essential for both presenting oneself to others (Goffman, 1959) and forming meaningful relationships (Cummings, Lee, & Kraut, 2006; Selfhout, Denissen, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). However, these fundamental goals of self-presentation and relationship maintenance frequently conflict, which presents a communication challenge. This conflict often arises when deciding whether or not to share information about one's success.


Consider a student who receives a good grade on an exam. The inherent desire to signal one's competence to others (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) suggests that the student

will share her success with others when given the chance (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998). People have a strong desire to leave a favorable impression of themselves on others, particularly of their competence (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Baumeister, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990; Sedikides, 1993; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). Self-promotion allows people to accomplish this goal (Collins & Stukas, 2008; Farkas & Anderson, 1976; Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005).

However, the student may also be concerned about how her friends will react to her success. Sharing the news of her good grade might make her friends feel jealous or threatened, which could damage her relationships with them. Indeed, existing research finds that self-promotion can create social comparisons (Swencionis & Fiske, 2016), highlight status differences (Arnett & Sidanius, 2018), lead to malicious envy (Brooks et al., 2019), and increase negative affect (Major, Testa, & Blysm, 1991; Salovey, 1991; Salovey & Rodin, 1984), which can ultimately jeopardize relationships. Therefore, the student may prefer to keep her success hidden.

Is hiding success a good idea? The present research suggests it is not. We define *hiding success* as intentionally withholding positive information about oneself or one's accomplishments. We find that hiding success damages relationships more than sharing success. Across our studies, we explore the reactions of the target (i.e., the person learning about another person's success) when the communicator (i.e., the person communicating their success) shares versus hides their success. While hiding is often motivated by good intentions, we find that targets feel more insulted by and less

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close to communicators who hide, rather than share, their success. We explore the underlying mechanism—the inference that a communicator has paternalistic motives—and the boundaries of this effect. Across our studies, we also explore the emotional and impression-management consequences of hiding success. We find that although the relational consequences of hiding success are universally negative, the emotional and impression-management consequences are sometimes mixed.

These results make fundamental contributions to our understanding of impression management, communication, and deception. First, we contribute to the impression management literature by identifying a distinct self-presentation strategy: hiding success. We categorize hiding success as a *self-deprecating* tactic, which is a communication strategy used to downplay rather than highlight one's positive traits and achievements (Lee, Slater, & Tchernev, 2015; O'Donnell, Jung, & Critcher, 2016; Sekhon, Bickart, Trudel, & Fournier, 2015). We provide an empirical investigation of the ironic consequences of this strategy.

In doing so, we provide novel insights into the relationship between communication tactics, motive inferences, and relational development. Existing research on impression management has highlighted how communication tactics influence impression management, such as how they affect inferences about a communicator's warmth and competence (Holoien & Fiske, 2013). In the present research, we focus on a different set of consequences and considerations. Communication tactics not only provide information about the communicator's qualities (i.e., how smart or arrogant they are), but also the relationship between a communicator and a target. The communicator's decision to share information provides a signal of the strength of their relationship with the target and the inferences they make about the target. In the context of hiding success, we find that one primary inference the target makes is that the communicator has paternalistic motives. Specifically, targets believe that communicators hide their success because they assume the target will be envious and are therefore trying to protect the target from experiencing this negative emotion. Although previous research on interpersonal emotion regulation has focused on how people use communication to regulate others' emotions (Van Kleef, 2009), we instead examine how people make inferences about others' interpersonal emotion regulation motives and how they react to these motives.

Finally, we document a new way in which people deceive others with good intentions (Hildreth & Anderson, 2018; Levine & Schweitzer, 2014, 2015) and explore the contradictory consequences of this behavior. Therefore, this work furthers our understanding of the importance of perceived intent in social judgment and, in particular, the social judgment of paternalistic deception (Lupoli, Levine, & Greenberg, 2018).

## Communication Traps: How to Communicate Success?

Although achieving success feels wonderful, it can put people in a precarious situation. People strive to be perceived as both competent and warm, qualities that require distinct communication tactics (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986). In many situations, displaying competence comes at the expense of perceptions of warmth or likability (Carlston & Shovar, 1983; Holoien & Fiske, 2013).

When people self-promote, they intend to communicate their success and display competence (Scopelliti, Loewenstein, & Vosgerau, 2015). However, people often make systematic errors when presenting themselves to others (Steinmetz, Sezer, & Sedikides, 2017), particularly when attempting to communicate their success (Brooks et al., 2019). Self-promotion can often be perceived as bragging, which has negative consequences for warmth and related traits (Berman, Levine, Barasch, & Small, 2015; Godfrey et al., 1986; Holtgraves & Srull, 1989; Powers & Zuroff, 1988). Highlighting positive traits may be particularly threatening when there is a salient social comparison, for example, when the communicator is in a relatively better position than the target (Arnett & Sidanius, 2018; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2006; Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012; Swencionis & Fiske, 2016), when the trait being compared is central to the target's identity (Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Tesser & Campbell, 1982), or when the communicator and target are close friends (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988; Zuckerman & Jost, 2001). In these situations, sharing success may elicit jealousy (Major et al., 1991; Salovey, 1991; Salovey & Rodin, 1984), threaten social status (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015), or create social isolation (Cooney, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2014). Taken together, previous research suggests that when the perception of warmth is particularly relevant, such as in close relationships, people may be better off hiding their success because success is likely to trigger social comparisons.

Indeed, people seem to be aware of the pitfalls of sharing success, which leads them to engage in self-deprecating communication tactics. Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell (1995) find that participants are more modest when answering questions about themselves in front of friends than in front of strangers. Arnett and Sidanius (2018) find that people often conceal relatively high-status identities to preserve social harmony. For instance, individuals who attended a high-status university were more likely to conceal the university's status when they were interacting with someone from a lower-ranked school than when interacting with someone from a similarly ranked school. In addition, individuals are less likely to share their positive experiences with people they believe have low self-esteem because they think people with low self-esteem will not be supportive (MacGregor & Holmes, 2011). Even when attempting to brag, people often deploy complex communication tactics to hide their motivation, such as disguising bragging with complaints—that is, “humblebragging” (Sezer, Gino, & Norton, 2018). We suggest that people's discomfort with sharing their success is so strong that it leads them to hide their successes by lying or withholding relevant information. Indeed, in our pilot study (reported in detail later in the article), we find that 82% of participants report hiding a success from others at some point in their lives.

## The Costs of Hiding

Despite its ubiquity in everyday life, hiding success may have social costs. Indeed, failing to share success prohibits people from signaling competence. If the success is not communicated, the target may remain unaware of the communicator's accomplishments (Collins & Stukas, 2008; Farkas & Anderson, 1976; Vohs et al., 2005). In the present research, we instead focus on the rela-

tional consequences of hiding one's success. We define *relational consequences* as the target's feelings toward the communicator (e.g., feelings of insult, closeness, and trust), which we compare to *emotional consequences*, or the target's emotional response to the information shared (e.g., feelings of envy and happiness), and *impression-management consequences*, or the target's impression of the communicator's character (e.g., perceptions of warmth, competence, and modesty).

Hiding information leads to a number of negative reactions. First, when communicators hide information, targets tend to assume that the hidden information is more negative than it really is (John, Barasz, & Norton, 2016). People assume that individuals who fail to answer questions are hiding extremely negative information, which makes them less likable, trustable, and hireable than those who explicitly reveal unsavory information. Second, omitting expected information can cause targets to feel anxious and uncertain. For example, when doctors omit prognostic information, patients tend to feel more upset and anxious than when doctors give patients truthful negative prognoses or false hope (Levine et al., 2018). Third, hiding information can damage interpersonal trust and reduce intimacy. Hiding information may require emotion suppression, which can increase stress (Butler et al., 2003) and impair memory (Gross, 2002), thereby reducing communication and intimacy with others (Peters, Overall, & Jamieson, 2014; Peters & Jamieson, 2016). Even absent emotion suppression, the process of keeping a success secret may be psychologically burdensome for the communicator, and therefore harmful for their relationship with the target (Slepian, Chun, & Mason, 2017; Slepian, Masicampo, Toosi, & Ambady, 2012).

By hiding success, communicators are also missing out on the interpersonal benefits of capitalization bids. Capitalization is the process by which people derive additional benefit from a positive event by sharing it with others (Langston, 1994). Capitalizing on good fortune has been found to not only have intrapersonal benefits, such as increasing positive affect and life satisfaction, but also interpersonal benefits, such as strengthening intimacy and relationship well-being (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, & Strachman, 2012). Engaging in capitalization bids provides an opportunity for others to respond positively to the good news, which can lead to relationship commitment and satisfaction as well as increase intimacy and trust. Indeed, revealing information deepens relationships (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1999), as self-disclosure is an essential component of trust, particularly in close relationships (Sheldon, 2009; Wheelless & Grotz, 1977). When communicators hide success from others they forgo an opportunity to strengthen their relationships by capitalizing on the event.

Hiding success, as compared to hiding information more broadly, may be particularly damaging for relationships because of the motives it signals. Sharing good news (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Jourard, 1959) and expressing excitement for others' successes (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982) are norms of close relationships and predict relationship success (Gable et al., 2004, 2006). Therefore, hiding success violates the norm of mutual self-disclosure in friendship and signals that the communicator expects the

target to feel envious instead of excited. Unusual, norm-violating behavior captures people's attention and motivates them to seek an explanation (Fiske, 1980; Holland & Gallagher, 2006; Vachon, Hughes, & Jones, 2012). For example, imagine that Suzie recently received a promotion at work. If she tells her friend John about the promotion, John probably will not wonder why she told him and may perceive this as a sign of closeness. But if John finds out that Suzie hid news of her promotion from him, he may wonder why she did so. Given that people often feel jealous when those close to them do well (Tesser et al., 1988; Zuckerman & Jost, 2001), John may believe that Suzie hid her success because she assumed he would be envious and was trying to prevent him from feeling bad. In our studies, we find the inferential process activated by discovered success-hiding leads to more negative relational consequences than both sharing success and never learning about one's success in the first place (i.e., through undiscovered hiding).

What inferences does discovering that someone hid their success activate? Consider again the example of Suzie and John. Suzie may have hid her success from John to prevent him from feeling envious, but if John discovers her success from another source, he will not only feel envious, but will also infer that Suzie assumed he would be jealous and attempted to protect him from this emotional reaction. In other words, John might believe that Suzie's decision to hide her success was guided by *paternalistic motives*, which we define as the intention to help the target based on assumptions about the target's best interest (Lupoli et al., 2018). In general, people find paternalistic motives insulting, even when they recognize the good intentions behind them, because they reflect a decision-maker's negative assumptions about the target's character and emotional resilience (Schroeder, Waytz, & Epley, 2017). Although communicators may hide their success with good intentions, and therefore believe their behavior is ethical, targets may evaluate their dishonest behavior as unethical instead (Hildreth & Anderson, 2018; Lupoli et al., 2018). In sum, we predict that targets will feel less close to and more insulted by communicators who hide their success than communicators who share their success, which is driven by the inference that success-hiders have paternalistic motives.

Furthermore, we predict that the strength of these inferences depends on the degree to which hiding success violates a salient norm of communication within the given conversational context. Specifically, when sharing is normative—as is the case in one-on-one conversations (Taylor, De Soto, & Lieb, 1979), in response to direct questions (Minson, VanEpps, Yip, & Schweitzer, 2018; Schweitzer & Croson, 1999), or in close relationships (Chelune, Waring, Vosk, Sultan, & Ogden, 1984; Petronio & Bantz, 1991; Schweitzer & Croson, 1999)—we predict that hiding success is more likely to lead the target to search for an explanation for the communicator's surprising behavior. Without violating conversational norms, choosing not to share a success may be perceived as modest rather than paternalistic. In these cases, hiding success may be viewed more favorably than sharing success (O'Mara, Kunz, Receveur, & Corbin, 2019).

However, it is important to note that communicators who hide their success may anticipate the negative consequences of doing so, but hide it anyway because they do not think their hiding

behavior will ever be discovered.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is possible that hiding is a good idea because the benefits of undetected hiding outweigh the costs if the hiding is detected. We explore this possibility in the present research by examining targets' reactions to hidden and shared success both when the success is already known (and the target is aware the communicator is hiding their success) and when the success is not already known (and the target is not aware the communicator is hiding their success). In other words, we explore the consequences of hiding success both when the information is discovered and when it is not, and ultimately find that hiding success has relational costs regardless of whether or not the hiding is detected.

### Overview of Research

Across eight studies ( $N = 1,687$ ), seven of which were preregistered, we explore the consequences of hiding success across a broad range of personal and professional successes, and within many different types of relationships, including family members, friends, work colleagues, romantic partners, and classmates. In a pilot study, we document the ubiquity of hiding success in everyday life. In the remainder of our studies, we explore participants' (i.e., targets') reactions to communicators who hide versus share their success. In Study 1, we recruit pairs of actual relational partners and randomly assign one person to share or hide their recent success from their partner. We find that hiding success is a costly relational strategy. In Study 2, we explore the consequences of sharing versus hiding success when the success is either previously known or unknown by the target. We find hiding success has mixed emotional consequences, as it decreases both targets' envy toward and happiness for the communicator. In Study 3, we examine how hiding success affects trust and cooperation in a real-world setting and provide initial evidence that inferences about the communicator's paternalistic motives underlie the relational costs of hiding success. In Study 4, we explore this mechanism in greater detail by comparing hiding success to hiding failure.

