

Use of Closed Influence Tactics by Salespeople: Incidence and Buyer Attributions

by Steven P. Brown

Introduction

A salesperson's effectiveness in sales interactions depends to a large extent on making a good impression on the buyer. In pursuit of this goal, the salesperson may draw upon the many arts of "impression management" (Schlenker 1980). These include many specific types of behavior that can be classified generally as attention to and management of personal appearance and verbal, relational and non-verbal messages conveyed during sales interactions.

The salesperson's verbal and relational behaviors provide cues for the buyer to use in making inferences about the salesperson's disposition and motives and in making evaluations of the salesperson and his/her company (Jones and Davis 1965; Heider 1958). Soldow and Thomas (1984) provide an interesting discussion of how "relational" postures (e.g., dominance or deference in the exchange of messages) adopted by salespeople affect the impressions they make on buyers.

The impression that a buyer forms of a salesperson, however, is likely to depend on more than just the salesperson's behavior. An extensive tradition of research in person perception has indicated that the context in which information regarding a stimulus person is presented has important effects on perceivers' judgments (Asch 1946; Haire 1950; Bierhoff 1989). The same behavior by the salesperson may have different effects on buyers' perceptions depending on the situational context in which the behavior occurs. For instance, a favor rendered by a salesperson when no immediate business is at stake may give the impression of unselfish helpfulness, whereas the same action might be considered ingratiation when the salesperson stands to gain an

immediate reward. Thus, both the direct behavior of the salesperson and the situational context in which the behavior occurs contribute to the impressions formed by the buyer.

Open and Closed Influence Tactics

Some previous research has classified the influence tactics used by salespeople as either "open" (i.e., straightforward, legitimate) or "closed" (deceptive, characterized by hidden objectives, illicit; Spiro and Perreault 1979; Weitz 1981). Spiro and Perreault (1979) classify impression management as a set of "closed" influence tactics and operationalize it using items measuring deceptive intent or hidden objectives on the part of the salesperson. Such intent may indeed exist in situations in which the salesperson presents himself/herself in a false or deceptive manner in order to make a calculated, non-veridical impression on the buyer.

However, impression management tactics need not necessarily be false or deceptive. Many things that a salesperson might do to make a good impression (e.g., smile, express appreciation for the buyer's interests, listen attentively) may not involve any deception or hidden motive (cf., Carnegie 1936). Thus, impression management tactics may constitute either open or closed influence strategies, depending on whether the tactic is deceptive and whether it involves a hidden motive. If a tactic involves either deception or hidden, ulterior motive, or both, it can be termed a closed strategy (Velasquez 1988).

In actual selling situations, the distinction between the two may be very subtle and not clear even to the salesperson exhibiting the behavior. For purposes of this paper, whether a particular behavior truly constitutes an open or closed influence tactic is considered a matter of definition rather than an empirical issue. Influence tactics involving deception and/or manipulative intent on the part of the salesperson are, by definition, closed. Of greater

About the Authors

Steven P. Brown received his Ph.D. in marketing from the University of Texas at Austin and is currently Assistant Professor of Marketing and Distribution at the University of Georgia beginning in Fall 1990. He has published articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Advertising Research* (September 1990) and *Advances in Consumer Research*. His research interests include cognitive and motivational determinants of salesperson performance and selected topics in consumer behavior.

interest here are characteristics of salespeople, buyers, and selling situations that affect the incidence of closed influence tactics by salespeople and the attributions that buyers make for salesperson influence tactics.

In a large-scale survey of salespeople in many different industries, Spiro and Perreault (1979) reported that use of closed influence strategies tended to occur in selling situations characterized by low buyer involvement, considerable competition among products with little differentiation, and difficult vendor-buyer relations. Weitz (1981) proposed that closed influence tactics would tend to be used in situations in which the salesperson has high power relative to the buyer and in situations in which the salesperson does not expect to be calling on the same buyer again. Weitz notes that use of such tactics is likely to involve sacrificing future business because their use is not likely to promote long-term customer satisfaction. Successful maintenance of long-term account relationships involves fulfilling promises and living up to buyers' expectations. The consistent user of closed influence tactics is likely to have little intention of doing these things. Thus, inasmuch as the use of closed strategies is a function of the salesperson's motives and intent, these are likely to be valid predictors of the salesperson's long-term effectiveness (Weitz 1981).

