

## RESEARCH REPORT

# Achieving Desired Images While Avoiding Undesired Images: Exploring the Role of Self-Monitoring in Impression Management

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A study was conducted to test the hypothesis that high self-monitors more effectively manage impressions than low self-monitors do. Students in work groups indicated the extent to which they used 5 impression-management tactics over the course of a semester-long project. At the project's conclusion, students provided their perceptions of the other members of their group. The relationship between impression management and image favorability was then examined across 339 student–student dyads. The results generally suggest that high self-monitors can use impression-management tactics more effectively than can low self-monitors. In particular, high self-monitors appear to be more adept than low self-monitors at using ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification to achieve favorable images among their colleagues.

Impression management is the process by which people attempt to influence the images that others have of them (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). The topic of impression management has been studied by researchers in sociology and social psychology for nearly 40 years (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Jones, 1964; Schlenker, 1980). In recent years, organizational scholars have become increasingly interested in the study of impression management as well (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989, 1991; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). As a result, impression management has been examined in a number of organizational contexts, including interviewing (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992), performance appraisal (Wayne & Ferris, 1990), feedback seeking (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992), and leadership (Wayne & Green, 1993).

Regardless of the specific context in which it is used, the general goal of impression management is to create a particular impression in others' minds (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Rosenfeld et al., 1995). However, while impression-management tactics are often used to generate desired images, Jones and Pittman (1982) caution that attempts at impression management invariably carry the risk of being perceived negatively; that is, for every desired image that is sought by the user of impression management, there is a corresponding undesired image that is risked. For example, an individ-

ual using ingratiation hopes to be perceived as likeable; however, he or she risks being seen as a sycophant. Likewise, a person engaging in self-promotion hopes to come across as competent; however, he or she risks coming across as conceited instead.

Most previous research in organizational settings has focused on how impression management aids individuals in achieving favorable images and attaining career success. For example, Wayne and Liden (1995) found that the use of impression management by subordinates led to more favorable evaluations by their supervisors. In addition, Judge and Bretz (1994) found that the use of ingratiation (a particular type of impression management) was related to career success. While such research indicates that impression-management behaviors can facilitate favorable images, far less research has examined why impression management works and when impression management may have unintended negative consequences.

In contrast to most previous work on impression management, then, this study examines both the positive images that are desired as well as the negative images that are risked when individuals utilize various impression-management tactics. Moreover, this study explores the role that a particular individual difference, namely self-monitoring, plays in determining whether impression-management behaviors have desired or undesired consequences. Specifically, it is suggested that high self-monitors are able to use impression management more effectively than low self-monitors are. That is, when engaging in impression management, it is expected that high self-monitors are more likely than are low self-monitors to achieve desired images while avoiding undesired ones.

### Self-Monitoring and Impression Management

Previous research suggests that individuals who are high self-monitors are sensitive to the appropriateness of the image

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This research was funded by a summer research grant from the College of Business Administration, Kansas State University.

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they are conveying and act like social chameleons by changing their attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors to suit different social situations (Snyder, 1974, 1987; Snyder & Gangestad, 1982). Gabrenya and Arkin (1980) describe high self-monitors as being attentive to the behaviors of others to obtain clues for their own impression management, having great skill at controlling the images they present to others, and frequently using their impression-management skills. These tendencies are thought to facilitate the success of high self-monitors in organizations. For example, Kilduff and Day (1994) demonstrated that high self-monitors are generally more successful in managing their careers (at least in the early stages) than low self-monitors are.

In terms of impression-management research, Snyder and Cope-land (1989) indicated that high self-monitors are more likely to tailor the image they present to others in such a way that it best serves their interests. Furthermore, Fandt and Ferris (1990) found that high self-monitors were more likely than were low self-monitors to manipulate information to present a more positive image of themselves. Other researchers have recognized that self-monitoring not only pertains to one's tendency to engage in impression management, but also to one's skill in successfully using such behaviors. For example, Anderson (1990) indicated that high self-monitors are more effective than low self-monitors are at adapting their leadership style to fit the different contingencies facing work groups. Likewise, other research suggests that high self-monitors' skills in managing impressions allow them to perform better in boundary spanning jobs (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982) and make them likely to emerge as leaders of work groups (Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991).

Researchers generally acknowledge that self-monitoring encompasses both the tendency to use impression management and the skill to successfully execute such behaviors. However, little empirical research has examined how self-monitoring might relate to individuals' abilities to successfully achieve their image goals. Specifically, because they are more sensitive to social cues and have more experience in managing impressions, it is proposed here that high self-monitors should be better able to use impression-management tactics to achieve desired images while avoiding the negative images that are risked in attempts at impression management.