In Studies 5–7, we continue to explore our mechanism by documenting the contextual cues that elicit inferences of paternalistic motives. In Study 5, we examine the impact of hiding success in public versus private contexts. In Study 6, we document the relational, emotional, and impression-management consequences of hiding success in response to a direct versus indirect question at two points in time: when the success is unknown and after a third party reveals the success. We find hiding success has mixed impression-management consequences, as it decreases perceptions of competence and warmth, but increases perceptions of modesty. Finally, in Study 7 we compare the consequences of hiding success in close versus distant relationships.

Across all studies, we chose our sample size in advance, and we report all of the variables and conditions we collected. To maximize power across studies, we honed our measures and manipulations in pilot studies. These pilot studies yielded medium main effect sizes ranging from  $d = .66$  to  $d = .77$ . Accordingly, we targeted a minimum sample of 50 participants per cell in our main studies. Power analyses conducted in G\*Power on respective sample sizes and target alpha level ( $\alpha = .05$ ) revealed that we had sufficient power (i.e.,  $\geq .80$  in all studies except Study 4, which due to recruitment limitations had power of  $.77$ ) to detect a

medium to large effect (e.g.,  $d = .60$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ ). All data, syntax, and materials are available through the Open Science Framework: <https://tinyurl.com/HidingSuccessOSF>.

### Pilot Study

In our pilot study, we document the ubiquity and nature of hiding success in everyday life.

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 101 individuals from a park in downtown Chicago (48% female;  $M$  age = 37.92) to participate in a study on an electronic tablet.

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read a brief description of hiding success and then reported whether or not they had ever hidden a success from another person. If participants had hidden a success before, they described the situation, who they had hidden success from, and why.

**Dependent variables.** Participants first indicated whether or not they had ever hidden a success before: "Have you ever tried to hide a success from another person?" (dichotomous choice: yes, no, or do not know). If participants reported they had hidden a success, they were asked to describe the situation: "In a few sentences, please describe a situation where you hid your success from another person." Participants then selected all of the types of people they have hidden a success from out of a list of eight: acquaintance, close friend, colleague/coworker, competitor, family member, stranger, superior, and other.

Participants were then asked to describe their motivation for hiding success in two formats. First, they were asked to write an open response: "Why did you try to hide your success? In a few sentences, please provide your reasoning." In addition, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they hid their success because of eight different reasons, (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*): (a) "You did not know how the recipient would respond to your success," (b) "You did not think the recipient would be happy for your success," (c) "You thought it would be awkward to share your success," (d) "You thought the recipient would be upset with you if they knew your success," (e) "You thought the recipient would be envious of your success," (f) "You were embarrassed of your success," (g) "You did not want to brag about your success," and (h) "You thought the recipient would feel bad about themselves if they knew about your success." At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

### Results

**Frequency of hiding success.** Hiding success is ubiquitous in everyday life. The majority of participants could recall hiding a success from another person: 82% of participants (83 of 101 participants) reported trying to hide their success from others.

**Descriptions of hiding success.** Participants described hiding a wide range of successes. Their descriptions revealed that 55% of

<sup>1</sup> A supplemental study (see Study S3 in online supplemental materials 11) found that communicators recognized that targets would feel more insulted by, less close to, less happy for, and similarly envious of communicators who hid, rather than shared, their success.

participants hid success in school (“My friend got a lower grade than me in an exam, so I didn’t want to upset her and lied that I got the same grade as her”) or at work (“I received a promotion at work but didn’t tell one of my friends because she was having a difficult time at her job”), 13% hid personal events (“Pregnancy because close friends couldn’t get pregnant”) and goals (“I qualified for the Boston Marathon and I didn’t tell anyone. The race was a pretty big deal”), and 17% hid signals of high status, such as their education (“I was interacting with a college student from ‘lower’ ranked college who asked me about my graduation degree. I omitted my college name so as not to seem arrogant”) or wealth (“My best friend has less money than me and I don’t tell her about some of my trips and purchases”).

**Relationship with the target.** Participants hid success from many different types of people in their lives. The majority of people hid success from colleagues and coworkers (57%), followed by close friends (45%), family members (45%), acquaintances (40%), strangers (40%), competitors (34%), and superiors (23%).

**Motivation for hiding success.** Participants had many different motivations for hiding their success. The strongest reason for hiding success was to avoid bragging ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ), followed by a concern that the target would feel envious ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ), that the target would feel bad about themselves ( $M = 4.59$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ), and that sharing success would feel awkward ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ).

## Discussion

These findings indicate that hiding success is common in everyday life. People hide success from both close and distant others in a variety of different contexts. Communicators’ most common motivation for hiding their success is the desire avoid bragging. Yet, as we find in the next seven studies, the primary motivation targets *infer* is that communicators hide their success because they want to regulate targets’ envy. This inference leads to a number of relational costs.

### Study 1: Target Reactions

Study 1 examines the relational and emotional consequences of hiding success. We recruited pairs of relational partners and had one person in the pair share or hide a recent success from their life with their partner. We preregistered Study 1 on AsPredicted.org (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=ah2tj8>).

## Method

**Participants.** We recruited 153 pairs of undergraduate and business school students from a university in the Midwest. For each pair, we randomly assigned one participant to be the communicator (52% female;  $M$  age = 29.58) and one participant to be the target (51% female;  $M$  age = 30.07).

All pairs of participants knew each other before starting the experiment: 48% were friends, 17% were work colleagues, 14% were romantic partners, 12% were spouses, 5% were family members, 3% were acquaintances, and 1% were in other relationships.

**Procedure and materials.** Pairs of people were approached on campus and upon consent were randomly assigned to the role of

communicator or target. The communicator received a tablet with the survey instructions first, while the target waited.

At the beginning of the survey, communicators provided the target’s (i.e., their partner’s) name and answered questions about their relationship with the target. Specifically, they indicated how close they felt to the target, how long they had known the target, and the nature of their relationship with the target (e.g., friends, work colleagues, romantic partners, etc.). Then, as a cover story, communicators were told: “In this study we are interested in personal positive life events. We define a personal positive event as an event that makes you happy, proud, or excited. For the question below, please choose an event that is a personal positive event for you, but that [piped text: target name] does not know about.” Communicators then described a recent success in their life: “In the space below, please describe a recent success in your life. The success should be a recent event that you are proud of and think is impressive. For example, perhaps you achieved a personal goal or received praise from your boss at work.” After describing their success, communicators rated how much they would want the target to read their response and provided demographic information.

The communicator then passed the tablet to the target. In the next part of the study, targets were asked to answer the same questions about their relationship with the communicator as the communicator answered, which included how close they felt to the communicator, how long they had known the communicator, and the nature of their relationship with the communicator (e.g., friends, work colleagues, romantic partners, etc.). Targets were informed we would not share the information they provided with the communicator. Then targets learned that communicators answered a question about personal positive events in their life and rated how much they wanted to share what they wrote with the target.

Regardless of the communicators’ preferences for having their success shared, we randomly assigned targets to either a share or hide condition. In the hide condition, we displayed the question the communicator faced about their recent success and told targets: “[Piped text: communicator name] indicated that they did not want to share their response to this question with you.” In the share condition, we displayed the question the communicator faced about their recent success, piped text of the communicator’s response, and told targets: “[Piped text: communicator name] indicated that they wanted to share their response to this question with you.”<sup>2</sup> Then targets responded to the dependent variables.

### Dependent variables.

**Relational consequences.** Our main dependent variables were perceived insult and closeness (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Participants rated their feelings of insult with three items ( $\alpha = .86$ ): “To what extent do you feel insulted?” “To what extent do you feel offended?” and “To what extent do you feel angry with [piped text: communicator name]?” Participants indicated how close they felt to the communicator with one item: “To what extent do you feel close to [piped text: communicator name]?”

<sup>2</sup> Communicators knew their response could be shared and could opt out of the study if they strongly objected to sharing the information. Only five pairs of participants (3%) chose not to finish the entire study.

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 1,  $N = 153$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Share vs. hide
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> test
Insult	1.07	0.35	1.56	1.03	$F(1, 151) = 15.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$
Closeness	4.94	1.50	3.97	2.15	$F(1, 151) = 10.29, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .06$
Envy	1.58	1.34	1.26	0.77	$F(1, 151) = 3.29, p = .072, \eta_p^2 = .02$
Happiness	6.39	0.98	4.61	2.30	$F(1, 151) = 39.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$
Willingness to pay	0.78	0.31	0.62	0.39	$F(1, 151) = 7.57, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .05$

Note. Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means.

**Emotional consequences.** We also examined envy and happiness (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*): “To what extent do you feel envious of [piped text: communicator name]?” and “To what extent do you feel happy for [piped text: communicator name]?”

**Behavioral consequences.** As a behavioral measure of closeness, we asked participants how much money they were willing to pay to send a friendly e-card greeting to the communicator. We informed participants that “the e-card greeting is intended to make your partner feel happy and remind them of your friendship” and that they could write a short message to their partner to accompany the e-card.

To make the decision consequential, all participants were given a \$1.00 Amazon gift card and were told they could spend as much of the \$1.00 as they wanted to send the e-card to the communicator. Participants could keep any money that they did not spend on the e-card in the form of the Amazon gift card. We used a Becker-DeGroot-Marschak mechanism (Becker, DeGroot, & Marschak, 1964) to determine prices and to elicit the participant’s willingness to pay for the card. Specifically, we told participants that we would randomly select a price between \$0.01 and \$1.00. If the participant’s willingness to pay exceeded the selected amount, then the card would be sent for the selected price and the participant would keep any money left over (\$1 minus the selected price). However, if the participant’s willingness to pay did not exceed the selected amount, then the e-card would not be sent and the participant would keep the \$1 gift card. Participants selected one of six friendly e-card greetings and then answered (\$0.00 to \$1.00): “How much of the \$1.00 would you be willing to pay to send the e-card greeting you selected to [piped text: communicator name]?” The exact instructions are available via OSF (<https://tinyurl.com/HidingSuccessOSF>). At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

## Results

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on all of our dependent variables, using Decision to Share as a between-subjects factor.<sup>3</sup> We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 1 and categorize the successes reported by communicators in Table 2.

**Relational consequences.** We found a significant main effect of Decision to Share on feelings of insult,  $F(1, 151) = 15.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ , and closeness,  $F(1, 151) = 10.29, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .06$ . As predicted, targets felt more insulted by and less close to communicators who hid, rather than shared, their success. In sum, hiding success led to negative relational consequences.

**Emotional consequences.** We found a significant effect of Decision to Share on happiness,  $F(1, 151) = 39.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$ , such that targets felt less happy for communicators who hid, rather than shared, their success. We did not find a significant effect of the Decision to Share on envy,  $F(1, 151) = 3.29, p = .072, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . In sum, hiding success led to negative emotional consequences.

**Behavioral consequences.** We found a significant effect of Decision to Share on the willingness to pay for the e-card,  $F(1, 151) = 7.57, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , such that targets were willing to pay less money to send a friendly greeting card to communicators who hid their success than communicators who shared their success. In sum, hiding success led to negative behavioral consequences.

## Discussion

Study 1 documents the relational costs of hiding success. Targets felt more insulted by and less close to communicators who hid their success than to communicators who shared their success. These relational costs had behavioral consequences. When targets learned their partner hid their success, they were less willing to spend money on a token of their friendship (a friendly e-card). Hiding success also led to negative emotional consequences, as targets were less happy for the communicator when the communicator hid rather than shared their success. Overall, the results of Study 1 suggest hiding success from close relational partners has relational, behavioral, and emotional costs.

In addition to the preregistered analyses, we explored the moderating role of the communicator’s desire to hide their success from the target on the target’s reactions. After describing a recent success from their life, communicators were asked: “How much would you want [piped text: target’s name] to read your response to the question?” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Regardless of the communicator’s response, the target was randomly assigned to

<sup>3</sup> We also conducted additional analyses in Study 1 to explore how the gender composition of the communicator-target dyads affected our results. We found that feelings of insult were significantly greater in mixed-gender dyads than in same-gender dyads, interaction:  $F(1, 147) = 5.75, p = .018$ . The gender composition of the dyads did not moderate any other effects. We report these results in more detail in online supplemental materials 1.

<sup>4</sup> We note, however, that the effect of Decision to Share on envy was marginal, which was also the case in Study 6. We discuss the effect of hiding success on feelings of envy across all studies in the General Discussion.

Table 2  
*Categories of Success (Study 1, N = 153)*

Percent	Category	Example
31%	Academic success	Got a 4.0 GPA.
21%	Work success	I got a nice bonus and pay raise from work.
18%	Personal success	Cooked a good meal with only one pot.
12%	Praise from others	My bosses at work complemented me on asking really good questions.
6%	Athletic success	Hit a personal best lifting weights last week.
6%	Social success	Started a Twitter account and gained a large follower count.
5%	Other success	Achieved a certification.

learn that the communicator hid or shared their success. Although one might expect that hiding success would be a more effective communication strategy for successes that the communicator is reluctant to share, we found no significant moderation by the communicator's desire to hide (each  $p > .100$ ). In this naturalistic paradigm, the communicator's desire to hide their success did not significantly influence the relational or emotional consequences of hiding success.<sup>5</sup>

## Study 2: Hiding Known Versus Unknown Success

In Study 2, we examine the consequences of hiding and sharing success when the success is already known and when the success is not otherwise discovered. We predict that when the success is not discovered, hiding success will not have relational penalties (though it may also not have any benefits), as the target is not aware the communicator is hiding information. However, when the success is discovered, we predict that hiding success will have more relational costs than sharing success, consistent with the results of Study 1. We preregistered Study 2 on AsPredicted.org (<http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=d5ee2s>).

## Method

**Participants.** We intended to recruit 400 participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to participate in an online study in exchange for \$0.30.<sup>6</sup> We ended up with a final sample of 403 adults (53% female;  $M$  age = 35.77).

