7 Strategic self-presentation: an overview

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The term *self-presentation* refers to the process of establishing an identity through the appearance one presents to others. Three decades ago, Erving Goffman stimulated a tradition of research: he noted that it is clearly in a person's 'interests to control the conduct of others', especially conduct that has immediate personal consequences for the individual (Goffman, 1959: 3). Goffman characterised impression management in everyday relations as one common way to accomplish this end. People are acutely aware that others form impressions and use these impressions to guide the course and outcome of social relations. Indeed, M. Snyder (1977) argued that self-presentation, or impression management, is 'the inevitable consequence of social perception' (p.90); by this, he meant that the importance of impression formation in everyday relations implied that people would attempt to manage the impressions made.

The manner in which people plan, adopt and carry out the process of conveying an image of self has grown immensely in scope and sophistication since Goffman first generated interest in the topic. Taxonomies and models of contemporary research agree that there are many goals people strive to achieve through their presentation of self. Research has provided evidence for a host of subtle and sophisticated strategies people undertake to realise these goals.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of contemporary research on self-presentation. Today, one can hardly scan a journal in social psychology without seeing some insightful account or intriguing demonstration of the ways in which people behave to create impressions on others. Increasingly, the same is true in the fields of sociology and communication. To provide some order to this overview, and to distill the literature to manageable proportions, we will focus on two *self-presentation styles* (Arkin, 1981), and touch on the ways in which adopting one or the other of these styles can facilitate or impede an individual's personal success in interpersonal relations. Our focus in this chapter is also exclusively on *direct* tactics of image management (cf. Cialdini & Richardson, 1980); *indirect* tactics (i.e. conveying an impression of self through information about people and things to which one is merely connected) are the focus of the following chapter (Chapter 8) by Cialdini, Finch, and DeNicholas.

Self-Presentation Styles

We live in a world in which a great deal of what we do is evaluated, both by ourselves and by others, with an eye towards assessing a host of personal qualities (Tedeschi, 1981). For instance, performance on the tennis court, in the classroom, in the concert hall, and across a table for two is scrutinised closely to determine athletic, intellectual, artistic or social competence. In addition to ability, characteristics such as likeability, trustworthiness and reliability are assessed and reassessed on a continuous basis.

An acquisitive self-presentation style

Whether the goal can be superficially described as that of appearing knowledgeable, facile, smooth or productive, the underlying basis of impression management characteristically involves impressing others favourably whenever and wherever possible. The prototype of the effective impression manager is the individual high in 'self-monitoring' (e.g. M. Snyder, 1979). The 'high self-monitor' has 'the flexibility and adaptiveness to cope quickly and effectively with a diversity of social roles . . . [she] can choose with skill and grace the self-presentation and social behavior appropriate to each of a wide variety of social situations' (Snyder, 1979: 102). As described in much greater detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974, 1979) is a trait dimension that represents

a combination of self-presentational and self-attentional differences. The high self-monitoring individual is simultaneously sensitive to situational cues to appropriate behaviour and is also skilful at monitoring his or her own expressive behaviour to keep it in accordance with these cues.

Historical perspectives

Actually, William James (1890) anticipated this analysis of self-presentation quite some time ago. James focused on the pervasive nature of an acquisitive brand of self-presentation:

> A man [sic] has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind . . . But as the individuals who carry the images form naturally into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. Many a youth who is demure enough before his parents and teachers swears and swaggers like a pirate among his 'tough' young friends. We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club companions, to our masters and employers as to our intimate friends. (1890, Vol. 1: 294)

Similarly, Goffman (1959) drew an analogy between everyday life and the world of the theatre in his 'dramaturgical' approach. For Goffman, borrowing from Shakespeare, 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'. According to Goffman (1959), self-presentation is designed to overcome obstacles to smooth encounters and lasting relationships. The goals of the relationship are the multitude of material and social benefits people obtain from affiliating with others.

Among the benefits of affiliation, the quest for social approval or liking was among the first motives posed (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964; Jones, 1964) and is still thought to be one of the primary forces underlying self-presentation (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Individuals who score high on a scale of Need for Approval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) tend more than their low-scoring counterparts to engage in socially desirable behaviour. For instance, they (a) tend to report extremely favourable attitudes about dull and boring tasks they must do for the experimenter, (b) tend to conform in response to social pressure, (c) tend to give popular rather than unusual word associations, (d) are less likely to use or report noticing 'dirty' words, (e) are more susceptible to persuasive appeals to change their attitudes, and (f) tend to suppress hostility towards persons who insult or take advantage of them (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). Each of

these behaviours reflects a sort of smoothing over of interpersonal relations; each is an expression of the socially desirable thing to do.