Developing a better understanding of the role that self-monitoring plays in the impression-management process might help us to answer two additional questions as well. First, whereas researchers such as Kilduff and Day (1994) suggest that high self-monitors are more likely to get ahead in organizations, our understanding of why this is true is somewhat speculative. If high self-monitors are indeed more adept at using impression-management strategies than low self-monitors are, then this might help explain why they are also able to advance up the corporate ladder more quickly. Also, whereas some researchers have pointed out that impression-management attempts can backfire (e.g., Crant, 1996), there has been little research examining the factors that influence the effectiveness of impression-management attempts. We believe that self-monitoring may play an important role in determining whether impression-management attempts succeed or fail.

## Impression Management Tactics

Although several different taxonomies of impression-management tactics have been developed by different groups of researchers (e.g., Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), one of the most widely used is the taxonomy developed by Jones and Pittman (1982). Jones and Pittman identified five impression-management strategies that individuals are likely to use:

1. Ingratiation, where individuals use flattery or favor-doing in an attempt to be seen as likeable.
2. Self-promotion, where individuals play up their abilities or accomplishments to be seen as competent.
3. Exemplification, where individuals go above and beyond the call of duty to appear dedicated.
4. Supplication, where individuals advertise their shortcomings in an attempt to be viewed as needy.
5. Intimidation, where individuals seek to appear intimidating or threatening to have others view them as dangerous.

Of these five impression-management tactics, researchers have most often studied the use of ingratiation and self-promotion (e.g., Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Liden & Mitchell, 1988; Ralston, 1985). In a meta-analytic investigation of 69 studies of ingratiation, Gordon (1996) found that ingratiation behaviors were positively related to performance evaluations and interpersonal attraction. However, the effectiveness of ingratiation tactics was influenced by other factors such as the type of ingratiation used (e.g., flattery vs. favors), the transparency of the ingratiation (i.e., the motive attributed to the ingratiation by a target), and the direction of the ingratiation (e.g., peer vs. supervisor). Like the research on ingratiation, the extant literature on self-promotion also indicates that self-promotion may lead to either favorable outcomes (Stevens & Kristof, 1995) or unfavorable outcomes (Judge & Bretz, 1994). For example, Rudman (1998) found that women who self-promote are often viewed as more competent but less socially attractive by observers of their actions.

In general, there has been less research examining the use of exemplification, supplication, and intimidation. In one study, however, Gilbert and Jones (1986) found that exemplification can backfire and result in exemplifiers being seen as hypocritical (rather than virtuous or dedicated) by those they are trying to impress. Research on supplication has sought to understand when and why individuals in organizations might seek to "play dumb" or appear needy (Becker & Martin, 1995). Other studies of supplication have found that using such tactics often has negative repercussions (e.g., decreased self-esteem) for the individuals employing them (Gove, Hughes, & Geerkin, 1980). However, little research has looked at how the individuals using supplication or intimidation are viewed by others—either positively or negatively.

In summary, then, the use of impression-management tactics may lead to either desired or undesired images. This article is concerned with the role self-monitoring plays in determining whether individuals who use impression management will be viewed favorably or unfavorably. Table 1 summarizes the five impression-management tactics identified by Jones and Pittman (1982). Then, following the outline supplied by Jones and Pittman, Table 1 specifies both the desired image that is sought and the undesired image that is risked by individuals using each

Table 1  
*Impression-Management Strategies and  
 Associated Image Outcomes*

Strategy	Representative behaviors	Desired image	Undesired image
Ingratiation	Flattery, favor-doing	Likeable	Sycophant
Self-promotion	Performance claims, boasting	Competent	Conceited
Exemplification	Going beyond the call of duty, appearing busy	Dedicated	Feels superior
Supplication	Asking for help, playing dumb	Needy	Lazy
Intimidation	Making threats, displaying anger	Intimidating	Bossy

*Note.* From *Toward a General Theory of Strategic Self-Presentation* (p. 249), by E. E. Jones and T. S. Pittman, 1982, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. Copyright 1982 by Erlbaum. Adapted with permission.

of the impression management strategies. The primary hypothesis in this study is that high self-monitors will be more successful in their use of impression-management tactics than will low self-monitors.

H1a: High self-monitors will more frequently achieve the desired image of "likeable" when using ingratiation than will low self-monitors.