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read two scenarios in a random order. Each scenario described a situation in which a close other decided to either share or hide their success. The success was either previously known or unknown to the participant. That is, we randomly assigned participants to a condition from a 2 (Scenario: weight loss or salary)  $\times$  2 (Previous Knowledge: known or unknown)  $\times$  2 (Decision to Share: share or hide) mixed within-between subject design. Scenario was a within-subject factor; Previous Knowledge and Decision to Share were between-subjects factors.

In both conditions, participants learned background information that would make the knowledge of the communicator's success meaningful. In the salary condition, participants read:

Imagine that you live in a midsize city and have been working for a few years. You make an annual salary of \$50,000. You come from a family of four, and you are close with your parents and your younger brother. Your brother lives in the same city and has been working at a market research company for two years.

We chose to explore a situation in which the target was in a relatively worse position than the communicator. Sharing success has the greatest potential to damage relationships when there is a relevant social comparison (Arnett & Sidanius, 2018; Dunn et al., 2012; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008; Swencionis & Fiske, 2016). In a supplemental study, we found that communicators were most likely to hide their success when they were engaged in a downward social comparison—when the communicator was in a relatively better position than the target (see Study S1 in online supplemental materials 9 for details). To create the downward social comparison, participants in the salary scenario imagined that they had been working in the same position for two years with an annual salary of \$50,000, and participants in weight-loss scenario imagined that they had not lost any weight after dieting for three months.

Participants read about a third party—the participant's mother in the salary scenario and the participant's friend in the diet scenario—who either informed the participant about the communicator's success (known condition) or stated neutral information about the communicator (unknown condition). In the salary scenario and known success condition, participants read: "You are talking with your mother one day, and she mentions that your younger brother recently received a raise from \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year." In the salary scenario and unknown success condition, participants instead read: "You are talking with your mother one day, and she mentions that she recently talked to your younger brother."

The diet scenario followed the same format, but instead described the participant talking with a friend named Erik about the weight loss of another friend, Rebecca.

Next, all participants learned that they talked to their brother [friend] later that day. In the share condition, their brother [friend] shared their success by repeating the same information that had been provided in the known condition. In the hide condition, their brother [friend] hid their success by saying that nothing was new.

<sup>5</sup> We also explored the moderating role of the target's initial closeness with the communicator. However, because we did not manipulate closeness directly, our ability to interpret these results is limited. We report these results in online supplemental materials 2 and more precisely investigate the moderating role of relationship closeness in Study 7.

<sup>6</sup> For all MTurk studies, participants were only eligible to take our study if they passed an attention check. In the attention check, we presented participants with a paragraph of text about the importance of wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle that ended with: "Select rarely for the question below". We then asked participants: "How often do you wear your helmet when riding a bike?" Participants who failed the attention check twice were not eligible to participate in the study.

Therefore, in the known and share condition, participants learned about the communicator's success from a third party and then the communicator also chose to share that success with the target. In the known and hide condition, participants learned about the communicator's success from a third party and then realized that the communicator chose *not* to share that success with the target. In the unknown and share condition, participants did not learn about the communicator's success from a third party, but then the communicator chose to share the success with them. Lastly, in the in the unknown and hide condition, participants did not learn about the communicator's success from a third party nor did the communicator share the success with them. Thus, the unknown and hide condition serves as a no-information control condition.

#### Dependent variables.

**Manipulation check.** As a manipulation check, we asked participants: "In this scenario, how does your salary [dieting] compare to your brother's salary [Rebecca's dieting]?" (1 = *you make much less [lost much less weight]*, 7 = *you make much more [lost much more weight]*).

**Relational consequences.** We collected the same measures of perceived insult ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and closeness as in Study 1.

**Emotional consequences.** We collected the same measures of envy and happiness as in Study 1. At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

## Results

We ran OLS regressions on the dependent measures, using Decision to Share, Previous Knowledge, and the Decision to Share  $\times$  Previous Knowledge interaction as the independent variables. We used an OLS regression in Study 2 and ANOVAs in all other studies because in Study 2 participants were assigned to different conditions in each of the two scenarios they viewed, and thus, a mixed within-between subjects ANOVA was not appropriate. To account for the fact that each participant made two judgments (one within each scenario), we clustered standard errors at the participant level, using the `lm.cluster` command in the "miceadds" package for R (Robitzsch, Grund, & Henke, 2017).<sup>7</sup> For completeness, we replicated this analysis adding Scenario as an independent variable and the Scenario  $\times$  Decision to Share and Scenario  $\times$  Previous Knowledge interactions. Adding these terms does not qualitatively change our results. We provide the detailed regression results in online supplemental materials 3 and all descriptive statistics in Table 3.

**Manipulation check.** We found a significant Previous Knowledge  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction on the manipulation check ( $b = 1.60, p < .001$ ). Consistent with the intent of the manipulation, when the success was previously unknown, participants perceived the communicator as more successful when the communicator shared rather than hid their success ( $b = 1.71, p < .001$ ). However, when the success was previously known, participants perceived the communicator as successful in both the share and hide conditions ( $b = 0.11, p = .431$ ). The main effects of Previous Knowledge and Decision to Share were not significant (each  $p > .400$ ).

**Relational consequences.** We found a significant main effect of Decision to Share on insult ( $b = 1.15, p < .001$ ) and closeness ( $b = -1.40, p < .001$ ). The main effects were qualified by a significant Previous Knowledge  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction on insult ( $b = -0.93, p < .001$ ) and closeness ( $b = 1.04, p < .001$ ).

Table 3  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 2,  $N = 403$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Hide vs. share
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test
Manipulation check					
Know					
Salary	2.17	1.25	2.20	1.35	$t(202) = .20, p = .845$
Diet	2.09	1.39	2.27	1.47	$t(199) = .90, p = .372$
Total	2.13	1.32	2.24	1.41	$b = 0.11, p = .431$
Don't know					
Salary	2.26	1.12	4.10	0.95	$t(197) = 12.49, p < .001$
Diet	2.08	1.43	3.66	0.92	$t(200) = 9.38, p < .001$
Total	2.17	1.28	3.88	0.96	$b = 1.71, p < .001$
Insult					
Know					
Salary	1.52	1.00	2.85	1.62	$t(201) = 7.00, p < .001$
Diet	1.74	1.21	2.71	1.58	$t(198) = 4.91, p < .001$
Total	1.63	1.11	2.78	1.60	$b = 1.15, p < .001$
Don't know					
Salary	1.67	1.07	1.93	1.32	$t(197) = 1.55, p = .123$
Diet	1.78	1.21	1.96	1.37	$t(198) = 1.02, p = .309$
Total	1.72	1.14	1.95	1.34	$b = 0.23, p = .064$
Closeness					
Know					
Salary	5.22	1.39	3.65	1.68	$t(202) = 7.26, p < .001$
Diet	4.65	1.52	3.41	1.61	$t(199) = 5.63, p < .001$
Total	4.92	1.48	3.52	1.65	$b = -1.40, p < .001$
Don't know					
Salary	5.17	1.49	4.66	1.60	$t(197) = 2.37, p = .019$
Diet	4.48	1.45	4.30	1.44	$t(199) = .90, p = .371$
Total	4.83	1.51	4.47	1.53	$b = -0.36, p = .016$
Envy					
Know					
Salary	3.82	1.93	4.10	1.93	$t(202) = 1.02, p = .309$
Diet	4.27	1.81	4.06	1.96	$t(199) = .78, p = .436$
Total	4.04	1.88	4.08	1.94	$b = 0.03, p = .862$
Don't know					
Salary	4.16	1.94	2.03	1.52	$t(197) = 8.55, p < .001$
Diet	4.16	2.07	2.19	1.42	$t(200) = 7.87, p < .001$
Total	4.16	2.00	2.11	1.47	$b = -2.04, p < .001$
Happiness					
Know					
Salary	6.06	1.11	5.18	1.53	$t(202) = 4.66, p < .001$
Diet	5.76	1.45	4.63	1.76	$t(199) = 4.98, p < .001$
Total	5.91	1.30	4.91	1.67	$b = -1.00, p < .001$
Don't know					
Salary	5.95	1.29	4.35	1.52	$t(197) = 7.98, p < .001$
Diet	5.79	1.23	3.83	1.64	$t(200) = 9.61, p < .001$
Total	5.87	1.26	4.09	1.60	$b = -1.78, p < .001$

*Note.* Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means. To account for the fact that each participant made two judgments in different conditions, the Total comparisons report the main effect of Decision to Share with clustered standard errors at the participant level.

When the communicator's success was previously unknown, participants felt significantly less close to ( $b = -0.36, p = .016$ ) their brother [friend]—but not significantly more insulted by their brother [friend] ( $b = 0.23, p = .064$ )—when he hid his success than when he shared his success. Thus, hiding success decreased closeness relative to never having the success revealed. This result

<sup>7</sup> This analysis differed from the analysis in the preregistration, which did not account for the fact that each participant made two judgments in different conditions.



is consistent with our proposition that sharing is normative and rewarded in close relationships.

When the success was known, hiding significantly increased feelings of insult ( $b = 1.15, p < .001$ ) and reduced feelings of closeness ( $b = -1.40, p < .001$ ) as compared to sharing success.

The main effects of Previous Knowledge on insult and closeness were not significant (each  $p > .350$ ). In sum, hiding success led to negative relational consequences, which were stronger when the success was known than when the success was unknown (see Figure 1).

**Emotional consequences.** We found a significant Previous Knowledge  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction on envy ( $b = -2.07, p < .001$ ). There was also a significant main effect of Decision to Share on happiness ( $b = -1.00, p < .001$ ), which was qualified by

a significant Previous Knowledge  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction ( $b = -0.78, p < .001$ ).

When the success was previously unknown, hiding success decreased feelings of envy ( $b = -2.04, p < .001$ ) and happiness ( $b = -1.78, p < .001$ ). That is, participants felt less envious and happy for their brother [friend] when he hid his success (and they never found out about it) than when he shared his success.

When the success was known, participants were similarly envious of ( $b = 0.03, p = .862$ ) and less happy for ( $b = -1.00, p < .001$ ) their brother [friend] when he hid his success than when he shared his success. Learning about another's success led to the same level of envy regardless of who revealed the success. Although hiding success reduced participants' happiness both when the success was known and unknown, it reduced happiness more when the success was unknown.

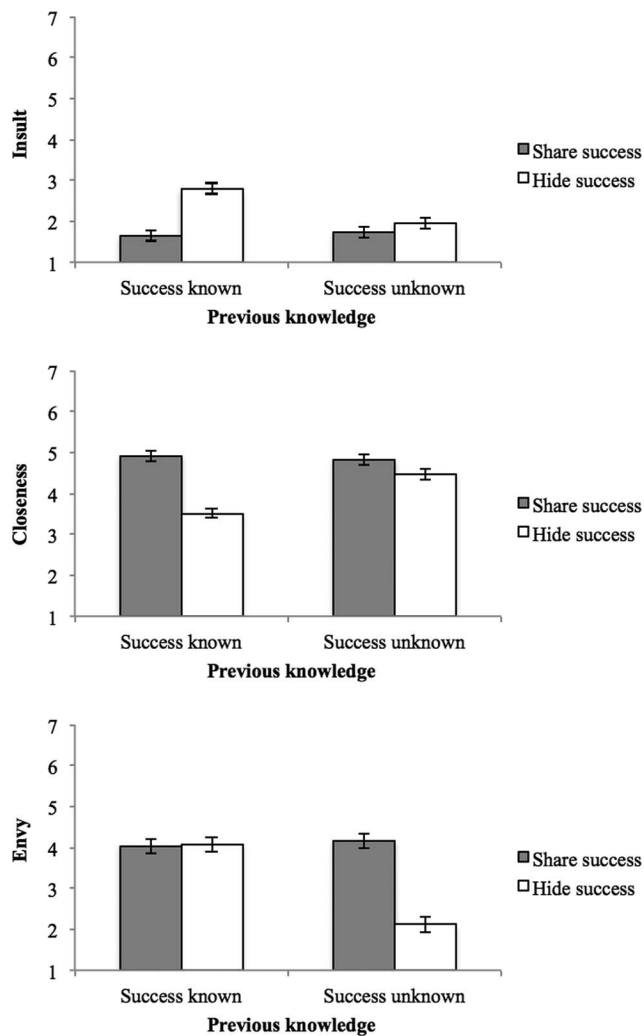
The main effect of Decision to Share on envy and the main effects of Previous Knowledge on envy and happiness were not significant (each  $p > .550$ ). In sum, hiding success had mixed emotional consequences when the success was unknown and negative emotional consequences when the success was known.

## Discussion

Study 2 provides further evidence of the relational costs of hiding success. When the communicators' success was already known, targets felt more insulted by and less close to communicators who hid, rather than shared, their success. Interestingly, this study also finds no relational benefit of hiding success when the success was never revealed. If anything, there was actually a relational cost to hiding success—or conversely, a benefit to openly sharing success—even when a target had no other means of finding out about a communicator's success or the act of hiding. When the success was unknown, hiding still decreased closeness. Taken together, these results suggest that hiding success is a bad strategy for relationship maintenance: There is a reliable cost to hiding when the success is known and a mild cost (but no benefit) when the success is unknown. Hiding success is unwise when a communicator's goal is to foster a positive relationship with the target.

Importantly, however, our results also suggest that communicators are not wrong to believe their success will elicit envy. Targets did feel more envious when learning about the communicators' success. Thus, hiding success can have positive emotional consequences for the target. The target was equally envious of the communicator regardless of how they discovered the success and was more envious than if they never found out about the success because the communicator successfully hid it. However, the depth of an individual's relationship (i.e., closeness) was only modestly correlated with envy,  $r = -.121, p = .001$ , which suggests envy does not preclude closeness. In addition, envy was positively correlated with happiness,  $r = .184, p < .001$ . Communicators may not appreciate that targets can feel both envious and genuinely happy for others' success.