Buyer Attributions

In individual sales interactions, the buyer's perception of the salesperson's intent may be more important than the salesperson's actual intent in determining outcomes. A model of the salesperson's intent and the buyer's perception of the salesperson's intent is represented in Figure 1.

The buyer, acting as "naive psychologist" (Heider 1958), is likely to attempt to ascribe motives or causes for the salesperson's behavior (e.g., Kelley 1967). The buyer's attributions will play a large part in determining outcomes of the interaction. If the buyer attributes the salesperson's behavior to an ulterior motive or manipulative intent, favorable outcomes are unlikely. However, if the buyer perceives the salesperson's impression management tactics to be sincere and appropriate, the latter is likely to succeed in establishing good rapport and enhancing the probability of making a sale.

Because salespeople virtually always have something to gain in sales interactions, their motives for impression management behaviors may be especially suspect. Attribution research has shown that impression management behaviors tend to be dis-

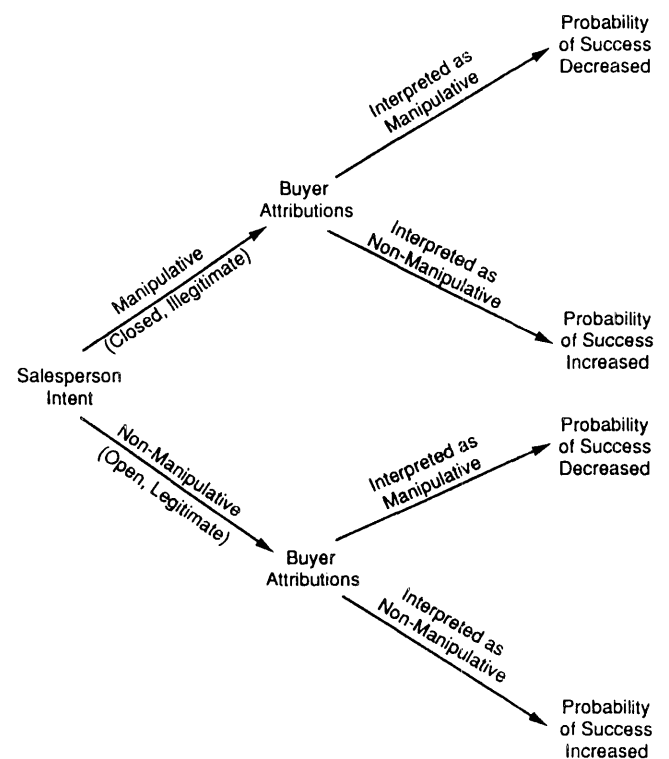


Figure 1
Salesperson Intent, Buyer Attributions and Likely Outcomes

counted when an actor stands to gain a reward if he/she is liked by a target (Kelley 1967). The salesperson thus faces the dilemma that he/she needs to make a positive impression to be successful, but the fact that he/she stands to gain by being liked by the buyer makes his/her motives for interpersonal behaviors suspect!

What variables, then, affect the incidence of closed influence tactics by salespeople and the attributions buyers make in response to salesperson influence tactics? These are the two primary questions explored in this paper. The discussion is grounded on theories of personality, person perception, and attribution and takes the perspective that certain characteristics of salespeople, buyers, and selling situations (and interactions among these types of variables) are related to greater incidence of closed influence attempts by salespeople and to tendencies of buyers to attribute ulterior motives to influence attempts. It suggests a number of trait and situational variables that are likely to be related to these behavioral tendencies. The paper argues that buyer attributions of motive for salesperson influence tactics

largely determine the effectiveness of such tactics. Consideration centers on trait and situational variables that lead buyers to interpret the same types of salesperson behaviors in different ways. A model incorporating variables hypothesized to influence the incidence of closed influence tactics and the nature of buyer attributions is posited and a series of propositions regarding these phenomena advanced.