H1b: Low self-monitors will more frequently achieve the undesired image of "sycophant" when using ingratiation than will high self-monitors.

H2a: High self-monitors will more frequently achieve the desired image of "competent" when using self-promotion than will low self-monitors.

H2b: Low self-monitors will more frequently achieve the undesired image of "conceited" when using self-promotion than will high self-monitors.

H3a: High self-monitors will more frequently achieve the desired image of "dedicated" when using exemplification than will low self-monitors.

H3b: Low self-monitors will more frequently achieve the undesired image of "feels superior" when using exemplification than will high self-monitors.

H4a: High self-monitors will more frequently achieve the desired image of "needy" when using supplication than will low self-monitors.

H4b: Low self-monitors will more frequently achieve the undesired image of "lazy" when using supplication than will high self-monitors.

H5a: High self-monitors will more frequently achieve the desired image of "intimidating" when using intimidation than will low self-monitors.

H5b: Low self-monitors will more frequently achieve the undesired image of "bossy" when using intimidation than will high self-monitors.

## Method

### Sample

The participants in this study were business students enrolled in undergraduate management classes at a large university in the midwestern United States. The students were at the junior or senior level in their undergraduate program. Students were randomly assigned to work in four-person groups on a semester-long project. The project was research based and entailed identifying an organization to study, collecting class-relevant data from members of the organization, analyzing the data, and providing both an oral and written account of the project and its major findings. Participation in the class project was mandatory; however, participation in this study was voluntary. Students who chose to participate did receive extra credit.

One hundred seventy-one (171) of 192 students agreed to participate in this study; this represents a participation rate of 89%. Approximately 54% of the participants were men, 96% of participants were White, and over 90% of participants were between the ages of 20 and 25. These percentages were representative of the demographic composition of students enrolled in the courses. All participants had some work experience and most currently held part-time jobs.

### Procedure

Each student created a code name by using the first three letters of his or her mother's name and the month of her birth. Students shared their code name with the other members of their group and with the graduate assistant assigned to the course (so that they could receive extra credit). However, students did not reveal their code name to the course instructor. In this way, the respondent's anonymity with respect to the instructor was maintained.

Participants completed the self-monitoring scale at the beginning of the project. At the conclusion of the project, participants indicated the extent to which they had engaged in each of the five impression-management tactics. Four days (two class periods) later, participants provided their perceptions of each of the other three members of their group. Each member of the four-person team, then, was evaluated by three teammates. Thus, given that there were 171 participants in the study, there were a total of 513 (171 × 3) student-student dyads. All of this information was collected before students received their grade on the project.

### Measures

*Self-monitoring.* Self-monitoring was measured using the 18-item revised version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). This scale was developed in response to criticisms directed at the original version of the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974) by several other researchers (e.g., Briggs, Cheek, & Buss, 1980; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). Compared with the original version of the scale, the revised version appears to be more reliable and to more effectively tap a single latent factor of self-monitoring than did the original 25-item scale (Krosnick & Sedikides, 1990; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). As recommended by Briggs and Cheek (1986), a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*), was used rather than the True-False format. A sample item is: "I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people" (reverse scored). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .81.

Previous research on self-monitoring has often classified individuals as low or high self-monitors on the basis of median splits (e.g., Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Miller & Thayer, 1989). However, Webb, Marsh, Schneiderman, and Davis (1989) suggest that a tripartite split is preferable for distinguishing between low and high self-monitors. Thus, because we were specifically interested in examining differences among high and low self-monitors, a tripartite split was used to separate the sample into three groups. The low self-monitoring group was composed of 56 individuals

whose mean score on the measure of self-monitoring was less than 2.72; the high self-monitoring group was composed of 57 individuals whose mean score was greater than 3.22; the middle group (i.e., those who were neither low nor high self-monitors) was made up of 58 individuals with mean self-monitoring scores between 2.72 and 3.22. This distribution resulted in 168 ( $56 \times 3$ ) student-student dyads in the low self-monitoring group, 171 ( $57 \times 3$ ) dyads in the high self-monitoring group, and 174 ( $58 \times 3$ ) dyads representing those who were neither high nor low self-monitors.

**Impression management.** Jones and Pittman's (1982) five impression-management tactics were measured using Bolino and Turnley's (1999) impression-management scale. In their article, Bolino and Turnley describe five studies undertaken to develop the measure of impression management and report evidence of its reliability and convergent and discriminant validity. The measure used here consisted of 23 items tapping the extent to which individuals engage in certain impression management behaviors. The scale asked how accurate each statement was in describing the individual's behavior during the group project. Responses ranged from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). Some of the items were reworded to make them more amenable for use in student workgroups. Cronbach's alphas for the five impression-management dimensions were as follows: Ingratiation (.72), Self-Promotion (.83), Exemplification (.71), Supplication (.80), and Intimidation (.79).