We posit that the relational costs of hiding success are predicted not by the emotions the target feels in response to the communicator's success, but rather by the inferences that targets make about the communicator's motives—in this case, why the communicator hid or shared the success and what that signals to the target about



**Figure 1.** The relational and emotional consequences of sharing versus hiding known versus unknown successes (Study 2). Ratings were made on 7-point scales. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Consistent with our predictions, there was an interaction between a known or unknown success and the decision to share or hide the success for each of our dependent variables ( $ps < .001$ ), such that hiding success increased insult and reduced closeness more when the success was previously known, but reduced envy more when the success was previously unknown.

the nature of the relationship. We explore these inferences further in the next study.

### Study 3: Paternalistic Motives

In Studies 1 and 2, we find that hiding success has relational costs. In Study 3, we explore why this is the case. We predict that when a communicator hides their success, the target infers that this behavior is driven by the communicator's paternalistic motives. That is, the target may believe the communicator assumes the target will be threatened by their success and is attempting to protect the target's feelings.

Study 3 tests this proposition and also extends our findings in three important ways. First, Study 3 examines reactions to hiding success in a realistic workplace context with actual practitioners. Specifically, we examine how academics react to colleagues who share or hide news of their job interviews. Furthermore, whereas a third party revealed previous knowledge of the communicator's success in Study 2, success is discovered from a neutral online source in Study 3. This eliminates the possibility that the relational costs of hiding success are driven by negative feelings about the discovery that the communicator revealed the success to another person instead of the target.

Third, Study 3 examines how hiding success affects trust and cooperation intentions. Learning that someone chose to hide information from you may signal that they distrust you. Affective trust is rooted in mutual vulnerability (McAllister, 1995; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Thus, an unwillingness to trust often results in reciprocal distrust. Accordingly, we predict that hiding success will reduce feelings of affective trust. We also include a measure of cooperation intentions because cooperation decisions are common in professional and personal life and capture both the willingness to trust and goodwill toward a relational partner (Mayer et al., 1995). Therefore, we expect that hiding success could also reduce cooperative intentions. We preregistered Study 3 on AsPredicted.org (<http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=ph2zk5>).

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 114 academics for this study (52% female;  $M$  age = 37.02), 106 from a large academic management conference in Chicago and eight from a public Google spreadsheet with information on the 2018 management job market.

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read the following scenario about the academic job market:

Imagine that you are a PhD candidate on the management job market this year. Your close friend Alex is in the same program at your school and is also going on the academic job market this year. You are applying to a similar set of top universities in the field.

One day you are looking on the website of a top university that you are interested in when you see that Alex is scheduled to give a job talk at the school.

Later in the week you run into Alex on campus and you ask him if he has any updates from the job market.

Next, we randomly assigned participants to either a share or hide condition. In the share condition, Alex shares his success on the

job market with the participant. In the hide condition, Alex hides his success on the job market from the participant by saying that nothing is new.

**Dependent variables.** We collected the same measures of perceived insult ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and closeness as in Studies 1 and 2.

**Paternalistic motives.** Participants responded to nine items intended to measure perceptions of the communicator's paternalistic motives (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*;  $\alpha = .87$ ). The items were separated into two categories but loaded together on a single factor in a pilot study (see Study S6 in online supplemental materials 14 for details), and thus were combined to create one composite scale of paternalistic motives.<sup>8</sup> The first set of items assessed whether participants (targets) thought the communicator believed the target would be threatened by the communicator's success: "To what extent would you believe Alex thought": (a) "You would be upset?", (b) "You could not handle the truth?", (c) "You would be envious?", (d) "You would be happy for him?" (reverse-scored), (e) "You could not handle learning about his success?", and (f) "You would feel threatened?"

The second set of items assessed the extent to which participants believed the communicator acted on their negative beliefs (i.e., by manipulating the target): "To what extent would you believe Alex was": (g) "Attempting to regulate your emotions?", (h) "Attempting to manipulate your feelings?", and (i) "Being condescending?"

**Affective trust.** We also explored how hiding success influenced affective trust with five measures (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .94$ ): (a) "Soon after this interaction, I would feel comfortable sharing my most outlandish ideas and hopes with this person", (b) "Soon after this interaction, I would feel comfortable talking with this person about difficulties I am having at work", (c) "Soon after this interaction, I would feel comfortable admitting my worst mistakes to this person", (d) "Soon after this interaction, I would feel comfortable relying on this person for support when I need it", and (e) "Soon after this interaction, I would feel comfortable revealing information to this person that I don't want others to know about." The items were adapted from previous measures of affective trust (Dunn et al., 2012).

**Cooperation.** Participants also indicated their cooperation intentions: "How likely are you to collaborate with Alex on research projects in the future?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Although theoretically distinct, collaboration is considered a form of cooperation (Anvur & Kumaraswamy, 2008). At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

### Results

We conducted a one-way ANOVA on all of our dependent variables, using Decision to Share as a between-subjects factor. We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 4.

**Relational consequences.** We found significant effects of Decision to Share on insult,  $F(1, 112) = 71.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .39$ ;

<sup>8</sup> We conducted additional analyses for every study that measured paternalistic motives to explore how hiding success differentially influenced the two sub-components of the paternalistic motives measure. Overall, we found that hiding success increased the target's perception that the communicator both assumed the target would be threatened and attempted to regulate the target's threat. We report these results in more detail in online supplemental materials 4.

Table 4  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 3,  $N = 114$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Share vs. hide <i>F</i> test
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Insult	1.66	0.91	3.75	1.66	$F(1, 112) = 71.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .39$
Closeness	3.54	1.73	2.25	1.16	$F(1, 112) = 21.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$
Paternalistic motives	2.60	1.03	3.87	1.07	$F(1, 110) = 41.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$
Affective trust	3.90	1.48	2.20	0.92	$F(1, 109) = 51.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$
Cooperation	5.08	1.38	3.55	1.37	$F(1, 112) = 35.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$

Note. Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means.

closeness,  $F(1, 112) = 21.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 110) = 41.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$ , affective trust,  $F(1, 109) = 51.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$ , and cooperation,  $F(1, 112) = 35.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ . Consistent with our predictions, participants felt more insulted, felt less close, inferred more paternalistic motives, felt less affective trust, and were less likely to cooperate with the communicator in the future when he hid his success than when he shared his success. In sum, hiding success led to universally negative relational consequences (see Figure 2).

**Mediation analysis.** We ran a mediation analysis to examine whether the belief that the communicator had paternalistic motives increased feelings of insult. Specifically, we ran a mediation analysis with Decision to Share as the independent variable (hide = 0, share = 1), paternalistic motives as the mediator variable, and insult as the dependent variable (Model 4 of SPSS Macro MEDIATE with 10,000 samples; Hayes, 2017). We found that our proposed paternalistic motives mechanism mediated the

effect of the Decision to Share on feelings of insult (indirect effect =  $-1.23, SE = 0.25, 95\% CI [-1.72, -0.74]$ ).

**Discussion**

Study 3 reveals that the relational costs of hiding success are mediated by the belief that the communicator has paternalistic motives. Specifically, when communicators hid their success, targets were more likely to infer paternalistic motives, and thus, to feel more insulted. When communicators hid success, targets made negative inferences about the communicator’s beliefs and motives.

Study 3 also finds additional relational costs of hiding success: reduced trust and cooperation. Academics who hid their job market success were judged lower in affective trust and rated as less desirable collaborators than academics who shared their success.

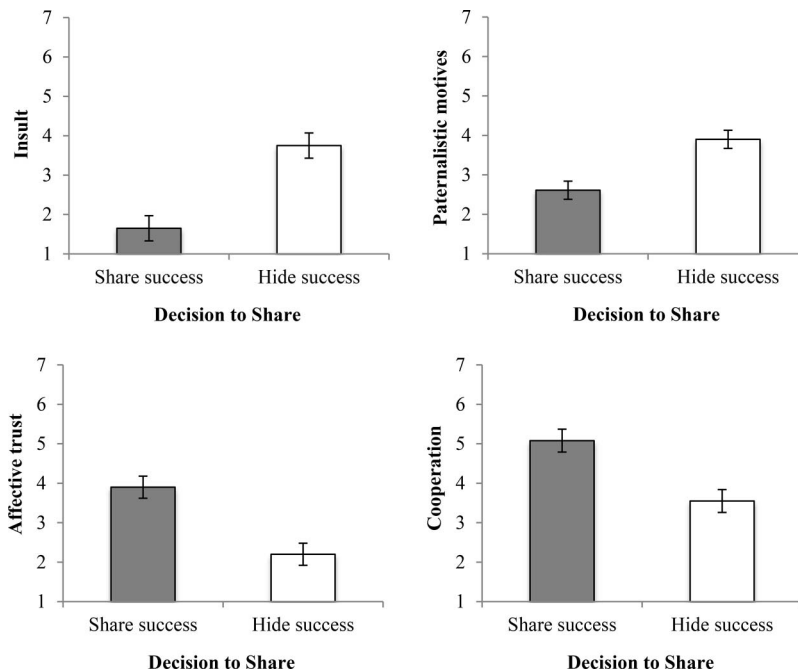


Figure 2. The relational consequences of sharing versus hiding successes (Study 3). Ratings were made on seven-point ratings scales. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Consistent with our predictions, there was a significant main effect for the decision to share or hide the success on all dependent measures ( $ps < .001$ ).

### Study 4: Hiding Success Versus Failure

In Study 4, we explore our proposed mechanism in greater detail by comparing reactions to hiding success and hiding failure. We propose that hiding success has unique relational costs relative to other hiding decisions. The inference that a communicator has paternalistic motives is uniquely activated by hiding positive self-relevant information or accomplishments. If the communicator hides failure, this suggests they are embarrassed or ashamed of themselves, but it does not signal that the communicator assumes the target will be threatened. Although hiding any information may be penalized in social interactions, hiding success in particular signals that the communicator has paternalistic motives, which activates the feeling of insult. We test this in Study 4, which we preregistered on AsPredicted.org (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=zs8xe7>).

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 288 undergraduate students from three universities in the United States (53% female;  $M$  age = 20.13) to participate in a study in exchange for \$2.00.<sup>9</sup>

**Procedure and materials.** Participants first arrived to a laboratory and completed a survey about themselves in which they answered questions about their gender, age, and grade point average (GPA). Next, participants learned they would be paired with a partner for the remainder of the study. They were told that their partner was another student in the lab who had also answered questions about their gender, age, and GPA at the beginning of the study. Participants learned that their partner answered the same questions twice: First, after their partner was told that their answers would be shared with the participant (“The first time, your partner was told it was very likely that their responses would be shared with you. Your partner intentionally answered these questions to provide you with information about themselves”) and second, after their partner was told that their answers would probably not be shared with the participant (“The second time, your partner was told it was very unlikely that their responses would be shared with you. Your partner provided these answers as demographic information and did not know that you would see them”). Therefore, participants knew their partner’s answers to the two questions might differ.

Participants then received the two sets of information about their partner’s age, gender, and GPA. In between reviewing the two sets of information, participants were required to report their partner’s GPA and age to ensure they had read the information about their partner.

Participants were then randomly assigned to a condition from a 2 (Decision to Share: hide vs. share)  $\times$  2 (Outcome: success vs. failure) between-subjects design. In the hide condition, participants read that their partner said they didn’t remember their GPA when they knew the information would likely be shared with the participant, but reported their GPA when they thought it was very unlikely the information would be shared with the participant (see Figure 3). In the share condition, participants read that their partner reported the same GPA both when they knew it was very likely it would be shared and when they knew it was very unlikely it would be shared. In the success condition, participants read that their partner’s GPA was 3.90. In the failure condition, participants read

that their partner’s GPA was 2.89. Participants always read that the partner was 19 years old and the same gender as the participant.

**Dependent variables.** We collected the same measures of insult ( $\alpha = .94$ ), closeness, and paternalistic motives ( $\alpha = .86$ ) as in Study 3.<sup>10</sup>

Participants also responded to four additional items (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), which were intended to explore the perceived shame associated with hiding failure. Participants answered: “To what extent do you believe your partner feels”: (a) “Ashamed?”, (b) “Embarrassed?”, (c) “Afraid of your judgment?”, and (d) “Afraid of your pity?” We combined these items into a composite measure of perceived shame ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

As a manipulation check, we asked participants: “How does your GPA compare to your partner’s GPA?” (1 = *yours is much lower*, 7 = *yours is much higher*). At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

### Results

We conducted a two-way ANOVA on all of our dependent variables, using Outcome and Decision to Share as between-subjects factors. We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 5.

**Manipulation check.** Consistent with the intent of the manipulation, we found a main effect of Outcome on the manipulation check,  $F(1, 284) = 480.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .63$ . Participants on average had lower GPAs than their partner in the success condition and higher GPAs than their partner in the failure condition. Specifically, in the success condition, 86% of participants had a lower GPA than the target, 4% had the same GPA, and 10% had a higher GPA, whereas in the failure condition, 88% of participants had a higher GPA than the target, 6% had the same GPA, and 6% had a lower GPA. There was no significant main effect or interaction based on Decision to Share (each  $p > .250$ ). As preregistered, we did not drop any participants from the analyses based on the manipulation check.

**Relational consequences.** We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on insult,  $F(1, 284) = 7.39, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 284) = 62.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$ , and perceived shame,  $F(1, 284) = 166.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .37$ . Participants felt more insulted and perceived that their partner had greater paternalistic motives and shame when their partner hid information rather than shared information.