Making a Good Impression

A number of different types of salesperson behavior can contribute to the goals of making a good impression and establishing rapport with the buyer. Competence, credibility, attractiveness and likability are all important, and most impression management behaviors by salespeople will be aimed at establishing these qualities. It is unlikely that a buyer will choose to do business with a salesperson whom he/she does not perceive to exceed some threshold on these criteria. Thus, the salesperson is likely to engage in behaviors that he/she thinks will elicit these types of attributions from buyers. Behaviors that may be adopted to accomplish this end include claiming attractive images (e.g., standout tennis player, former football star; Schlenker 1980), fashioning an attractive personal appearance (Kleinke 1975), using "props" (e.g., sales aids such as audio-visual displays), claiming associations with attractive people, places or events (*millions* of people claim to have attended Woodstock, even though not that many actually did!), using the buyer's name appropriately in conversation (Kleinke, Staneski and Weaver 1972), smiling (Kraut and Johnston 1979), looking directly at the other person (Lefebvre 1975), and conveying verbal and relational messages appropriate to the particular sales interaction (Weitz, Sujana and Sujana 1986; Soldow and Thomas 1984).

Making a positive impression is a necessary but not sufficient condition for making a sale. In addition to establishing rapport and appearing to be a desirable person to do business with, the salesperson usually must also exercise some degree of influence over the buyer to close a sale. Salesperson use of legitimate, referent and expert power bases (according to the French and Raven 1959 taxonomy) has been investigated by Busch and Wilson (1976) and Spiro and Perreault (1979). Classified as open influence strategies, these appear to be most frequently used in situations involving differentiated products and highly involved buyers (Spiro and Perreault 1979; Weitz 1981). Other taxonomic descriptions of influence tactics have been advanced by Jones and

Pittman (1982), Frazier and Summers (1984), Kotter (1977) and Kelman (1961). Although these descriptions differ somewhat in their classifications of behavior, they all include the use of rewards, coercion, persuasion and appeals to values as means of inducing compliance. In-depth discussion of these broad classes of influence tactics can be found elsewhere (cf. Kipnis 1976; Schlenker 1980).

Ingratiation and Non-Ingratiation: Intent and Perception

To exemplify the tactics that salespeople might frequently resort to in the quest to make a positive impression and influence the buyer, consider three general classes of behavior: 1) complimentary other enhancement, 2) opinion conformity, and 3) rendering favors. These three types of behavior have been classified by Jones (1964) as ingratiation, by definition an "illicit" form of impression management. The argument here, however, is that the *legitimacy* of these behaviors in a sales context depends on the salesperson's intent in employing them and their *effectiveness* depends on the buyer's attributions for the salesperson's intent. That is, these types of behavior may constitute perfectly straightforward and aboveboard influence tactics in the absence of deceptive or manipulative intent on the part of the salesperson. From the buyer's point of view, the behaviors are ambiguous. The buyer must infer the salesperson's motives and intent from direct behavioral cues or from cues present in the situation. Whether impression management behaviors and influence tactics contribute to attainment of the salesperson's goals depends on how the buyer interprets these behaviors. In turn, the buyer's interpretation will depend on characteristics of the salesperson, the buyer, and the selling situation.

E. E. Jones (1964), who conducted the seminal research on ingratiation, defines it as "a class of behaviors illicitly designed to influence a particular other person concerning the attractiveness of one's personal qualities" (p. 11). Jones considers ingratiatory behaviors "illicit" because "they are directed toward objectives not contained in the implicit contract which underlies social interaction" (p. 11). That is, the ingratiation has a "hidden agenda" and seeks to create an advantage for himself/herself in some future interaction, while at the same time trying not to divulge that he/she has any strategic purpose beyond the present interaction. A salesperson, for example, might set the stage for an advantageous future interaction by doing a favor for the buyer (e.g., providing tickets for a sporting event), flattering

him/her on some quality he/she would like to possess, or expressing false agreement with attitudes, opinions or values that are important to the buyer. Meanwhile, the ingratiating salesperson will attempt to avoid the perception that such behaviors have any purpose beyond the sincere expression of admiration, agreement or helpfulness.

To the extent that the buyer accepts this premise, the overture is likely to succeed in enhancing the salesperson's attractiveness, making it more difficult for the buyer to reject the salesperson's proposition subsequently. The same behaviors, however, offered without manipulative intent or ulterior motive, would not constitute ingratiation but altruistic helpfulness, genuine appreciation, and sincere agreement. If legitimate, these qualities can translate into significant value for the buyer and his/her company in the transaction.