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the scale supported the factor structure proposed by Bolino and Turnley (1999). That is, when using item parcels (as outlined by Floyd and Widaman, 1995), maximum likelihood estimation, and a five-factor model, the following fit indices were obtained: GFI = .96, CFI = .95, and TLI = .91. Moreover, an unparceled CFA model indicated that all of the impression-management items significantly loaded on their specified factor. The specific items and the item loadings

(obtained from the unparceled CFA) are provided in Table 2, and the interfactor correlations are provided in Table 3.

**Image outcomes.** Scales were created to measure the five desired and five undesired image outcomes associated with the various impression-management strategies. These scales were designed to assess the target images specifically identified by Jones and Pittman (1982). Where possible, items to tap these constructs were based on the Interpersonal Adjective Scale (IAS; Wiggins, 1979, 1995). Each image outcome was composed of four specific adjectives. For example, the "likeable" outcome included the following adjectives: likeable, pleasant, nice, and cooperative. All of the items used to measure the image outcomes are presented in the Appendix.

Respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of each member of their group; that is, a separate survey was filled out for each group member. Cronbach's alphas for the 10 image outcome scales were as follows: likeable (.93), competent (.89), dedicated (.88), needy (.74), intimidating (.85), sycophant (.75), conceited (.90), feels superior (.80), lazy (.85), and bossy (.88).

A correlation matrix of all the variables used in this study is provided in Table 4. The means, standard deviations, and alphas for the scales are also provided in this table.

## Results

To test Hypotheses 1–5, we compared the correlations between the impression-management tactics and their associated image outcomes for low self-monitors versus high self-monitors using a one-tailed test as described by Cohen and Cohen (1983). Specifically, Fisher's *r*-to-*z* formula was used to directly contrast the correlations between specific impression-management tactics and

Table 2  
*Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Impression-Management Scale*

Dimension	Factor loading
<b>Ingratiation</b>	
Praise your group members for their efforts so that they will consider you a nice person.	.76
Compliment your group members so they will see you as likeable.	.64
Do personal favors for members of the group to show them that you are friendly.	.55
Take an interest in other group members' personal lives to show them that you are friendly.	.52
<b>Self-Promotion</b>	
Make other group members aware of your talents or qualifications.	.85
Make other group members aware of your unique skills and abilities.	.85
Let other group members know that you are a valuable member of the group.	.66
Talk proudly about your past accomplishments which might help make this project successful.	.65
<b>Exemplification</b>	
Let other group members know how hard you have been working on this project.	.87
Let others know that you have been putting in a lot of time on the project.	.73
Take on more than your fair share of the project so that other group members will see you as dedicated.	.52
Try to appear like you have been very busy working on your part of the project.	.39
Arrive at group meetings on time and stay until the end in order to look dedicated.	.37
<b>Supplication</b>	
Act like you know less than you really do so that other group members will help you out.	.76
Try to gain assistance or sympathy from other group members by appearing needy in some area.	.72
Act like you need assistance on your part of the project so that other group members will help you out.	.71
Pretend not to understand how to do something in order to avoid having to work on an undesirable part of the assignment.	.71
Disclose your weakness in a particular area so that you can avoid an unpleasant part of the assignment.	.49
<b>Intimidation</b>	
Be intimidating with other group members when it is necessary for the good of the project.	.77
Use intimidation to get other group members to do their share of the work.	.67
Speak strongly or forcefully to get other group members to agree to do the project the way you think it should be done.	.65
Deal strongly or aggressively with group members who aren't contributing their fair share to the project.	.64
Let other group members know that you are not willing to be pushed around or dictated to.	.53

Note. Factor loadings are completely standardized. All factor loadings are significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

Table 3  
*Interfactor Correlations for the Impression-Management Scale*

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
1. Ingratiation	—				
2. Self-promotion	.43	—			
3. Exemplification	.49	.52	—		
4. Supplication	.27	.09	.11	—	
5. Intimidation	.22	.39	.34	.34	—

their associated image outcomes for high versus low self-monitors. These correlations and the test statistic used to determine whether the differences are significant appear in Table 5. (The correlations between impression-management tactics and image outcomes are provided for all three groups. However, because our hypotheses are specifically concerned with differences between low and high self-monitors, only differences between these two groups are discussed here.)