Contemporary perspectives

Jones & Pittman (1982; and Jones, 1964) refer to such approval-based self-presentation as *Ingratiation*. The main goal of the ingratiator is to be seen as likeable. There are many ways this can be accomplished, of course; one common tactic is to give compliments, another is to conform to another person's opinions or to copy or imitate his or her acts (e.g. Jones, 1964). As the saying goes, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. It is clear that people tend to like other people whose beliefs, attitudes or behaviours are similar to their own (e.g. Byrne, 1971). Ingratiators tend to use both verbal and nonverbal indicators of attentiveness as well as agreement. For instance, the individual seeking to be ingratiating tends to lean forward, nod and agree and smile, ask questions and talk less (Godfrey, Jones & Lord, 1986).

Such flattery—compliments, favours, imitation and attentiveness—must be given with skill and grace, however. Indiscriminate flattery can lead a target individual to suspect ingratiation (Kauffman & Steiner, 1968), and transparent ingratiation produces suspicion and can produce disliking where likeability was sought (Jones & Wortman, 1973). This fine line between promoting 'the attractiveness of one's personal qualities' (Jones & Wortman, 1973) and risking sycophancy is called the 'ingratiator's dilemma' (Jones & Wortman, 1973). Unsuccessful ingratiators appear to be the victims of 'either too much or too little' (Godfrey, Jones & Lord, 1986: 115).

A person can seek to present an identity directed at gaining some immediate or deferred reward through other means as well. In contrast to the goal of affection or attractiveness, sought by the ingratiator, Jones & Pittman (1982) posed the tactic of *Intimidation*; intimidation is designed to induce fear in another and, in turn, to make attempts at social influence more effective. The person who is feared is credible when threats and other forms of coercion are used. That is, by creating an image of being dangerous, the intimidator is in a position to control the course and outcome of social interaction merely by seeming likely to mete out punishment. The ineffective intimidator is the one who seems unable to live up to his or her reputation; the person who is wishy-washy, or blustery and weak, finds that his or her threats are diminished—not enhanced—by tactics of intimidation.

Another tactic, *exemplification* (Jones & Pittman, 1982), can be effective in eliciting imitation in others. For example, the individual who exemplifies the best of work habits (arriving at work early, no coffee breaks, taking work home) projects an image that permits rigid adherence to high standards in evaluating others. By fostering a perception of integrity or moral worthiness, one can also arouse guilt in the target of the influence attempt. In either case, the exemplifier can induce stricter adherence to some desired standard of behaviour. Of course, the exemplifier runs the risk of seeming to be a hypocrite or sanctimonious. As with the ingratiator's dilemma, there is a fine line between the desired reaction (guilt, emulation) and a response that is reactive (feelings of exploitation). Exemplification also requires skill and grace.

Self-promotion is the tactic used as a vehicle to help demonstrate competence, either in terms of some general ability (one's intellect) or some specific skill (playing piano). The goal of this tactic is respect or deference. Self-promotion requires as much skill, grace and sophistication as all the other forms of acquisitive self-presentation described above. For instance, the individual whose shortcomings are known by others may have to acknowledge such weaknesses, but then go on to emphasise other positive characteristics that may not have been apparent (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). There is also the danger of making claims that prove a great mismatch with reality (e.g. Wortman, Costanzo & Witt, 1973), such as when someone fraudulently brags about some athletic prowess.

Individuals can use a variety of tactics to achieve self-promotion (Godfrey, Jones & Lord, 1986); for instance, subjects instructed to engage in self-promotion are likely to draw attention to themselves by using first-person pronouns. In addition, they are more likely to mention or consider mentioning their accomplishments when pursuing self-promotion. In so doing, self-promoters can capture the attention of others and provide evidence of their competence.

Finally, perhaps the most intriguing of these self-presentational tactics described by Jones & Pittman (1982) is *supplication*. The supplicant seeks to demonstrate his or her helplessness. Unlike the self-promoter (who seeks respect), the intimidator (who fosters fear) or the exemplifier (who seeks guilt or hopes for emulation), the supplicant acknowledges weakness and dependence. The supplicant relies on a sense of obligation, or feelings of nurturance, to lead others to treat the supplicant well. Unlike the other self-presentation strategies, then, supplication is not a direct attempt to seek power and therefore influence. It stems from a position of weakness. An individual may feign fatigue, and seek help on

a dull task without seeming to be lazy. Being 'poor with one's hands' is a convenient way to avoid the role of Mr Fixit around the house. And knowing little about the specifics of cars can be used to get help with changing the tyre. Recent evidence suggests that, in certain circumstances, people will even 'strategically fail' at some task, lowering others' expectations for satisfactory performance and taking themselves 'off the hook', so to speak (Baumgardner & Brownlee, 1987; Weary, 1988).