The two-way ANOVAs also revealed significant main effects of Outcome on closeness,  $F(1, 284) = 7.05, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 284) = 44.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$ , and perceived shame,  $F(1, 278) = 90.22, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ . Participants felt less close to their partner in the success condition than in the failure condition. Participants also perceived their partner had more paternalistic motives and less shame in the success condition than in the failure condition.

These main effects were qualified by significant Decision to Share  $\times$  Outcome interactions on paternalistic motives,  $F(1,$

<sup>9</sup> We preregistered a target sample size of 300 participants. However, we exhausted our subject pool after ten months and therefore had to end the study with only 288 participants.

<sup>10</sup> Participants also played a trust game with their partner. We find hiding both success and failure directionally, but not significantly, decreased trust. We provide further details about the trust game in online supplemental materials 5.

**Hide GPA**

What is your age in years?

● Enter age:

---

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

---

What is your current GPA?

● Enter GPA:

**Share High GPA**

What is your age in years?

● Enter age:

---

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

---

What is your current GPA?

● Enter GPA:

Figure 3. Examples of hiding and sharing success (Study 4).

284) = 40.07,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ , and perceived shame,  $F(1, 284) = 62.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$ . Participants inferred a similar amount of paternalistic motives from their partner,  $t(143) = 1.37, p = .173$ , regardless of whether their partner hid or shared their failure. However, participants inferred their partner had more paternalistic motives,  $t(141) = 8.60, p < .001$ , when their partner hid, rather than shared, their success. Though hiding failure,  $t(143) = 13.24, p < .001$ , and hiding success,  $t(141) = 4.05, p < .001$ , both lead to an inference of perceived shame, the effect was larger for hiding failure.

There was no significant main effect of Decision to Share on closeness, nor was there a significant Decision to Share  $\times$  Outcome or interaction on insult or closeness (each  $p > .100$ ). In sum, hiding both success and failure led to relational costs, however, participants believed that their partner had more paternalistic mo-

tives and less shame when they hid their success than when they hid their failure.

**Emotional consequences.** We found a main effect of Outcome on envy,  $F(1, 284) = 68.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$ . Participants were more envious of their partner in the success condition than in the failure condition. There was no significant main effect or interaction based on Decision to Share (each  $p > .100$ ).

**Moderated mediation analysis.** We ran moderated mediation to explore how paternalistic motives explain the difference between hiding success and hiding failure. Specifically, we ran models that included Decision to Share as the independent variable, paternalistic motives as the mediator variable, Outcome as the moderator, and insult as the dependent variable (Model 8 of SPSS Macro MEDIATE with 10,000 samples; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). We found significant moderated mediation for

Table 5  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 4,  $N = 288$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Share vs. hide
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test
Manipulation check					
Failure	5.76	1.29	5.93	1.23	$t(143) = .82, p = .414$
Success	2.55	1.35	2.69	1.12	$t(141) = .67, p = .504$
Insult					
Failure	1.28	0.84	1.41	0.89	$t(143) = .92, p = .358$
Success	1.23	0.84	1.74	1.34	$t(141) = 2.71, p = .008$
Closeness					
Failure	2.44	1.50	2.49	1.66	$t(143) = .19, p = .850$
Success	2.20	1.58	1.77	1.32	$t(141) = 1.78, p = .077$
Envy					
Failure	1.39	0.92	1.09	0.41	$t(143) = 2.56, p = .012$
Success	2.46	1.69	2.64	1.83	$t(141) = .58, p = .562$
Paternalistic motives					
Failure	1.96	0.76	2.11	0.62	$t(143) = 1.37, p = .173$
Success	1.99	0.61	3.44	1.27	$t(141) = 8.60, p < .001$
Perceived shame					
Failure	1.23	1.16	4.76	1.64	$t(143) = 13.24, p < .001$
Success	1.38	0.90	2.14	1.27	$t(141) = 4.05, p < .001$

Note. Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means.

paternalistic motives (index of moderated mediation =  $-0.84$ ,  $SE = .20$ , 95% CI [ $-1.27$ ,  $-0.49$ ]). Paternalistic motives mediated the effect of hiding success (indirect effect =  $-0.95$ ,  $SE = .19$ , 95% CI [ $-1.35$ ,  $-0.60$ ]), but not hiding failure (indirect effect =  $-0.10$ ,  $SE = .08$ , 95% CI [ $-0.25$ ,  $0.05$ ]).

## Discussion

Using an information exchange paradigm in the laboratory, we found that participants were more insulted when a peer at the same university hid their success (their high GPA) as compared to when they shared their success. However, in this study, we found that hiding success did not impact feelings of closeness as compared to sharing success. This may be because the participants in this study did not have a previous relationship with the communicator, and therefore had low levels of closeness to begin with.

We then compared reactions to hiding success and hiding failure (their low GPA). Targets felt similarly insulted by the communicator when the communicator hid either success or failure. However, hiding success led to greater inferences that the communicator had paternalistic motives than hiding failure. While hiding information can damage relationships more generally, hiding success leads to different inferences than hiding failure.<sup>11</sup>

### Study 5: Hiding Success in Public Versus Private

In Study 5, we compare hiding and sharing success in public (when other people can witness the interaction) and private (when only the communicator and the target can witness the interaction). Although sharing good news is the norm in close relationships, sharing success with the general public is often perceived as bragging and interpreted negatively (Scopelliti et al., 2015). As a result, when the interaction is in public, sharing success may be perceived as more offensive than when the interaction is in private, and the costs of hiding may be attenuated. We test this possibility in Study 5, within the context of hiding versus sharing news of internship placements among MBA students and other students currently seeking employment. We preregistered Study 5 on AsPredicted.org (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=m7fz5p>).

## Method

**Participants.** We intended to recruit 300 participants. As preregistered, we recruited MBA students for one month and then recruited the remaining participants on Prolific Academic (an online survey platform) in exchange for \$0.35. We ended up recruiting 299 adults (40% female; mean age = 26.50): 149 MBA students from a business school in the Midwest and 150 Prolific Academic participants who self-identified as current students seeking employment.

As preregistered, we excluded participants who incorrectly answered the attention check. This resulted in 82 exclusions, 18 from the private condition and 64 from the public condition, yielding a final sample of 217 participants (41% female;  $M$  age = 25.53).<sup>12</sup> Including these participants does not change the significance of any reported results.

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read a scenario in which they were applying for a summer internship at top consulting firms, along with their classmates. Participants read about a

classmate named Jeff who was interviewing at the same firms. Participants read:

You are looking for an internship at a top consulting firm. You had several interviews and have heard back from a few already. However, you are still waiting to hear back from your top choice firm.

You have a classmate, Jeff, who is interviewing at many of the same firms you are. You check in with each other every once in a while about the internship process. You know he is waiting to hear back from the same top choice firm that you are also waiting on.

We then randomly assigned participants to a condition from a 2 (Decision to Share: share or hide)  $\times$  2 (Setting: public or private) between-subjects design. In the public condition, participants read that they sent Jeff a public message by writing a post on his Facebook wall asking if he had heard any news on his internship. In the private condition, participants read that they instead asked Jeff if he had heard any news by sending him a private message (via Facebook messenger). Jeff responded to the public or private question (“Hey, hope you’re well! Any news?”) by either sharing (“Hey! Yes, I got the job”) or hiding (“Hey! Nope, no news”) that he was offered the job. Participants both read a description and viewed an image of the interaction on Facebook (see Figure 4). The stimuli were adapted from Berman et al. (2015).

At the end of the scenario, a third party revealed Jeff’s success to all participants: “Later that day you are talking with your friend Amy. She mentions that Jeff received a job offer from the firm yesterday.”

**Dependent variables.** We collected the same measures of insult ( $\alpha = .87$ ), closeness, envy, paternalistic motives ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and affective trust ( $\alpha = .92$ ) as in Study 3. At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.

## Results

We conducted two-way ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables, using Decision to Share and Setting as between-subjects factors. We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 6.

**Relational consequences.** We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on insult,  $F(1, 213) = 31.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ , closeness,  $F(1, 213) = 35.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 213) = 68.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .25$ , and affective trust,  $F(1, 213) = 21.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . Participants felt more insulted, felt less close, inferred greater paternalistic motives, and felt less affective trust when the communicator hid than when he shared his success. There were no significant main effects or interactions based on Setting (each  $p > .150$ ). In sum, hiding

<sup>11</sup> These findings replicate the results in Study S4 in online supplemental materials 12, in which we compare reactions to hiding success and hiding failure with an online sample and hypothetical scenario.

<sup>12</sup> Specifically, we asked participants, “In the scenario, did you send a public or private Facebook message to Jeff? A public message is one that others can see, such as a Facebook message. A private message is one that others cannot see, such as in individual text message” (response options: public, private, or unsure). After seeing the high rate of failure for this attention check, we realized that this wording was unclear. The public message in the study stimuli was a wall post and the private message was a Facebook message, but the attention check framed a Facebook message as public and a text message as private. We posit that this poor wording choice explains the high failure rate.

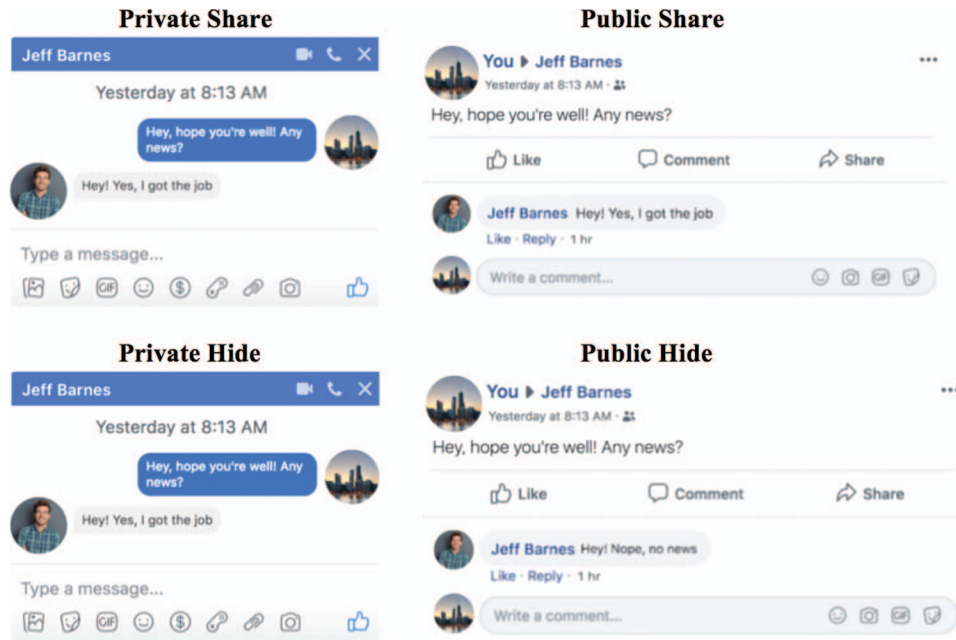


Figure 4. Sharing and hiding success in public and private on Facebook (Study 5). Images are purchased from: <https://www.istockphoto.com/>. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

success had more negative relational consequences than sharing success in both public and private settings.

**Emotional consequences.** We found no significant main effect of Decision to Share, Setting, or the Decision to Share × Setting interaction on envy (each  $p > .200$ ). In sum, hiding success did not have any significant emotional consequences.

**Mediation analysis.** We ran a mediation analysis to examine whether the belief that the communicator had paternalistic motives increased feelings of insult. Specifically, we ran a mediation analysis with Decision to Share as the independent variable (hide = 0, share = 1), paternalistic motives as the mediator variable, and insult as the dependent variable (Model 4 of SPSS

Macro MEDIATE with 10,000 samples; Hayes, 2017). We found that paternalistic motives mediated the effect of Decision to Share on feelings of insult (indirect effect =  $-0.86$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , 95% CI [ $-1.10, -0.65$ ]).

**Discussion**

In Study 5, we replicated previous findings on the relational costs of hiding success in a new context: online communication between classmates about internship applications. Targets felt more insulted by, less close to, and less affective trust for a classmate who hid rather than shared news of his internship, even when the target was competing for the same internship. This study also provides further evidence that the belief that communicators have paternalistic motives mediates the relational costs of hiding success. When communicators hid their success, targets made inferences that the communicators had paternalistic motives. In addition, we did not find any emotional benefits of hiding success, as targets felt similarly envious of the communicator regardless of how they discovered the success.

We also compared reactions to hiding success in public and in private. While one might expect that targets would perceive hiding success in public to be less offensive than hiding success in private, we find no evidence for this in the current study. Although our effects were generally stronger in the private condition than the public condition, we did not find significant interactions between Setting and Decision to Share for any of our dependent variables. It is possible, however, that our manipulation of the setting was not strong enough to influence reactions. We may see differences between reactions to hiding and sharing success in public versus private settings with a stronger manipulation of the two settings. Future research should explore the impact of hiding and sharing success based on the setting in more detail.

Table 6  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 5;  $N = 299$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Share vs. hide <i>t</i> test
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Insult					
Private	2.27	1.30	3.58	1.62	$t(129) = 5.12, p < .001$
Public	2.34	1.29	3.29	1.61	$t(84) = 3.02, p = .003$
Closeness					
Private	3.27	1.50	2.17	1.35	$t(129) = 4.38, p < .001$
Public	3.43	1.60	2.16	1.20	$t(84) = 4.18, p < .001$
Envy					
Private	4.39	1.71	4.56	1.52	$t(129) = .59, p = .559$
Public	4.52	1.81	4.14	1.54	$t(84) = 1.00, p = .319$
Paternalistic motives					
Private	2.61	0.99	4.08	1.86	$t(129) = 7.73, p < .001$
Public	2.69	1.10	3.76	1.14	$t(84) = 4.12, p < .001$
Affective trust					
Private	3.81	1.55	2.74	1.70	$t(129) = 3.77, p < .001$
Public	4.03	1.79	2.98	1.64	$t(84) = 2.84, p = .006$

Note. Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means.