Buyers, especially experienced or sophisticated buyers, recognize that it is in the salesperson's self-interest to create favorable impressions through the use of social influence tactics. Hence, the use of influence tactics by the salesperson may activate what Wright (1986) calls a "schemer schema" (or suspicion that one is the target of an influence attempt) on the part of the buyer. The buyer needs to determine whether the salesperson is legitimate in his/her presentation, or whether he/she is simply attempting to make the sale using closed influence tactics. The buyer is likely to scrutinize the salesperson's words and actions in an attempt to determine whether they are indicators of "real value" for the transaction, or merely the deceptive words and actions of empty ingratiation (Kraut 1978).

Face-Work versus Sparring

Goffman's (1955) concept of "face-work" provides a useful perspective for understanding the self-presentational behavior of salespeople. When one party to an interaction lays claim to a certain identity or role (such as that of an important decision-maker in a large pending purchase), he/she also claims entitlement to receive from others behaviors appropriate to that identity or role. Interpersonal encounters proceed smoothly because those involved in them do one another the courtesy of respecting and supporting the "face" presented by the other. Face-work on the part of the salesperson becomes ingratiation when he/she endeavors to improve his/her evaluation by the customer by not merely supporting the "face" claimed by the buyer, but embellishing it. According to Jones (1964, p. 5)

He supports the target person's definition of the

situation . . . by his own communicative behavior, but he adds a few twists which accelerate the target person's face work. . . Because he is intent upon building a beneficial relationship, he desires to leave the present interchange with a better face than when he entered it. As a result, subsequent encounters can start from a new, and for him more gratifying level of social interchange.

In contrast to the conspiratorial mode of the face-work "contract," Kraut (1978) argues that social interaction may occur in a "sparring" mode when one party suspects the other of an ulterior motive. "In this case," Kraut (p. 380) argues, "the interaction resembles a contest in which the actor tries to present himself in one way and the audience tries to see through this presentation to the actor's real qualities."

Research has indicated that observers tend to use several criteria in evaluating the truthfulness/deceptiveness of an actor's behavior. The first of these criteria has been called the "ulterior motive rule" (Kraut 1978). Similar to Kelley's (1967) "discounting rule," the ulterior motive rule holds that an actor's behavior should be discounted as an indicator of his/her true disposition to the extent that he/she stands to be rewarded in the short-term for that behavior. Behavior that is obviously self-serving will be subject to greater skepticism than behavior that is not. Because salespeople virtually always stand to gain something (either presently or in the future) in sales interactions, the ulterior motive rule will virtually always apply. Its strength as an evaluative criterion of salesperson behavior, however, may depend on other trait or situational variables that influence buyers' interpretations of behavior, such as being an in-supplier or out-supplier (as will be elaborated further below).

A second evaluative criterion of salesperson impression management behavior is the controllability rule (Kraut 1978). Research has indicated that some aspects of a deceiver's behavior provide better clues to the presence of deception than others (Ekman and Friesen 1974; Zuckerman, DePaulo and Rosenthal 1986). Facial expressions and the content of verbal messages, for example, are relatively easy to control compared to tone of voice and body movements (Zuckerman, DePaulo and Rosenthal 1986), so the latter two provide better indicators of deception than the former two.

A thorough summary of research on actual and perceived cues to deception is provided by DePaulo, Stone and Lassiter (1985). Their meta-analytic review indicates that perceivers use a number of cues

that are not associated with actual deception and do not use other cues that are actually related to deception. The review does show, however, that perceivers do use accurately some cues (i.e., speech hesitations and errors and pitch cues) that are associated with deception. Studies have consistently shown that voice cues are the best indicators of actual deception, followed by visual, audio-visual, and verbal cues. This ordering of channels is consistent with the controllability rule (DePaulo, et al. 1985).

Kraut (1978) compared cues that perceivers used to infer the truth value of statements with cues that actually did relate to telling the truth. The study showed modest correspondence between the two. When actors answered questions truthfully, they tended to give longer and more plausible responses and hesitated less before answering. The plausibility of statements was the best predictor of actual truth value, followed by hesitations and length of response. Plausibility also related most strongly to observers' judgments of truth value. Observers apparently also used hesitations accurately as a cue to truth-telling. They apparently used consistency of statements and grooming as positive indicators of truth content and smiling and postural shifts as negative cues, but these cues were actually unrelated to veracity.

Kraut (1978) posits a two-stage model of deception detection, arguing that self-serving, implausible and inconsistent statements put perceivers on guard to detect deception. Under these conditions, perceivers become especially vigilant for other verbal or non-verbal cues to deception, such as hesitations, speech errors or body movements. In sales interactions, where the ulterior motive rule will usually apply, buyers are likely to seek evidence of deception attentively.