Distinguishing assertive and defensive strategies

Jones & Pittman (1982) argue that supplication is distinct from the other strategies of self-presentation in that it is the tactic of last resort. They suggest that, in the hierarchy of choices among tactics of social influence, advertising one's weakness and dependence on another person is perhaps the least desirable means of 'getting one's way' (Cialdini, 1988). Relatively powerless individuals must opt for weaker strategies of influence in general (e.g. Canary, Cody & Marston, 1986), but supplication is an extreme form of acknowledging one's powerlessness. While weak forms of social influence, such as supplication, can achieve the short-term goal, the long-term costs can be substantial. Dependency on powerful others has collateral disadvantages, such as depressive affect (e.g. Ford & Berkman, 1988), beyond the loss in credibility and social power in the long-term course of social exchange. In sum, the tactics of supplication and of self-promotion appear to be incompatible and at odds with one another.

The tactic of supplication seems distinct from the other strategies of self-presentation outlined by Jones & Pittman (1982) in another way as well. It has only a superficial appearance of accomplishing some positive end. Instead, supplication seems more often than not to be focused on avoiding some negative outcome: that is, the weakness and dependence that constitute the supplication strategy is often genuine. An individual is willing to reveal it only because getting help and realising some goal prevents some negative outcome that is very costly. The supplication strategy seems to stem from a position of weakness (cf. Canary, Cody & Marston, 1986), while the other strategies described by Jones & Pittman (1982) tend to stem from a position of strength, and seem to be more clearly acquisitive in nature.

The person well up the social hierarchy may eschew self-presentational tactics altogether. The ultimate power of leadership can mean that it is not important how the subordinate views the leader, 'for the subordinate's opinion of the leader seldom has repercussions' (Snodgrass, 1985: 152). However, the superordinate individual's 'feelings about the subordinate can very well affect the subordinate's tenure, salary, grade, promotions, and so forth' (p. 152). Consequently, the subordinate in any social hierarchy must remain sensitive to the self-presentation he or she attempts as well as to the way the presentation of self is received by superiors. In sum, the role of the subordinate demands great skill and effort devoted to self-protection (associated with lowest levels of power) as well as various forms of self-promotion (associated with moderate degrees of power). By contrast, the person with absolute power need not be sensitive to the opinions or feelings of others at all.

In this section, we have posed a distinction between assertive self-presentation—broadly conceived to include acquisitive self-presentation in the form of ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, and other specific tactics—and self-protection. Having posed this distinction, we are now in a position to turn expressly to the topic of self-protection. Increasingly, the typical focus on the successful, facile, smooth and graceful among us has been viewed as an incomplete picture of the topography of self-presentation (e.g. Arkin, 1981; Tedeschi & Norman, 1985). In the sections to follow, we will develop further the idea that assertive and defensive strategies of self-presentation constitute two broad classes of self-presentational behaviour that offer a useful theoretical and empirical framework.

A protective self-presentation style

The polar opposite of the skill of the 'self-monitor' (the prototype of the acquisitive self-presenter described above) could be the carefree existence of the person completely unconcerned with social influence. Such a person could be described as indifferent to the social situation, or unaware of or insensitive to the long-term social consequences of his or her actions. Of course, such an individual might also be characterised as out of touch with social reality, where material and social necessities are meted out in both the short term and the long term by powerful others.

Quite apart from disinterest, or ignorance of the social consequences of one's actions, there is another countervailing force that competes with the desire for social approval and the material and social rewards that approval signifies: the desire to avoid social disapproval. As noted by Snyder and Higgins in Chapter 9 of this volume, one means of avoiding

disapproval is by offering an excuse for some inadequate behaviour that has created a social predicament (see also Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13). Excuses attempt to recast some action as inadvertent, an accident, or as an unintended after-effect. For example, the statement 'I didn't mean to . . . ' is a type of excuse commonly used to divert a powerful party from taking restorative action (Jellison, 1977). Similarly, justifications provide reasons why an apparently negative behaviour should be viewed instead as legitimate, justified, or even good (see particularly Chapter 11). Individuals may cite a higher good, as when a positive end seems to justify an uncomfortable means. Finally, disclaimers are used to deny personal responsibility for an event even before it occurs.

Together, the forms of self-protection listed above constitute ways of diverting superiors and peers from taking some action that is very costly to the individual. When in some predicament, and when anticipating some predicament, a person can present an identity directed at avoiding some specific and rather immediate loss or punishment.