## Study 6: Direct Versus Indirect Question

Is the decision not to share success always construed as hiding? We predict that the degree to which hiding success violates communication norms within a given conversational context is related to the degree to which withholding information about one's success is construed as a deliberate attempt to conceal. When sharing success is not expected (i.e., does not align with conversational norms), choosing not to share a success is unlikely to elicit suspicion and the negative inferences that follow.

In Study 6, we test this by manipulating whether the communicator's decision to hide or share follows a direct or indirect question. Studies 1–5 find that targets believe it is insulting when communicators hide their success in response to a direct question or explicit request for information. However, sharing is normative in response to a direct question (Minson et al., 2018). Thus, hiding success in response to a direct question clearly violates conversational norms. When the question is less direct, the target may not perceive withholding information about the success as a violation of conversational norms. Therefore, the relational costs of hiding success may be attenuated.

In Study 6, we also explore how sharing or hiding success affects impression management, or the target's judgments of the communicator's qualities rather than the target's intentions toward them. Specifically, we examine how hiding or sharing success after a direct or indirect question affects the target's perception of the communicator's warmth, competence, and modesty in order to explore whether there are impression-management benefits to hiding success, despite the relational costs.

We measure the relational, emotional, and impression-management consequences of hiding and sharing success at two points in time: before and after a third party reveals the communicator's success to the target. Therefore, as in Study 2, we are able to explore the consequences of hiding success across time, when the success is both known and unknown. We preregistered Study 6 on AsPredicted.org (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=jd6s8u>).

## Method

**Participants.** We recruited 207 undergraduates and 107 MBA students from a university and business school in the Midwest (52% female;  $M$  age = 24.07) to participate in a study on an electronic tablet. We conducted this study during on-campus recruiting, when the majority of participants were applying for jobs and internships, and therefore were learning of their own and others' job-hunting success.

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read a scenario in which they were applying for a summer internship at top consulting firms along with their classmates. Undergraduate students were asked to imagine they were an undergraduate majoring in economics and MBA students were asked to imagine they were a first-year MBA student. Participants read that they asked a classmate named Sam a direct question ("Hey, have you heard anything from the internships you applied to?") or indirect question ("Hey, anything new in your life?") about his internship applications. Sam responded by either sharing ("Sam tells you that he received an offer from McKinsey yesterday, which is the firm you are most interested in") or hiding ("Sam replies, 'Nope, nothing' and then says he has to run") his success. Participants then judged Sam (Time 1 ratings). Finally, a third party revealed Sam's success ("Later that

day you are talking with your friend Amy. She mentions that Sam received a job offer at McKinsey yesterday") and participants judged Sam again (Time 2 ratings).

### Dependent variables.

**Relational consequences.** At both Time 1 and Time 2, we collected the same measures of insult ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and closeness as in our previous studies. At Time 2, after the success was revealed, we also collected affective trust ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and paternalistic motives ( $\alpha = .90$ ) using the same measures as in our previous studies.

**Emotional consequences.** At both Time 1 and Time 2, we collected the same measure of envy as in our previous studies.

**Impression-management consequences.** At both Time 1 and Time 2, participants also rated the communicator's perceived warmth, competence, and modesty (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). We measured the target's perception of the communicator's warmth with four items ( $\alpha = .89$ ): "To what extent do you think Sam is: warm, tolerant, good natured, and sincere?" We measured the target's perception of the communicator's competence with five items ( $\alpha = .93$ ): "To what extent do you think Sam is: competent, confident, independent, competitive, and intelligent?" The items were adapted from previous measures of warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007). We also included two measures to assess the communicator's modesty ( $\alpha = .56$ ): "To what extent do you think Sam is: modest and a braggart (reverse scored)?"

## Results

We first report participants' reactions at Time 1 to explore the consequences of sharing or hiding success before the success is otherwise known. As in Study 2, this allows us to cleanly test the consequences of *sharing* success relative to a neutral control condition (when success is unknown). To examine Time 1 results, we conducted two-way ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables at Time 1, using Decision to Share and Directness as between-subjects factors.

Next, we report participants' reactions at Time 2 in order to explore the consequences of sharing or hiding success after the success is revealed by a third party. We conducted two-way ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables at Time 2, using Decision to Share and Directness as between-subjects factors.

Then, to explore how the consequences of hiding and sharing success change over time, we report the results of mixed within-between subject ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables, using Time as the within-subjects factor and Decision to Share and Directness as between-subjects factors. We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 7.

### Time 1 results.

**Relational consequences.** We found a significant main effect of Decision to Share on closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 55.25, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ . When the success was not otherwise known, participants felt less close to the communicator when he hid his success than when he shared his success, consistent with the results of Study 2. There was a significant main effect of Directness on closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 4.73, p = .030, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , such that participants felt less close to the communicator when he responded to a direct question rather than an indirect question. The main effects of Decision to Share and Directness on insult (each  $p > .083$ ) and the Directness  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction on insult and closeness were not significant (each  $p > .240$ ). In sum, hiding success in



Table 7  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 6,  $N = 314$ )

Variable	Time 1					Time 2				
	Share		Hide		Hide vs. share	Share		Hide		Hide vs. share
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test
Relational consequences										
Insult										
Direct	1.83	1.11	2.22	1.33	$t(157) = 2.00, p = .048$	1.95	1.23	3.45	1.82	$t(157) = 6.15, p < .001$
Indirect	1.96	1.27	2.04	0.98	$t(153) = .43, p = .671$	2.11	1.30	2.54	1.42	$t(153) = 1.96, p = .052$
Closeness										
Direct	3.37	1.58	2.27	1.21	$t(157) = 4.92, p < .001$	2.86	1.48	1.76	1.02	$t(157) = 5.47, p < .001$
Indirect	3.05	1.35	1.94	1.10	$t(153) = 5.68, p < .001$	2.47	1.28	1.89	1.19	$t(153) = 2.92, p = .004$
Paternalistic motives										
Direct	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.51	0.98	4.32	1.11	$t(157) = 10.92, p < .001$
Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.74	1.09	3.96	1.10	$t(153) = 6.93, p < .001$
Affective trust										
Direct	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.31	1.63	2.83	1.48	$t(157) = 1.92, p = .056$
Indirect	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.11	1.28	2.92	1.45	$t(153) = .89, p = .373$
Emotional consequences										
Envy										
Direct	5.00	1.76	1.86	1.36	$t(157) = 12.57, p < .001$	4.53	2.00	4.33	1.93	$t(157) = .63, p = .527$
Indirect	4.92	1.77	1.75	1.22	$t(153) = 13.07, p < .001$	4.61	1.89	4.04	1.62	$t(153) = 2.04, p = .043$
Impression-management consequences										
Competence										
Direct	5.22	0.89	4.00	1.07	$t(157) = 7.86, p < .001$	5.26	1.09	4.59	1.10	$t(157) = 3.88, p < .001$
Indirect	5.23	0.97	3.85	0.96	$t(153) = 8.87, p < .001$	5.17	1.07	4.60	1.09	$t(153) = 3.30, p = .001$
Warmth										
Direct	4.26	1.07	3.13	1.31	$t(157) = 5.96, p < .001$	4.00	1.06	3.09	1.32	$t(157) = 4.79, p < .001$
Indirect	4.04	1.00	3.03	0.94	$t(153) = 6.48, p < .001$	3.85	1.03	2.93	1.00	$t(153) = 5.62, p < .001$
Modesty										
Direct	4.55	1.00	4.61	0.91	$t(157) = .39, p = .694$	4.13	1.14	5.06	1.10	$t(157) = 5.26, p < .001$
Indirect	4.27	1.19	4.40	0.81	$t(153) = .82, p = .415$	3.99	1.23	4.94	1.33	$t(153) = 4.58, p < .001$

response to both direct and indirect questions led to negative relational consequences (and conversely, sharing success led to positive relational consequences) when the success was not otherwise known.

**Emotional consequences.** We found a significant main effect of Decision to Share on envy,  $F(1, 310) = 328.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .51$ , but no significant main or interaction effect of Directness (each  $p > .550$ ). When the success was not otherwise known, participants felt less envious of their classmate when he hid his success than when he shared his success in response to both a direct and indirect question. In sum, hiding success in response to both direct and indirect questions led to positive emotional consequences (and conversely, sharing success led to negative emotional consequences) when the success was not otherwise known.

**Impression-management consequences.** We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on perceived competence,  $F(1, 310) = 139.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ , and warmth,  $F(1, 310) = 75.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$ , but not on perceived modesty ( $p = .386$ ). When the success was not otherwise known, participants perceived the communicator as less competent and less warm when they hid, rather than shared, success. In addition, the main effect of Directness on modesty was significant,  $F(1, 310) = 4.89, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , such that participants perceived the communicator as more modest after answering a direct question than an indirect question. There were no other significant main effects or interactions based on Directness ( $p > .350$ ). In sum, hiding success in response to both direct and indirect questions led to negative

impression-management consequences (and conversely, sharing success led to positive impression-management consequences) when the success was not otherwise known.

Taken together, these results suggest that when the success was not otherwise known, hiding success has negative relational consequences (decreased closeness) and impression-management consequences (decreased competence and warmth), but positive emotional consequences (decreased envy) regardless of whether the hiding was in response to a direct or indirect question. In other words, openly sharing success—even when the target would not otherwise find out about it—improves the target's impression of and relationship with the communicator.

#### Time 2 results.

**Relational consequences.** At Time 2, we also measured paternalistic motives and affective trust. We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 34.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ , closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 35.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 310) = 157.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$ , and affective trust,  $F(1, 310) = 4.11, p = .044, \eta_p^2 = .01$ . When the success was known, hiding success increased insult and inferences of paternalistic motives as well as reduced closeness and affective trust compared to sharing success. There was also a main effect of Directness on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 5.13, p = .024, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , such that participants were more insulted after a direct question than an indirect question.

These main effects were qualified by a significant Directness  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 10.65, p =$

.001,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ , and paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 310) = 5.93, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .02$ . Hiding success increased insult and inferences of paternalistic motives more when the communicator was asked a direct question,  $t(157) = 6.15, p < .001$  (insult) and  $t(157) = 10.92, p < .001$  (paternalistic motives), than when the communicator was asked an indirect question,  $t(153) = 1.96, p = .052$  (insult), and  $t(153) = 6.93, p < .001$  (paternalistic motives).

There were no significant main effects of Directness on closeness, paternalistic motives, or affective trust (each  $p > .060$ ), and no significant interaction based on Directness for closeness or affective trust (each  $p > .400$ ). In sum, when the success was known, hiding success led to universally negative relational consequences. Some of these negative relational consequences, such as feelings of insult and inferences of paternalistic motives, were stronger when the success was hidden after a direct question than an indirect question.

**Emotional consequences.** There was no significant effect Decision to Share on envy,  $F(1, 310) = 3.38, p = .067, \eta_p^2 = .01$ , nor were there a significant main effect or interaction based on Directness (each  $p > .350$ ).

**Impression-management consequences.** We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on perceived competence,  $F(1, 310) = 25.78, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ , warmth,  $F(1, 310) = 52.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , and modesty,  $F(1, 310) = 47.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . When the success was known, participants perceived the communicator as less competent and warm, but more modest when he hid his success as compared to when he shared his success. There were no significant main effects or interactions based on Directness (each  $p > .200$ ). In sum, when the success was already known, hiding success led to mixed impression-management consequences (decreased competence and warmth, but increased modesty) after both a direct and indirect question.

Taken together, these results suggest that once a communicator's success is known, hiding has negative relational consequences (increased insult and decreased closeness) and mixed impression-management consequences (decreased competence and warmth, but increased modesty). Importantly, the relational consequences—but not the impression-management or emotional consequences—were moderated by directness, such that the interpersonal penalties of hiding were greater when the norm was to share (i.e., in response to a direct question).

**Moderated mediation analysis.** Based on the results above, we ran moderated mediation to further examine the nature of the relational consequences of hiding success. Specifically, we ran a moderated mediation model that included Decision to Share as the independent variable, paternalistic motives as the mediator variable, Directness as the moderator, and insult as the dependent variable (Model 8 of SPSS Macro MEDIANTE with 10,000 samples; Preacher et al., 2007). We found that the paternalistic motives mechanism mediated the effect of hiding success on insult when hiding followed an indirect question (indirect effect =  $-0.71, SE = .14, 95\% CI [-1.00, -0.45]$ ) and a direct question (indirect effect =  $-1.06, SE = .15, 95\% CI [-1.36, -0.75]$ ), but the indirect effect was significantly larger when the question was direct. As a result, we found significant evidence for moderated mediation (index of moderated mediation =  $-0.34, SE = .14, 95\% CI [-0.62, -0.07]$ ).

**Time 1 versus Time 2 results.** We conducted mixed within-between subject ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables, using

Time as the within-subjects factor and Decision to Share and Directness as between-subjects factors. In the main article, we discuss the effects of Time (main effect and the Time  $\times$  Directness, Time  $\times$  Decision to Share, and Time  $\times$  Directness  $\times$  Decision to Share interactions) to clarify how judgments of hiding success in response to direct versus indirect questions change over time. We present other main and interaction effects of Directness and Decision to Share in online supplemental materials 6.