Hypothesis 1a was supported. As predicted, the relationship between ingratiation and the image outcome of “likeable” was significantly different for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors. Specifically, among high self-monitors, the use of ingratiation was positively associated with being seen as likeable. In contrast, among low self-monitors, the use of ingratiation was negatively related to being seen as likeable. The relationship between ingratiation and the image outcome of “sycophant” was also significantly different for high and low self-monitors. In particular, the use of ingratiation was positively related to being perceived as a sycophant among low self-monitors, but was unrelated to being perceived as a sycophant among high self-monitors. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was supported as well.

Hypothesis 2a was supported. The correlation between self-promotion and the image outcome of “competent” differed significantly between high and low self-monitors. Specifically, among high self-monitors the use of self-promotion was positively related to being perceived as competent. Among low-self monitors, in contrast, self-promotion was unrelated to being perceived as competent. Hypothesis 2b, though, was not supported. The use of self-promotion was positively correlated with being perceived as conceited among low self-monitors, and self-promotion was unrelated with being perceived as conceited among high self-monitors; however, the difference in the size of these correlations was not significant.

The results support Hypotheses 3a and 3b. The relationships between exemplification and the image outcomes of “dedicated” and “feels superior” were significantly different between high and low self-monitors. Specifically, exemplification was positively related to the image of dedicated and unrelated to the image of feels superior among high self-monitors. In contrast, exemplification was unrelated to the image of dedicated and positively related to the image of feels superior among low self-monitors.

Neither Hypothesis 4a nor 4b was supported. There were no significant differences in the correlations between supplication and the images of “needy” or “lazy” between high and low self-monitors. Instead, the use of supplication was positively related to the image of “lazy” for both high and low self-monitors.

Hypothesis 5a was not supported either. Instead, in contrast to our expectations, the relationship between the use of intimidation

tactics and the image of “intimidating” was stronger for low self-monitors than for high self-monitors. However, Hypothesis 5b was supported. That is, the relationship between the use of intimidation tactics and the undesired attribution of “bossy” was significantly stronger for low self-monitors than for high self-monitors.

## Discussion

The current study sought to examine whether high self-monitors are able to more effectively use impression-management tactics than low self-monitors are. The results of this research provide some support for this proposition, at least with regard to the tactics of ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification. Specifically, when high self-monitors used these tactics, they were more likely to be seen as likeable, competent, and dedicated by the other members of their work groups. In contrast, low self-monitors appear to be less effective at using these tactics to obtain favorable images. In fact, the more low self-monitors used such tactics, the more likely they were to be seen as a sycophant, to be perceived as conceited, or to be perceived as egotistical by their work group colleagues.

In contrast to our hypotheses, the findings here did not support the idea that high self-monitors would be more effective at using supplication than low self-monitors would be. For high and low self-monitors alike, the more one used supplication, the more likely one was to be seen as lazy. These findings suggest that individuals who use supplication, which often involves “playing dumb” in an attempt to elicit the help of other group members, tend to be perceived unfavorably by their peers—regardless of their self-monitoring abilities.

The image outcomes associated with the use of intimidation did differ significantly between low and high self-monitors, but not exactly as predicted. Specifically, among high self-monitors, the use of intimidation was not significantly related to being seen as either intimidating or bossy. However, among low self-monitors, the use of intimidation was positively associated with both the image of intimidating (i.e., the desired image) and the image of bossy (i.e., the undesired image).

This research builds on previous work on self-monitoring, which suggests that this trait is likely to influence the effectiveness with which individuals use impression-management tactics (Anderson, 1990; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982; Zaccaro et al., 1991). Specifically, the findings of this study indicate that self-monitoring is especially important in helping individuals achieve their image goals when using the impression-management tactics of ingratiation, exemplification, and, to a lesser extent, self-promotion.