The role of 'state' social anxiety

Being interviewed for a desirable job, going on a first date, or giving a speech before a large and important audience are acts that could make almost anyone feel anxious. Some people—those who are shy (Zimbardo, 1977) or easily embarrassed (Crozier, in press)—may tend to feel anxious in almost any situation in which they might be evaluated. For these individuals, anxiety appears to have more traitlike qualities than it seems to be just a temporary and passing state.

Schlenker & Leary (1982) proposed that a 'state' of social anxiety arises when a person is motivated to make a particular impression on an audience, but doubts he or she is able to do so. In short, if an unsatisfactory evaluative reaction from a subjectively important audience is likely, social anxiety is the result. Naturally, according to this viewpoint an individual must assess the likelihood of achieving a preferred self-presentation, or social anxiety should never occur. Schlenker & Leary (1982) therefore propose that an assessment process is triggered whenever a self-presentational goal is important to the individual, and when some signal indicates that the social performance under way may be undermined. That is, people tend to feel anxious when motivated to impress others favourably, but are in doubt about the outcome. If an assessment indicates that the desired image will be achieved, the initial presentation of self is reinaugurated; that is, the initial acquisitive presentation of self is continued. However, if the assessment indicates that the desired image

will not be achieved, the individual must 'make the best of a bad situation' (p. 658). To cope with such a predicament, the individual will adopt a cautious, innocuous, or non-committal presentation of self (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

The simple principle offered by Schlenker and Leary helps to organise much of what is known about the antecedents of social anxiety. People tend to feel anxious (a) when dealing with powerful, high status others whose impressions matter, (b) when in a novel situation, where the social rules of action are unclear or unknown, (c) when there is a large number of people present, such as a large party or an audience to a speech, (d) when the context is an evaluative one, as when one is trying to make an impression during a first date, (e) when the desired impression one is trying to create involves something important or central to the individual's self-image, as when a student presents his or her senior honours project to the faculty for their consideration (Leary, 1983: 69–97).

In all these instances, people are highly motivated to make particular impressions, ones which have favourable implications, but at the same time are likely to doubt that they can foster the desired impression. The irony Schlenker & Leary (1982) offer is that it is precisely these circumstances (where a favourable presentation of self is most desired) in which doubts about one's self-presentational efficacy are most likely to arise.

The role of 'trait' social anxiety

The shy person has been posed as the prototype of someone inclined to adopt a conservative social orientation (Arkin, 1981). Those who are shy (Zimbardo, 1977), or easily embarrassed (Crozier, in press), tend to feel anxious in almost any situation in which they might be evaluated. To regulate that anxiety, even before it arises, the person who is 'trait' anxious chronically approaches social situations intending merely to avoid social disapproval rather than to seek approval. The term 'protective self-presentation' was coined to characterise this type of social conservatism. The 'protective' individual attempts to create an impression that is merely safe.

In sum, despite the general preference to present oneself in socially desirable ways (in order to engender approval and liking, sustain an interaction, and maximise the likelihood that others will help meet one's social and material needs), for the shy individual the motive to sustain a sense of safety and security (e.g. Sullivan, 1953) often predominates.

That is, when a person weighs the costs of disapproval as high or higher than the rewards of approval or accolades that can follow success, a conservative and safety-oriented style of interpersonal relations can supplant the acquisitive self-presentation style described earlier. In short, 'getting along' becomes pre-eminent over 'getting ahead' (Hogan, Jones & Cheek, 1985; Wolfe, Lennox & Cutler, 1986). For instance, the risk of social disapproval and the desire merely to 'get along' can produce self-censorship and compromise. To illustrate, individuals high in social anxiety, who place great stock in protecting their social image and avoiding disapproval (Arkin, 1981; Schlenker & Leary, 1982), tend to moderate their judgements when they expect to be confronted by someone who holds a different opinion from their own (e.g. Turner, 1977). In so doing, these individuals seize a part of the attitude scale that is normatively and practically unassailable. By appearing to have no attitude at all, one can avoid appearing to have the wrong attitude. Those who have no attitude can be persuaded, but they cannot be attacked.

The protective nature of moderating and self-censoring one's views (cf. Arkin, 1981) is highlighted when attitude moderation is contrasted with attitude polarisation. There are clear acquisitive advantages to holding fast, or even polarising one's judgements. A position towards the pole (on a generally preferred side of an issue) tends to convey the impression that one is knowledgeable, authoritative, expert and well-informed (Jellison & Arkin, 1977). Consequently, interpersonal politics (tactics for gaining, holding and using power in interpersonal relations) would tend to suggest that individuals position themselves towards one or the other end of an attitude dimension if they desire to establish themselves as competent, authoritative or powerful. An exception to this strategy, however, is found among candidates for high level public office who traditionally tend to avoid expressing attitudes or positions that might be interpreted as extreme.