**Relational consequences.** We found significant main effects of Time on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 58.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$ , and closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 39.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ , such that overall, participants felt more insulted and less close to the communicator at Time 2 than at Time 1. These main effects were qualified by a significant Time  $\times$  Decision to Share interactions on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 31.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ , and closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 4.01, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .01$ . Feelings of insult increased more from Time 1 to Time 2 when the success was hidden,  $t(157) = 7.83, p < .001$ , as compared to shared,  $t(155) = 1.75, p = .081$ , whereas feelings of closeness decreased more from Time 1 to Time 2 when the success was shared,  $t(155) = 5.65, p < .001$ , than when the success was hidden,  $t(157) = 3.03, p = .003$ . That is, hiding success increased insult more once it was discovered (at Time 2). Additionally, there was a significant Time  $\times$  Directness interaction on insult,  $F(1, 310) = 7.28, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .02$ , such that feelings of insult increased more from Time 1 to Time 2 in response to a direct question,  $t(158) = 6.36, p < .001$ , as compared to an indirect question,  $t(154) = 3.65, p < .001$ . The Time  $\times$  Directness interaction on closeness was not significant ( $p = .150$ ).

Importantly, we found significant three-way interactions between Time, Decision to Share, and Directness on both insult,  $F(1, 310) = 8.86, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , and closeness,  $F(1, 310) = 4.29, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .01$ . The directness of the question influenced feelings of insult and closeness after hiding success at Time 2, but not at Time 1. Only when the success is known (at Time 2) does hiding in response to a direct question reduce closeness,  $t(157) = 5.47, p < .001$ , and increase insult,  $t(157) = 6.15, p < .001$ , more than hiding in response to an indirect question,  $t(153) = 2.92, p = .004$  (closeness) and  $t(153) = 1.96, p = .052$  (insult). In sum, hiding success increased relational costs over time, as it increased insult and reduced closeness from Time 1 to Time 2. In addition, the directness of the question influenced the relational consequences of hiding success between Time 1 and Time 2. Hiding success led to more relational costs in response to a direct question than an indirect question at Time 2, but not at Time 1 (see Figure 5).

**Emotional consequences.** We found a significant main effect of Time on envy,  $F(1, 310) = 125.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ , such that participants were more envious at Time 2 than at Time 1. This main effect was qualified by a significant Time  $\times$  Decision to Share interaction,  $F(1, 310) = 241.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .44$ . When the communicator hid their success, participants became more envious at Time 2, after the success was revealed, as compared to Time 1,  $t(157) = 16.32, p < .001$ . When the communicator shared their success, participants became less envious at Time 2 as compared to Time 1,  $t(155) = 3.87, p < .001$ , because they already knew about the success before it was revealed from a third party. The Time  $\times$  Directness and three-way interaction between Time, Decision to Share, and Directness were not significant (each  $p >$

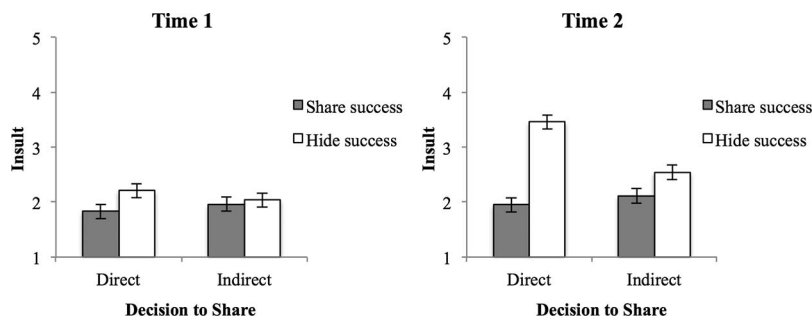


Figure 5. The relational consequences of sharing versus hiding successes after a direct versus indirect question at Time 1 and Time 2 (Study 6). Ratings were made on seven-point ratings scales. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Consistent with our predictions, there was an interaction between the directness of the question and the decision to share or hide the success at Time 2 ( $p = .001$ ).

.350). In sum, hiding success increased the negative emotional consequences from Time 1 to Time 2 more than sharing success.

**Impression-management consequences.** We found significant main effects of Time on warmth,  $F(1, 310) = 10.31, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , and competence,  $F(1, 310) = 55.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , but not modesty ( $p = .224$ ). Targets perceived the communicator as less warm but more competent at Time 2 than at Time 1.

These main effects were qualified by significant Time  $\times$  Decision to Share interactions for competence,  $F(1, 310) = 58.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$ , and modesty,  $F(1, 310) = 47.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ , but not for warmth ( $p = .087$ ). Hiding success increased competence more,  $t(157) = 9.29, p < .001$ , from Time 1 to Time 2 than sharing success,  $t(155) = 0.13, p = .901$ . Additionally, hiding success increased perceptions of modesty from Time 1 to Time 2,  $t(157) = 5.70, p < .001$ , while sharing success decreased perceptions of modesty from Time 1 to Time 2,  $t(155) = 4.06, p < .001$ . The Time  $\times$  Directness and three-way interaction between Time, Decision to Share, and Directness were not significant (each  $p > .170$ ). In sum, hiding success had positive impression-management consequences over time, as it increased perceived competence and modesty, while sharing success had negative impression-management consequences over time, as it reduced perceptions of modesty.

Taken together, these results suggest that as one's success is discovered from a third party (from Time 1 to Time 2), hiding success yields relational costs (increased insult and decreased closeness), emotional costs (increased envy), and impression-management benefits (increased competence and modesty). Alternatively, sharing success also yields relational costs (decreased closeness), emotional benefits (decreased envy), and impression-management costs (decreased modesty) from Time 1 to Time 2. Although both hiding and sharing success had some negative consequences after the success was discovered, sharing success led to fewer relational and emotional costs across time.

Finally, the directness of the question influenced the relational consequences of hiding success more at Time 2 than at Time 1. Targets felt more insulted in response to a direct question than an indirect question when the target was known to have hidden their success (Time 2), but not when the hiding was unknown (Time 1).

## Discussion

In Study 6, we find that hiding success in response to a direct question, versus an indirect question, led to greater relational costs. We take this as evidence that conversational norms influence how much hiding success is penalized, as hiding success in response to a direct question violates conversational norms more than hiding in response to an indirect question.

However, though the effects of hiding success were weaker when the question was indirect than direct, participants were still more insulted when communicators hid their success than when they shared their success in response to an indirect question. One might predict that when communicators share their success without explicit provocation, it would be seen as more insulting than choosing not to bring up the success. We do not find that to be the case.

In addition, by comparing targets' reactions at Time 1 and Time 2, we are able to explore responses to hiding success when the success is both known and unknown in a new way. Even at Time 1, targets felt less close to communicators who said nothing than communicators who shared their success. Consistent with Study 2, there was no relational penalty of sharing success when the success was not previously known. However, if the success was discovered, there was a relational cost of hiding success.

We also look at a broader range of consequences in Study 6. We find that when the success is revealed, hiding success had negative relational consequences and mixed impression-management consequences (decreased competence and warmth, but increased modesty). While hiding success led to increased perceptions of modesty, this perception was only weakly related to the target's feelings of insult,  $r = -.156, p = .006$ . Taken together, we find that hiding success has costs not only for the target's relationship with the communicator, but also for the target's perception of the communicator as competent and warm.

## Study 7: Hiding Success in Close and Distant Relationships

In Study 7, we continue to explore the circumstances in which hiding success may be seen as offensive. We recruited high school seniors who were about to receive college acceptance and rejection decisions to read a scenario in which a close friend or distant

acquaintance shared or hid their acceptance into the participant's top-choice college. Thus, we compare hiding success to sharing success in close versus distant relationships.

Close relationships dictate stronger norms of sharing (Chelune et al., 1984; Petronio & Bantz, 1991; Schweitzer & Croson, 1999), and as a result, the costs of hiding success may increase in close relationships. When the communicator and the target are close, sharing success may be expected. Therefore, hiding success may lead to more inferences of paternalistic motives, which the target would find offensive. By comparison, when the communicator and the target are not close, sharing successes may be less expected based on conversational norms. Although our previous studies have explored hiding and sharing success in a range of personal (family members and friends in Studies 1 and 2) and professional relationships (work colleagues and classmates in Studies 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6), in this study, we experimentally manipulate the closeness of the relationship between the communicator and the target. We predict that hiding success will have greater relational costs in close relationships than in distant relationships. We test this in Study 7, which we preregistered on AsPredicted.org (<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=p53rw2>).

## Method

**Participants.** We recruited 99 high school students who were at least 18 years old and applied to college earlier that year to participate in a study in exchange for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon.com gift card. We excluded three participants who did not indicate a college to which they applied or another person who applied to the same college, resulting in a final sample of 96 participants (62% female;  $M$  age = 18.00).<sup>13</sup>

**Procedure and materials.** All participants read about two interactions in a counterbalanced order: one in which the communicator hid their success and one in which the communicator shared their success. We randomly assigned participants to a condition from a 2 (Decision to Share: share or hide)  $\times$  2 (Relationship: close or distant) mixed within-between subject design. Decision to Share was a within-subject factor; Relationship was a between-subjects factor.

We first asked participants to think of a few people in their graduating class who also applied to at least one of the top-choice colleges to which the participant applied. From the list of people applying to the same colleges, participants reported the initials of the person they were closest to in the close relationship condition and a person they were not particularly close to in the distant relationship condition. Then participants reported the name of the top-choice college they were applying to along with the person whose initials they listed. To increase the realism of the scenario, we piped this information into the scenario, such that participants learned that the classmate whose initials they listed was accepted to the university to which they both applied.

Participants read about two interactions with their classmate. When the communicator hid their success, participants read:

Imagine college acceptance letters to [college] were just sent out.

At school, you run into [initials].

You start talking with them about college acceptances, and they quickly change the subject. They do not tell you that they received any new college acceptances.

Later you find out they were accepted to [college], and they knew this when they were talking to you.

When the communicator shared their success, participants instead read that when they start talking about college acceptances, their classmate told the participant that they were accepted to the university.

Participants read one interaction in which the communicator hid their success and one interaction in which the communicator shared their success in a counterbalanced order. Participants judged the communicator after reading each interaction.

**Dependent variables.** We collected the same measures of insult ( $\alpha = .83$ ), closeness, happiness, envy, and paternalistic motives ( $\alpha = .89$ ) as in previous studies. We also included measures (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*) of cooperation ("How much would you want to work with [initials] on a school project in the future?") and socialization intentions ("How much would you want to hang out with [initials] after school today?"). At the end of the study, participants answered demographic questions.<sup>14</sup>

## Results

We conducted mixed within-between subject ANOVAs on all of our dependent variables, using Relationship as a between-subjects factor and Decision to Share as a within-subject factor. We provide all descriptive statistics in Table 8.

**Relational consequences.** We found significant main effects of Decision to Share on insult,  $F(1, 94) = 22.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$ ; closeness,  $F(1, 94) = 11.43, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 94) = 62.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .40$ , cooperation intentions,  $F(1, 94) = 12.78, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , and socialization intentions,  $F(1, 94) = 11.38, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ . Participants felt more insulted by, felt less close to, perceived more paternalistic motives from, wanted to cooperate less with, and wanted to socialize less with their classmate when they hid their college acceptance rather than shared their college acceptance.

The two-way ANOVAs also revealed significant main effects of Relationship on closeness,  $F(1, 94) = 34.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$ , paternalistic motives,  $F(1, 94) = 5.16, p = .025, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , cooperation intentions,  $F(1, 94) = 17.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$ , and socialization intentions,  $F(1, 94) = 13.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . Participants felt closer to their classmate and wanted to socialize and cooperate with their classmate more in the close relationship condition than in the distant relationship condition. In addition, participants perceived their classmate had less paternalistic motives in the close versus distant relationship condition.

There was no significant main effect of Relationship on insult ( $p = .581$ ) nor were there any significant Decision to Share  $\times$  Relationship interactions on any of the relational consequences

<sup>13</sup> We also excluded four participants who reported that they were less than 18 years old.

<sup>14</sup> Participants also rated their discomfort with sharing their own college acceptance with their classmate. We find participants felt directionally, but not significantly, more uncomfortable sharing their success in distant relationships than close relationships. We provide further details in online supplemental materials 7.

Table 8  
Descriptive Statistics (Study 7,  $N = 97$ )

Variable	Share		Hide		Share vs. hide
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> test
Insult					
Distant	1.69	1.07	2.15	1.38	$t(50) = 2.57, p = .013$
Close	1.38	0.82	2.24	1.47	$t(44) = 4.01, p < .001$
Closeness					
Distant	2.67	1.63	2.39	1.59	$t(50) = 1.39, p = .172$
Close	4.89	1.89	3.84	2.11	$t(44) = 2.99, p = .005$
Happiness					
Distant	4.86	1.76	4.29	1.89	$t(50) = 2.76, p = .008$
Close	6.11	1.19	5.33	1.83	$t(44) = 2.97, p = .005$
Envy					
Distant	3.39	1.93	3.12	1.94	$t(50) = 1.44, p = .155$
Close	3.13	2.06	2.67	1.90	$t(44) = 2.20, p = .033$
Paternalistic motives					
Distant	2.27	1.03	3.29	1.34	$t(50) = 5.89, p < .001$
Close	1.73	0.71	2.88	1.63	$t(44) = 5.31, p < .001$
Cooperate					
Distant	4.27	1.73	3.94	1.85	$t(50) = 1.58, p = .120$
Close	5.80	1.39	5.07	1.75	$t(44) = 3.50, p = .001$
Socialize					
Distant	2.94	1.83	2.71	1.85	$t(50) = 1.08, p = .286$
Close	4.58	3.69	1.88	1.27	$t(44) = 3.49, p = .001$

Note. Means in all descriptive statistic tables reflect raw means.