It is not entirely clear why high self-monitors (relative to low self-monitors) were not able to more effectively utilize supplication and intimidation tactics. However, there are several potential explanations for these findings. First, supplication and intimidation may represent impression-management tactics for which the “desired” image outcomes are of questionable value, especially in the context of work groups. That is, in such settings, being perceived as “needy” or “intimidating” (the desired images associated with supplication and intimidation respectively) may have negative connotations. Thus, student work groups may not have been the best setting for examining the effectiveness of supplication and intimidation tactics. In support of this idea, the evidence suggests

Table 4  
Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.45	0.50																			
2. Race <sup>b</sup>	0.04	0.20	.11**																		
3. Age	1.11	0.48	.01	.26**																	
4. Self-monitoring	3.07	0.57	-.26**	-.07	-.15**	(.81)															
5. Ingratiation	3.13	0.82	-.07	-.10*	-.06	.09*	(.72)														
6. Self-promotion	3.12	0.89	-.17**	-.03	.08	.25**	.35**	(.83)													
7. Exemplanation	2.91	0.77	-.14**	-.07	-.10*	.21**	.47**	.47**	(.71)												
8. Supplication	1.79	0.71	-.11*	-.10*	-.04	-.03	.23**	.09*	.14**	(.80)											
9. Intimidation	2.27	0.84	-.28**	.00	.14	.08	.22**	.33**	.28**	.40**	(.79)										
10. Likeable	4.27	0.73	.03	-.05	-.05	-.09*	.01	.00	.04	-.09*	-.08	(.93)									
11. Sycophant	2.22	0.82	-.02	.06	.07	.01	.05	.12**	.05	.07	.09*	-.24**	(.75)								
12. Competent	3.82	0.77	.01	.02	-.01	.05	-.06	.04	.05	-.05	.05	.57**	-.23**	(.89)							
13. Conceited	1.76	0.91	-.07	.06	.04	-.01	.05	.13**	.06	.03	.14**	-.64**	.42**	-.34**	(.90)						
14. Dedicated	3.78	0.88	-.01	-.03	.00	.07	.01	.02	.12**	-.14**	-.04	.65**	-.23**	.65**	-.46**	(.88)					
15. Feels superior	2.27	0.90	-.02	.03	.06	-.01	.06	.09*	.10*	-.01	.15**	-.48**	.47**	-.24**	.72**	-.29**	(.80)				
16. Needy	2.20	0.83	.10*	.07	.03	-.09*	-.01	.00	-.06	.10*	-.07	-.22**	.47**	-.26**	.19**	-.30**	.22**	(.74)			
17. Lazy	1.73	0.80	-.04	.07	-.01	-.08	-.02	.02	-.11**	.18**	.09*	-.59**	.41**	-.56**	.51**	-.75**	.35**	.40**	(.85)		
18. Intimidating	1.80	0.81	.05	.05	.12**	.04	.00	.08	.03	.02	.11**	-.47**	.37**	-.16**	.64**	-.21**	.62**	.17**	.30**	(.85)	
19. Bossy	1.76	0.87	.03	.07	.11*	.02	-.01	.06	.00	.01	.13**	-.52**	.36**	-.20**	.77**	-.29**	.68**	.17**	.36**	.82**	(.88)

Note. Cronbach's alpha appears along the diagonal in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> Gender is coded as follows: 0 = male, 1 = female. <sup>b</sup> Race is coded as follows: 0 = White, 1 = African American.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5  
Correlations Between Impression-Management Tactics and Associated Image Outcomes by Level of Self-Monitoring

Measure	Self-monitors			Fisher's Z value
	Low	Intermediate	High	
<i>N</i>	168	174	171	
<i>M</i>	2.47	3.03	3.71	
<i>SD</i>	0.27	0.11	0.31	
	Image outcome			
Tactic: Ingratiation				
H1a: Likeable	-.22**	.12	.23**	4.11††
H1b: Sycophant	.19*	-.07	-.02	-1.92†
Tactic: Self-promotion				
H2a: Competent	.01	-.22**	.29**	2.55††
H2b: Conceited	.20**	.16*	.05	-1.37
Tactic: Exemplification				
H3a: Dedicated	.01	.10	.29**	2.55††
H3b: Superior	.26**	-.04	.05	-1.92†
Tactic: Supplication				
H4a: Needy	.11	.04	.10	0.09
H4b: Lazy	.16*	.03	.21**	0.46
Tactic: Intimidation				
H5a: Intimidating	.25**	.11	-.02	-2.46††
H5b: Bossy	.31**	.16*	.01	-2.73††

Note. Fisher's Z value was used to test for differences between the low self-monitoring and high self-monitoring groups.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . †  $p < .05$ , one-tailed. ††  $p < .01$ , one-tailed.

that participants in this study reported using lower levels of supplication and intimidation in comparison to ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification.