In general, however, in contrast to the individual seeking social power, the person who values getting along as much or more than getting ahead tilts towards a neutral position. This is the safe territory where followers can wait for consensus to emerge. When it does, they seek the safety of numbers and submerge their personal identity within the identity of the group.

Empirical Illustrations of the Self-Presentation Styles Concept

Most attempts at self-presentation reflect an intermixing of both the acquisitive and protective self-presentation styles. Specifically, a given

self-presentational act may be undertaken for reasons of self-promotion as well as self-protection. To illustrate the intermixing of the two self-presentational styles, we now focus on two specific self-presentational behaviours (the self-serving bias in causal attribution; and self-handicapping) that could be undertaken to serve either motive. Both conceptually and empirically, however, it is possible to disentangle the two sources of self-presentation, and the following illustrations provide a vehicle for that as well.

The self-serving bias

The process of self-attribution provides a rich illustration of the tug towards self-promotion and the competing appeal of self-protection. The 'self-serving bias in causal attribution' (Weary & Arkin, 1981) is a fairly clear use of attributional principles aimed at protecting, preserving and sustaining, or enhancing, one's image. The 'bias' refers to a rather pervasive tendency to attribute successful outcomes to oneself and failing outcomes to other factors (Weary & Arkin, 1981). Such a bias serves to modulate the link between the 'whatness' and the 'whyness' of things. By denying personal responsibility for a failing outcome, the negative quality of the event is vastly reduced; although the failure has occurred and cannot be reversed (i.e. the 'whatness' is left intact), the implications of the failing outcome in determining others' judgements of one's level of ability is minimised. Put simply, by attributing a failing outcome to some extraneous external cause, one can sever the usual link between performance and evaluation. Commonly, this is referred to as 'excuse-making' (Snyder, Higgins & Stucky, 1983; see Chapter 9 of this volume, by Snyder and Higgins, for empirical and everyday illustrations). By contrast, when one assumes personal responsibility for successful outcomes, the positive quality of the success can be increased by asserting the link between performance and evaluation (i.e. taking personal credit for the successful outcome).

As a self-presentational device, however, the self-serving bias would seem to be an *ad hoc* tool for fine-tuning one's image. A person associates himself or herself with success, and dissociates himself or herself from failure, only after the outcome has been achieved. The outcome, success or failure, reflects well or poorly on the individual. The attributional account is then offered to help the person cope with—or capitalise on—that outcome. That is, the 'self-serving bias' arises when a person is already in a predicament (i.e. a failure has occurred) or enjoys the prospect of basking in further glory (i.e. success has occurred). A more subtle approach would involve the strategic manipulation of a context

proactively, so that only desired inferences about personal qualities could be drawn by others.

The most direct way of achieving such a result would be to undertake tasks only when success is assured. Throughout life, people make choices (college major, career, marital partner) that they judge to be surer bets than other options. Indeed, some persons opt for a course that seems predictable (e.g. the military), and forgo control over their destiny in order to ensure certainty about their outcomes (e.g. Burger & Arkin, 1980). However, most persons choose courses of action that constitute a challenge, in which the probability of success and failure are both present (and perhaps near equal). The prospect of success and that of failure may be weighted differently, though, in terms of the value placed on making a favourable impression (consequent to success) and avoiding an unfavourable image (consequent to failure). A heavy stress on avoiding an unfavourable image might foster the self-presentational strategy of 'self-handicapping'.

Self-handicapping

The term 'self-handicapping' refers to a person's attempt to reduce a threat to esteem by proactively seeking or creating inhibitory factors that interfere with performance and thus provide a persuasive causal explanation for potential failure. The introduction of extraneous interfering causal factors obscures the link between performance and evaluation, at least in the case of that potential failure, and mitigates the impact of the failure feedback. As with the self-serving bias phenomenon, the result is that a failure is not viewed as a reflection of low ability or incompetence. Yet, the probability of failure is increased by the introduction of the 'handicap'; in the face of the handicap, success is less likely. To quote those who first studied the phenomenon, the self-handicapper 'reaches out for impediments, exaggerates handicaps, and embraces any factor reducing personal responsibility for mediocrity . . . ' (Jones & Berglas, 1978: 2), even at the cost of making mediocrity more likely.