(each  $p > .050$ ).<sup>15</sup> Taken together, these results suggest that hiding success has negative relational consequences both in close and distant relationships.

**Emotional consequences.** We found a main effect of Decision to Share on envy,  $F(1, 94) = 6.81, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , and happiness,  $F(1, 94) = 16.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ . Participants felt less envious of and less happy for their classmate when they hid their college acceptance rather than shared their college acceptance.

The two-way ANOVAs also revealed a significant main effect of Relationship on happiness,  $F(1, 94) = 13.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . Participants felt happier for their classmate in the close relationship condition than in the distant relationship condition.

There was no significant main effect of Relationship on envy ( $p = .345$ ) nor were there significant Decision to Share  $\times$  Relationship interactions on envy or happiness (each  $p > .500$ ). In sum, hiding success led to mixed emotional consequences in both close and distant relationships.

**Mediation analysis.** We ran a mediation analysis to examine whether the belief that the communicator had paternalistic motives mediated feelings of insult in both close and distant relationships. Because of the within-subject design, we ran two mediation analyses with Decision to Share as the independent variable (hide = 0, share = 1), paternalistic motives as the mediator variable, and insult as the dependent variable: one for close relationships and one for distant relationships (Model 1 of SPSS Macro MEMORE with 10,000 samples; Montoya & Hayes, 2017). We found that perceptions of paternalistic motives significantly mediated the effect of Decision to Share on feelings of insult in close relationships (indirect effect =  $-0.55, SE = 0.22, 95\% CI [-0.97, -0.12]$ ), but not in distant relationships (indirect effect =  $-0.32, SE = 0.18, 95\% CI [-0.68, 0.03]$ ).

## Discussion

By using a sample of individuals who actually faced the conflict of whether and how to communicate success to peers, Study 7 provides additional evidence that hiding success has negative relational consequences. Targets felt more insulted by, less close to, inferred more paternalistic motives from, and intended to cooperate and socialize less with communicators who hid, rather than shared, their success. Hiding success also had mixed emotional consequences, as targets felt less envious of, but also less happy for, communicators when they hid their success as compared to when they shared their success.

Study 7 also explores the circumstances in which hiding success is seen as more or less offensive. In this study, we do not find significant evidence that relationship closeness moderates feelings of insult or inferences of paternalistic motives. Hiding success in both close and distant relationships led targets to feel more insulted and infer more paternalistic motives than sharing success. These results are somewhat consistent with Supplemental Study S5 (online supplemental materials 13), in which we also manipulated closeness in two additional contexts: work promotions and medical school Match Day results.<sup>16</sup> In Study S5, as in Study 7, we found that hiding success in distant relationships still led targets to feel less close, infer more paternalistic motives, cooperate less, and trust less than sharing success. However, in Study S5, unlike Study 7, we found that hiding success was significantly more damaging in close than in distant relationships. Specifically, we found significant Decision to Share  $\times$  Relationship interactions on feelings of insult, closeness, paternalistic motives, cooperation, and trust. Overall, our findings from these two studies suggest that while the relational costs of hiding success may be stronger in close relationships, sharing success is still a better strategy for relationship maintenance than hiding success in both close and distant relationships.

## General Discussion

Across seven experiments, we document the relational, emotional, and impression-management consequences of hiding success. Unlike hiding other information, hiding success signals that a communicator has paternalistic motives, which targets find insulting. We examine the consequences of hiding success using a variety of paradigms, including in-person interactions between existing relational partners, information exchanges in the laboratory, and hypothetical scenarios. We find that hiding success has relational costs in public and private settings, in response to direct

<sup>15</sup> However, there were marginal Decision to Share  $\times$  Relationship interactions on closeness,  $F(1, 94) = 3.89, p = .051, \eta_p^2 = .04$ , and socialization intentions,  $F(1, 94) = 33.85, p = .053, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . This suggests the relational costs of hiding success may be stronger in close relationships than distant relationships. However, we are hesitant to overinterpret these marginal results.

<sup>16</sup> We chose to feature Study S5 in the supplement rather than the main text due to the complexity of the 2 (share vs. hide)  $\times$  2 (close vs. distant relationship)  $\times$  2 (high vs. low social comparison)  $\times$  2 (match day vs. promotion scenario) mixed design used in the study. In this study, our interpretation was complicated by the fact that we found differences in the effect of hiding success in distant relationships based on the scenario and sample (i.e., MTurk participants reading a promotion scenario vs. medical school students reading a match day scenario).

and indirect questions, in close and distant relationships, and across a range of relationships including classmates, coworkers, family members, friends, and romantic partners. While hiding success leads to consistent relational costs, the emotional and impression-management consequences are mixed. Targets often feel more envious of, but also less happy for, communicators who hide their success. In addition, targets perceive communicators who hide their success as more modest, but also less competent and warm, than communicators who share their success. The negative reactions to hiding success has behavioral consequences: Targets are less trusting of, less willing to cooperate or socialize with, and less willing to devote financial resources to maintaining their relationship with communicators who hide, rather than share, their success.

### Theoretical Contributions

This article makes several theoretical contributions. First, we document a novel self-deprecating strategy (Lee et al., 2015; O'Donnell et al., 2016; Sekhon et al., 2015): hiding success. Although hiding success is a natural response to the known penalties of bragging, no prior research has examined this communication strategy. We find that hiding success is common in everyday life. In doing so, we highlight an exception to the assumed ubiquity of self-promotion as an impression-management strategy (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998; Scopelliti et al., 2015).

Second, this research contributes to communication theory by documenting the tension between relational and self-presentational goals when communicating with others. Previous research has highlighted the negative consequences of self-promotion when attempting to appear warm (Godfrey et al., 1986; Holtgraves & Srull, 1989; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Scopelliti et al., 2015). We extend this research by comparing sharing success to the alternative of hiding success and by exploring the relational and emotional consequences of these tactics, along with their consequences for impression management. Instead of focusing solely on how sharing success affects the target's *impressions* of the communicator, we examine how sharing success affects the target's *relationship* and *emotion toward* the communicator. We find that the relational, emotional, and impression-management consequences of sharing and hiding success sometimes conflict. Sharing success leads targets to feel both more envious of and closer to the target, while hiding success increases both the target's perception that the communicator is modest and the target's own feelings of insult. Surprisingly, we do not find evidence that self-promotion undermines warmth when the success is previously unknown. Rather, our findings are consistent with research on capitalization bids, which finds that sharing positive personal events with others can have interpersonal benefits (Gable et al., 2004, 2006). Overall, our findings suggest that more research is needed to fully understand the costs and benefits of self-promotion.

Our findings also contribute to research on envy. Whereas previous research highlights the detrimental relational effects of malicious envy (Gino & Pierce, 2009; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009; Zizzo & Oswald, 2001), we find that envy and closeness can coexist. Malicious envy has been found to lead to harmful or hostile behavior toward the envied individual. By focusing only on the negative consequences of envy, scholars have failed to appreciate the mixed emotions that arise from learning

about others' successes. We find that sharing success leads targets to feel both envious of and happy for the communicator. Future research should explore whether communicators (and perhaps also targets) fail to anticipate these mixed emotional responses.

We also contribute to research on interpersonal emotion regulation (Van Kleef, 2009) by documenting its potential costs. We explore how people make inferences about others' interpersonal emotion regulation motives and react to these motives. Communicators often hide success to regulate the target's feelings of envy. However, targets perceive this interpersonal emotion regulation as paternalistic, which has relational costs. Therefore, we document the relational, emotional, and behavioral consequences of engaging in interpersonal emotion regulation strategies.

Finally, this research makes several contributions to theory on deception. First, we introduce a novel type of prosocial omission (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014, 2015; Levine et al., 2018) in which communicators deliberately withhold positive information about themselves from targets with the purpose of improving the target's emotional welfare. Despite the prosocial intent behind hiding success, we find hiding success leads to negative relational and emotional consequences because it is perceived as paternalistic. These findings build on previous research demonstrating that the motive for lying can be interpreted differently by the communicator and the target (Hildreth & Anderson, 2018) and by exploring the circumstances in which inferences of paternalistic motive are activated in everyday communication (Lupoli et al., 2018).

Apart from its theoretical contributions, this work also has practical implications for individuals struggling with how to communicate their success. Anyone who has achieved a success faces the challenge of deciding when and how to communicate their success with those around them. Our results indicate that targets are likely to penalize hiding success more than sharing success. Even if it feels uncomfortable for the communicator, sharing success is better for preserving one's relationships than hiding success.

### Limitations and Future Directions

As with any research program, our contributions must be interpreted in light of our methodological choices. Although Study 1 featured actual interactions among relational partners and Study 4 featured an information exchange in the laboratory, the other five experiments in this article relied on hypothetical scenarios. Though results from hypothetical scenarios can mirror people's behavior (Kühberger, Schulte-Mecklenbeck, & Perner, 2002), this is not always the case, as people's actual feelings and behaviors often diverge from their predicted feelings and behaviors (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that in some circumstances people may react more negatively toward those who share their success than they report in the current studies. For example, if a classmate shares that they received the job offer the target was hoping for (as in Study 6), it may increase feelings of insult more in real life than in a scenario. We encourage future scholars to further explore the consequences of hiding and sharing success in live interactions and to test whether communicators and targets correctly anticipate these consequences.

The effects of hiding success may also vary when communicators freely choose to hide or share their success. For example, it is

possible that communicators correctly choose to hide their success in the situations in which sharing is most likely to be penalized. We have some evidence to suggest this is not the case. In Study 1, the relational and emotional consequences of hiding success were not significantly moderated by the communicator's desire to hide their success, and in Supplemental Study S7 (online supplemental materials 15), the perceptions of hiding success led to relational costs in a situation in which the majority of communicators preferred to hide their success in an in-person interaction. However, additional research should continue to explore the situations in which people freely choose to hide their success from others and the consequences of those decisions.

Our results also suggest several other potential directions for future studies. Specifically, future work should examine how the type of success influences the consequences of hiding. Sharing success may seem normative when the success is especially notable, or the topic is relevant to a conversation. For example, not disclosing a recent promotion with a close other may seem like hiding success when the communicator and the target are talking about work, but not when they are discussing politics. Conversely, not telling a close other that one is engaged to be married may seem like hiding success regardless of the topic of the conversation because of the significance of the information. As a result, both the size of the success and the relevance of the conversation may influence perceptions of hiding success. We predict that withholding information is only perceived as hiding success, and thus is only damaging to relationships, when sharing is expected. More research is needed to systematically test this prediction.

It will also be important to investigate how the communication medium and choice of words influence the consequences of hiding success. Targets can more accurately infer a communicator's mental state via speech than via text (Hall & Schmid Mast, 2007; Kruger, Epley, Parker, & Ng, 2005). When a target hears a communicator's voice in a face-to-face interaction, the conversation may feel more personal and the target may be better able to detect the communicator's authentic excitement about the success, which may increase feelings of closeness from sharing success. In addition, the words the communicator uses to convey the success may impact the target's perception of and relationship with the communicator. For example, downplaying the significance of the success or the amount of effort involved may influence the target's perception of the communicator (Steinmetz, 2018). Future research should explore how the medium and content of the conversation affects the relational costs of sharing versus hiding success.

In addition, future research should continue to explore how the relationship between the communicator and target influences the consequences of hiding success. Across our studies, we find that hiding success has relational costs among close and distant others as well as classmates, coworkers, family members, friends, and romantic partners. However, future research could systematically explore other dimensions of the relationship between the communicator and the target. In online supplemental materials 8, we explore how gender affects the decision to hide success and reactions to hiding success across our studies. Although we do not find any consistently significant effects of gender on participants' (i.e., the target's) perceptions of hiding success, in Study 1 we find that the gender composition of the communicator-target dyad moderates feelings of insult (see online supplemental materials 1 for more detail). These findings suggest that the relational costs of

hiding success may be greater in mixed-gender dyads than in same-gender dyads. However, additional research is needed to confirm this post hoc result. In addition to gender differences, status differences between the communicator and the target may also influence the perceived intentions and consequences of hiding success. We explored how the social comparison between the target and the communicator influenced the relational consequences of hiding success in Supplemental Study S2 (online supplemental materials 10). We found that participants inferred the communicator had less paternalistic motives when they hid their success in an upward social comparison (i.e., when the target was in a better position than the communicator). Future research should continue to explore how aspects of the relationship between the communicator and the target, such as the gender and status differences in the dyad, influence the consequences of hiding success.

Finally, future research should explore how the consequences of hiding success vary by culture. We predict that hiding success damages relationships when the social norm is to share information. Therefore, the consequences of hiding success may vary based on the social norms of the culture. For example, sharing success may not be considered a social norm in East Asian cultures, which tend to emphasize modesty more than North American cultures (Cai, Brown, Deng, & Oakes, 2007). Indeed, there is a strong expectation that individuals will downplay their accomplishments in Eastern cultures (Genyue, Heyman, & Lee, 2011; Kim, Chiu, Peng, Cai, & Tov, 2010). If people in East Asia do not perceive sharing success as a social norm, then they are less likely to perceive hiding success as paternalistic, and therefore, it is less likely to have relational costs. Throughout all of our studies, we recruited a primarily Western sample of participants. Future research should explore whether the consequences of hiding success vary based on cultural modesty norms, such as between Eastern and Western cultures.

## Conclusion

After achieving a success, people are faced with a choice: Should they share or hide the success from others? Communicators may be tempted to hide their success, but we find that targets respond negatively to this decision because it signals paternalistic motives. When one's goal is to maintain a relationship with the target, sharing success is a more effective communication strategy than hiding success.

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