Second, there is less distinction between the "desired" and "undesired" outcomes associated with supplication and intimidation than there is with the outcomes associated with the other impression-management tactics investigated here. For example, both theoretically and empirically, there is a clear distinction between being perceived as competent and being perceived as conceited (the image outcomes associated with self-promotion). In this study, the correlation between those outcomes was moderately negative ( $r = -.34$ ). In contrast, there is far less theoretical and empirical distinction between being viewed as intimidating and being viewed as bossy (the image outcomes associated with intimidation). Not surprisingly, the correlation between those two images was very high and positive ( $r = .82$ ), suggesting that observers really did not differentiate between those two images.

Third, while the results did not fully support our hypotheses, an alternative explanation suggests that high self-monitors may, nevertheless, be somewhat more adept at using intimidation than low self-monitors are. Specifically, the more that low self-monitors used intimidation tactics, the more likely they were to be seen as both bossy and intimidating. In contrast, high self-monitors had the ability to be somewhat more aggressive and assertive without being considered intimidating or bossy by their colleagues. Thus, if both image outcomes associated with the use of intimidation are somewhat unfavorable, then this finding reinforces the general idea that high self-monitors may be able to use impression-

management tactics without incurring the undesirable perceptions sometimes associated with them.

### Implications for Future Research

This study has several implications for future research on impression management. Most prior research has focused on the positive outcomes that accrue to users of impression-management tactics. By examining the undesired images that can result from impression management, this research examines the "other side of the coin" of which Jones and Pittman (1982) wrote. Furthermore, this research suggests that such negative outcomes are fairly common. In fact, the findings presented here suggest that the same impression-management behaviors may actually result in either the desired or undesired image, depending on the particular individual's self-monitoring abilities.

In addition, most previous research has focused on the extent of impression-management usage. However, this research suggests that it is the skill (and not the frequency) with which impression-management tactics are utilized that determines how others perceive such behaviors. For example, low and high self-monitors did not vary significantly in the amount of ingratiation they reported using. However, among high self-monitors, the use of ingratiation was positively associated with the image of likeable and negatively associated with the image of sycophant. In contrast, among low self-monitors, the use of ingratiation was negatively associated with the image of likeable and positively associated with the image of sycophant. This finding, in particular, reinforces the idea that the effectiveness of impression management is not merely a function of its frequency. In light of these results, more research is needed that examines both the quantity and quality of impression-management behaviors.

Furthermore, future theoretical and empirical research should examine factors that are likely to increase the effectiveness of individuals' attempts at impression management. Possible variables for examination include an individual's political skills, physical attractiveness, and gender. For example, Rudman's (1998) research suggests that gender may play an important role in determining the outcome of impression-management attempts. Specifically, Rudman's (1998) work suggests that women may be more effective in their use of ingratiation than in their use of intimidation. Similarly, Jones (1990) suggests that certain individuals may have an interpersonal style or political skills that enable them to pull off attempts at impression management more effectively than can those lacking such qualities.

Future research should also examine characteristics of the target that may influence how attempts at impression management are interpreted. For example, because high self-monitors are more adept at reading social cues, they may interpret others' attempts at impression management differently than low self-monitors do. Likewise, individual differences such as Machiavellianism may make some people more cynical regarding others' motives and, thus, more likely to interpret impression-management behaviors negatively. Finally, gender may also play a role in determining how individuals respond to impression management. More theoretical and empirical work is needed, then, which not only examines individual differences among impression-management "actors,"

but which explores individual differences among impression-management “targets” as well.

### *Practical Implications*

The results obtained here also have some practical implications. As discussed earlier, Kilduff and Day (1994) found that the career progression of high self-monitors was greater than that of low self-monitors. This study suggests that a potential explanation for these findings is that high self-monitors possess superior impression-management skills. Practically speaking, then, organizations should be cautious in allowing individuals to move quickly through the corporate ranks based on their impression-management abilities rather than their technical competence. Even though impression management may be a job-related skill in some positions, organizations should carefully evaluate the extent to which their selection practices and promotion decisions reward impression management in areas where such skills are less relevant.

Like other studies (e.g., Zaccaro et al., 1991), the findings presented here suggest that high self-monitors may be better suited to certain organizational roles than low self-monitors may be. In particular, high self-monitors may be more effective in positions that require employees to manage certain impressions. For example, relative to low self-monitors, high self-monitors may be more adept in boundary spanning roles, such as dealing with customers and other organizational stakeholders. In addition, high self-monitors are also likely to be more skilled at managing the interpersonal relationships that are required among peers in team-based organizations.