Regulating 'state' social anxiety

Berglas & Jones (1978) demonstrated self-handicapping first in a laboratory experiment. Participants in this study were informed that they had performed very well on a pre-test measuring intellectual ability. For half of the participants, the items on the pre-test were moderately difficult,

leading them to believe that they had a reasonable probability of reproducing their performance on a follow-up test. For the remaining participants, however, the items on the pre-test were predominantly unsolvable. These subjects could not understand how they performed so well on the pre-test and, consequently, were led to doubt their ability to reproduce their performance on the follow-up test. Prior to taking the follow-up test, participants were given a choice between taking a drug that would facilitate test performance (called 'Actavil'), a drug that would interfere with test performance (called 'Pandocrin'), and a neutral drug which was described as likely to have no effect on test performance at all. Ostensibly, they were given the choice because the researchers were interested in the influence of the drugs on intellectual functioning. In fact, the alleged drugs were placebos.

From a self-presentation styles perspective, the participants who believed they had performed very well on a test that actually consisted of unsolvable items had been placed in a predicament. These participants desired to sustain their positive presentation of self through reproducing the successful performance on the re-test. However, because their prior success followed working on unsolvable problems, they doubted their ability to do so. According to Schlenker & Leary (1982), these participants should have experienced 'state' social anxiety. Furthermore, they could have exacerbated their predicament by choosing the facilitating drug, 'Actavil'. They might perform no better in spite of the boost afforded them by the Actavil. Yet, should they choose the interfering drug, 'Pandocrin', they might actually increase the likelihood of failing.

However, choice of the interfering drug provided a path towards reducing the experience of social anxiety and would serve to counteract the interfering effects of the state of social anxiety itself. By choosing to handicap their forthcoming performance these individuals could provide themselves with a non-ability explanation for failure. Should they perform poorly on the upcoming test, their failure would be attributable not to their own shortcomings, but to the debilitating drug instead. With a handicap in place, these subjects would no longer be expected to perform at their previous level. In a sense, the handicap would take them 'off the hook', releasing them to pursue a more obtainable self-presentational goal. The net result would be lowering social anxiety. There is evidence to suggest that social anxiety is reduced by the presence of a handicap; both Leary (1986) and Brodt & Zimbardo (1981) found that socially anxious persons, forced to perform in the presence of a debilitating handicap, were less anxious during the course of a social encounter than their counterparts who were not exposed to the debilitating handicap.

Berglas & Jones (1978) found that participants who had experienced the 'non-contingent success', in which their successful performance was somewhat of a mystery, resolved the conflict by ingesting the interfering 'Pandocrin'. (Those who were more sure of their ability to perform well on the follow-up test more often chose the facilitating 'Actavil'.) By choosing the interfering pill, they were able to mitigate the implications of the failure for spoiling their public image. The pill provided an excuse, should they fail, permitting them to conceal their inadequacy.

Taking a debilitating drug, consuming alcohol and withdrawing effort are all illustrations of self-handicaps. Each of these acts obscures the inference that poor performance is due to incompetence. However, each of these actions reflects an internal 'disposition' that is itself not particularly flattering. The alcoholic, the drug abuser and the chronically slothful individual are all able to protect themselves from the attribution of incompetence. However, the short-term and long-term costs of this type of label (e.g. shame) are little better than an attribution of incompetence. A more strategic self-handicap would set the stage so that a poor performance would be attributable to some *external* impediment, a factor that could not reflect poorly on the handicapper. The most common example in the literature involves the choice of an inordinately difficult goal, or task, for which the likelihood of success is low (e.g. see Arkin & Baumgardner, 1985).

Interestingly, the choice of a very difficult goal or impossible task confers an additional advantage. It is hard not to admire an individual with high aspirations. Consequently, it is possible that a self-presentation strategy such as self-handicapping stems from the desire to promote oneself, rather than to protect oneself. In addition to the admiration one receives for being willing to work under less than ideal circumstances, and the admiration associated with accepting challenges or trying the impossible, there is always the possibility of success. The person who succeeds in spite of a handicap is all the more entitled to the accolades that success ordinarily brings.

Although, in principle, self-handicapping would embody this self-promotive feature alongside its self-protective quality, we suspect that genuine handicaps are rarely sought with an eye towards promoting one's image in this way. People may claim (or, more likely, 'let on') that their successes were achieved in spite of overwhelming odds, but it seems unlikely that people would risk failure (i.e. actually handicap themselves) in order to demonstrate true excellence (i.e. success in spite of the handicap). Handicapping as an acquisitive brand of self-promotion seems

likely to occur only when success is already assured. Thus, it seems likely that self-handicapping is predominantly self-protective.

Self-promotion probably takes the form of more direct attempts to establish one's competence, intelligence, knowledge, skills or prowess. The self-promoter may display his or her 'credentialled self' by displaying diplomas, certificates, or plaques of one type or another. Ordinarily, these tactics are employed for some immediate objective, such as obtaining a job. The job application itself constitutes a study in the art of self-promotion. Modesty is a strategy restricted to a very special set of circumstances, such as when the audience already has an image of the actor as competent (Ackerman & Schlenker, 1975) or when the actor fears he or she will be asked to deliver on a more flattering claim in the short term (Wortman, Costanzo & Witt, 1973).

The role of 'trait' social anxiety

In the previous section it was argued that, when performance circumstances are characterised by doubt and uncertainty, people will regulate their anxious feelings by self-handicapping. Given their doubt and uncertainty, it might be anticipated that persons who are chronically high in social anxiety would be prime candidates for self-handicapping. By self-handicapping, socially anxious persons would be able to keep their anxiety feelings in check.

Before discussing self-handicapping and trait social anxiety, it is first necessary to draw a distinction between two classes of self-handicaps. Self-handicaps differ with respect to whether they are 'created' by an individual prior to some performance or exist in some form prior to performance. By 'created', we mean to imply impediments that are set in place or actually fashioned by the individual. Created or constructed handicaps would include such actions as ingesting alcohol or drugs, choosing inhibiting performance circumstances, preparing for some performance to an inadequate degree, etc. In contrast to constructed handicaps are those handicaps that pre-exist either within the individual or in the individual's context, prior to performance. This class of handicaps would include personal disabilities, physical complaints, personal constraints such as test-anxiety, and environmental factors such as loud noise, poor lighting, and the like.

Regarding pre-existing self-handicaps, there is evidence to suggest that socially anxious persons will self-handicap by pre-emptively claiming their anxiety symptoms as an excuse for failure. In one study, for instance,

high and low socially anxious undergraduates were instructed that they were to take a test of social intelligence. Some of the participants were led to believe that anxiety symptoms had no effect on test performance, while others were told nothing about the relationship between anxiety symptoms and test performance. An additional group of high and low socially anxious participants also was given no information regarding the relationship between anxiety and test performance; instead, they were provided with instructions that de-emphasised the evaluative nature of the test (Snyder *et al.*, 1985). Prior to taking the test, all participants were provided with an opportunity to report their current level of anxiety.

The researchers found that highly socially anxious participants reported experiencing heightened anxiety symptoms in a setting in which their anxiety could serve as an excuse for poor performance. In the setting in which social anxiety was described as having no effect on performance, and in the non-evaluative setting, socially anxious participants did not report heightened anxiety. Low socially anxious persons did not demonstrate the self-protective strategy in any instance; rather they reported relatively few anxiety symptoms regardless of how the test setting was characterised. To summarise, the study by Snyder *et al.* (1985) suggests that high socially anxious persons are willing to use their anxiety symptoms strategically as a pre-emptive excuse for failure on an upcoming test.

Although socially anxious persons appear willing to claim their anxiety symptoms as a handicap to an upcoming performance, they seem unwilling to discount personal responsibility for an unsuccessful act by constructing a handicap to performance. In two experiments high and low socially anxious participants were given a choice between listening to performance-enhancing or performance-debilitating music while taking a test measuring intellectual ability (Arkin & Shepperd, 1988). Although low socially anxious persons chose to listen to performance-debilitating music while taking the test, high socially-anxious individuals did not.

The research described above raises an interesting question: why are socially anxious individuals willing to report their anxiety as a handicap (a pre-existing handicap) but not willing to engage in the ostensibly similar behaviour of acquiring an external impediment to performance (a constructed self-handicap)? Both pre-existing self-handicaps and constructed self-handicaps provide a pre-emptive excuse for failure—the handicap itself. Should a person perform poorly in the presence of either a pre-existing or constructed handicap, he or she can assert the handicap as a plausible cause of the failure. Moreover, the two forms of self-

handicapping share the added advantage of augmenting ability should the person perform successfully in the presence of the handicap. After all, success achieved in spite of a handicap should be seen as an admirable accomplishment.

Nevertheless, there are several plausible explanations for the inconsistent findings among socially anxious individuals across the two classes of self-handicaps. First, there may be different costs associated with the two forms of self-handicapping. Specifically, the anxious person who reports that his or her debilitating anxiety functions as an obstacle to a successful performance suffers no increased risk of failure by making such a claim. For the anxious person, the probability that failure will ensue as a result of crippling anxiety remains the same regardless of whether the knowledge of this handicap is made public or kept private. Thus, in terms of the impact it has on actual task performance, claiming a pre-existing handicap is a relatively safe venture. Conversely, constructing handicaps, by definition, diminishes the probability that the handicapper will perform successfully. Indeed, the handicaps which are likely to be most persuasive are the same ones that debilitate task performance the most. In short, persons who construct handicaps not only (1) must admit to embracing an action which, if it is to be persuasive as a handicap, is likely to be negatively sanctioned, but also (2) diminish the likelihood that a successful performance on the task will occur. In weighing the costs and benefits associated with constructed self-handicaps, it seems likely that socially anxious persons perceive the increased risk of failure as too costly. Consequently, they resist using this attributional strategy.