### *Research Limitations*

Even though this study possesses several methodological strengths, it is not without its limitations. First, the impression-management scale used in this study captures only individuals’ general impression-management attempts. That is, respondents were not asked about their impression-management behaviors with respect to specific individuals. Because impression-management theory suggests that people may alter their impression-management strategies based on the specific target of the behavior (cf. Leary & Kowalski, 1990), future research should investigate whether different results are obtained if target-specific relationships are examined.

A second limitation is that the data collected in this study were obtained over the course of a semester-long project. It may be that individuals’ impressions of others are time sensitive. For example, certain impression-management tactics may only be effective over short periods of time. Others may be more effective when used repeatedly over an extended period of time. Thus, a limitation that should be addressed in future research is how time impacts the effectiveness of individuals’ attempts at impression management.

A third limitation concerns the potential generalizability of the obtained results. Whereas it is likely that many of the processes underlying impression management among student workgroups will operate much like those in organizations (especially among peers in team-based organizations), the extent to which these results are generalizable to the workplace and to more hierarchical relationships remains an issue for future field-based research.

A fourth limitation relates to the measures of impression management used in this study. Although the Bolino and Turnley (1999) measure of impression management appears to reliably assess a variety of behaviors, their scale is by no means exhaustive. That is, there are other types of impression management, like opinion conformity (a form of ingratiation) or accounts and self-handicapping (types of self-promotion), which are not tapped by their scale. Moreover, their measure does not assess the extent to which exemplification entails the portrayal of the actor as morally righteous, nor does it focus on the extent to which an individual’s use of intimidation involves displays of incipient anger or emotional breakdowns.

Another limitation of this scale is the fairly strong correlations between some of the impression-management tactics (e.g., the correlation between ingratiation and exemplification was .47). Although these correlations seem somewhat large and might suggest poor discriminant validity, they are similar to those reported by Bolino and Turnley (1999). Moreover, in their study, Bolino and Turnley explicitly test alternative confirmatory models in which different impression-management tactics were combined. Such tests consistently supported the discriminant validity of the measures. Nevertheless, future studies should replicate these findings using other measures of impression management (e.g., Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

A fifth and final limitation concerns the image outcomes. First, although the scales used here demonstrated good internal reliability, many of the scales consisted only of selected items from the IAS (due to survey length considerations). Furthermore, because the IAS did not provide measures of some of the outcome variables of interest, the scales utilized here were developed specifically for use in this study. Another concern is that the correlations among many of the image outcome variables were fairly large. These correlations may simply reflect theoretical links between the outcomes—for example, people who are bossy tend to be disliked; alternatively, the high correlations may suggest a lack of discriminant validity. Future research should seek to better establish the validity and reliability of these measures before firm conclusions can be drawn with respect to the findings presented here. Also, since each respondent provided more than one image outcome, the outcomes are not independent, even though they are treated as such in the analyses. Future studies, then, should also use research designs that yield image outcome observations that are truly independent.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study has several methodological strengths. First, the reports of individuals’ self-monitoring activities, impression-management behaviors, and perceptions of other group members were all obtained at different points in time. Second, the primary independent (impression-management behaviors) and dependent (other group members’ perceptions of the individual) variables were collected from different sources. Third, this research examined a wider variety of impression-management tactics than has typically been looked at in previous work on the topic. Specifically, this research examined the five impression-management strategies proposed by Jones and Pittman (1982). In addition, this research also highlights the potential downside of impression-management behaviors. In particular, and especially for low self-monitors, it illustrates how impression management may backfire such that individuals seeking



to make a positive impression may actually end up creating an image opposite of the one that is desired.

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## Appendix

### Items Used to Assess Image Outcomes

Hypothesis 1	
a. Likeable:	b. Sycophant:
Likeable	Overly conformist
Cooperative	A flatterer
Nice	A "yes man"
Pleasant	A "brown-noser"
Hypothesis 2	
a. Competent:	b. Conceited:
Competent	Conceited
Intelligent	Pretentious
Talented	Arrogant
Accomplished	Cocky
Hypothesis 3	
a. Dedicated:	b. Feels superior:
Dedicated	Prideful
Hard-working	Self-satisfied
Committed	Sanctimonious
Conscientious	Self-righteous
Hypothesis 4	
a. Needy:	b. Lazy:
Needy	Lazy
Helpless	Incompetent
Self-effacing	A slacker
Self-deprecating	Inept
Hypothesis 5	
a. Intimidating:	b. Bossy:
Intimidating	Bossy
Forceful	Controlling
Demanding	Pushy
Short-tempered	A jerk

Received July 27, 1998  
 Revision received March 14, 2000  
 Accepted March 14, 2000 ■