A second explanation is also based on the equation of the relative costs associated with internal pre-existing versus constructed forms of self-handicapping. Constructed handicaps subject the handicapper to a very great risk of being caught practising deception. People who construct a handicap run the risk that observers will call their bluff, forcing them to attempt the task again unencumbered by the handicap. With the handicap removed, their true ability (or lack thereof) is laid open to the scrutiny of others. Should they continue to fail in the absence of the handicap, they are left with the cost of the handicap (being perceived as lazy, as a drug or alcohol abuser, etc.) yet denied the benefit of a non-ability attribution made for failure. With internal pre-existing handicaps, the handicapper's bluff can never be called. While an audience may come to doubt the authenticity of a self-handicap that is merely reported, they can never conclusively exclude it as the cause of a failure. Thus, there is less risk associated with internal pre-existing self-handicaps because only the handicapper can know the impact they truly have on performance.

This same argument can be used to explain why socially anxious persons are unwilling to deny personal responsibility for an unsuccessful outcome after it occurs (i.e. make self-serving attributions; Arkin *et al.*, 1980). As with acquiring a self-handicap, citing a cause other than lack of ability as the source of failure raises the spectre of being challenged. Persons who assert extenuating circumstances (e.g. 'my poor performance was due to not having enough time to do my best') as an excuse for failure may be requested to repeat the task with the extenuating circumstances removed. Likewise, they may be faced with the prospect that their excuse will not be judged credible; an excuse is often offered to a more powerful and knowledgeable expert who presumably has a better understanding of what is and is not a viable excuse for failure. It is the resulting embarrassment and the risk of being labelled as one who 'shirks responsibility' that may dissuade socially anxious persons from making self-serving attributions.

The third explanation for the inconsistent findings is that the two forms of self-handicapping may tap different levels of sophistication in knowledge of attributional inference processes. Socially anxious persons are characterised by a focus away from the task and on avoiding disapproval (Baumeister & Steinhilber, 1984). In a sense, they are very much like test-anxious persons (Mandler & Watson, 1966; Wine, 1971). In a test situation, test-anxious persons tend to think not about the test, but rather about such interfering things as how poorly they are performing, the time constraints, the difficulty of the problems, how others have performed, and their level of ability. These interfering thoughts inhibit test-anxious individuals from concentrating on the test problems, and consequently impede performance.

In a similar manner, the inordinate focus of socially anxious persons on social disapproval may interfere with the tendency to make attributional links between behaviours and outcomes. The report of a pre-existing self-handicap (e.g. reporting anxiety symptoms as an impediment to performance in the Snyder *et al.* study) is a relatively simple means by which the socially anxious person can manipulate the attributions made for a performance. It merely requires that the audience infer the appropriate attribution from the handicapper's verbal report of personal circumstances that debilitate performance. By contrast, constructing a self-handicap (e.g. taking a test while listening to distracting music as done in the Arkin and Shepperd studies) is a more complex strategy, demanding that the handicapper engage in a more sophisticated attributional inference process. It requires that the handicapper not only be cognisant of the fact that a constructed handicap can serve as a persuasive excuse for a potential failure, but also that he or she realise that observers of the handicap can be drawn into making non-ability attributions should failure occur. To summarise, socially anxious persons may fail to draw the conclusion that a constructed self-handicap can provide an excuse for failure on a forthcoming task. Specifically, their intense concern with evaluation may cloud their ability to make the inference that creating a handicap ultimately can result in others making non-ability attributions for failure.

Summary and Conclusions

Our purpose in this chapter has been to provide a selective overview of the self-presentation literature. Particular attention was given to a framework emphasising two opposing styles of self-presentation: (1) an acquisitive style undertaken with the goal of self-promotion, and (2) a conservative style undertaken with the goal of self-protection. The opposing nature of these two styles was examined in terms of the regulation of state social anxiety and the differences between individuals high and low in trait social anxiety.

From both an historical and a contemporary perspective, the literature on self-presentation has been difficult to organise theoretically. Most attempts at placing the literature within a framework have focused on supplying a litany of strategies for presenting the self. Missing from these approaches is some type of organisational scheme. This chapter offers a framework for viewing self-presentation, one which attempts to move towards an analysis of the broader goals realised through self-presentation: self-promotion and self-protection.

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