Fein, et al. (1990) have recently presented empirical findings consistent with the notion that a potential ulterior motive affects buyer perceptions of a salesperson and his/her behavior. They have demonstrated that the presence of a potential ulterior motive negates perceivers' tendencies to commit the so-called fundamental error of attribution (i.e., ascribing an actor's behavior to dispositional rather than situational factors; Ross 1977). They suggest that the presence of a potential ulterior motive creates ambiguity with respect to whether the behavior results from the character of the individual or situational circumstances. Attempting to resolve the ambiguity is likely to result in more careful (and effortful) attention to and interpretation of cues present in the salesperson's behavior. This attention and effort may result in less tendency to err in the

process of quickly and automatically characterizing individuals (Fein, et al. 1990; Gilbert, et al. 1988).

When Will Impression Management be Interpreted as Ingratiation: A Model

The Salesperson's Dilemma

As has been suggested, the effectiveness of salesperson influence tactics depends on the attributions buyers make for his/her behavior. To the extent that buyers accept such tactics at face value (i.e., attribute them to sincere motives), they are likely to succeed in enhancing the salesperson's likability and the probability of making a sale. To the extent that they are attributed to ulterior motives, however, they are likely to backfire and result in negative outcomes (Jones 1964).

As has been suggested also, however, buyers are most likely to attribute influence tactics to ulterior motives precisely when the salesperson has the most to gain through such tactics. This leads to the conundrum that influence tactics are *least* likely to succeed when the salesperson has the greatest incentive to influence the buyer. Jones (1964) has described this circumstance as "the ingratiator's dilemma." Research has also demonstrated that when individuals have strong motivation to succeed in a deception attempt, the deception is most likely to be accurately detected (DePaulo, et al. 1985). This appears to be true because emotions are aroused when motivation is high, and this results in leakage of cues that the deceiver has difficulty controlling. Hence, the presence of a strong motive to use closed influence tactics decreases the probability that such tactics will succeed, both because the buyer's suspicion is aroused and because the salesperson's paralinguistic behavior tends to betray the deception.

General conditions that give the salesperson a strong incentive to gain the buyer's favor (at the same time as they render attributions of ulterior motive highly probable) include dependence on the buyer for favorable outcomes and the obviousness of the connection between the influence tactics and potential rewards. A number of specific trait and situational variables may affect buyers' perceptions of the salesperson's dependence, as will be discussed below. In general, however, the more dependent the salesperson is on the buyer for achieving a particular reward and the more obvious the connection between the tactical behavior and the reward, the more likely the buyer is to attribute the behavior to ulterior motives. That is, when the salesperson is highly dependent on the buyer and an obvious connection exists between his/her influence tactics and

potential rewards from the sales interaction, the tactical behaviors are very likely to be interpreted as ingratiation. Thus, propositions 1 and 2, describing general conditions related to buyer perceptions of ingratiation, posit:

Proposition 1: The more dependent the salesperson is on the buyer for a positive outcome, the more likely influence tactics are to be interpreted as ingratiation.

Proposition 2: The more obvious the connection is between a salesperson's influence tactics and the rewards to be gained from a sales interaction, the more likely the tactical behaviors are to be interpreted as ingratiation.

Variables likely to affect the salesperson's actual or perceived level of dependence on the buyer and the obviousness of the connection between influence tactics and rewards to be gained are examined more specifically in the context of the model depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2 depicts hypothesized relationships between three types of exogenous (independent) variables (salesperson characteristics, buyer characteristics and situational characteristics) and two endogenous (dependent) variables (likelihood of employing closed influence strategies and likelihood that the buyer will interpret influence strategies as closed). In addition to the main effect relationships involving individual exogenous variables hypothesized in the propositions to follow, numerous interaction effects involving combinations of exogenous variables are likely also to exist. Owing to space limitations, only a few illustrative examples will be noted. Rationales for the hypothesized relationships are described in the sections that follow.

Salesperson Characteristics

Certain dispositional traits of the salesperson may be related to greater use of closed influence tactics and to elicitation of particular types of attributions from buyers. Individual difference traits can be conceptualized as predispositions to engage in certain characteristic types of behavior (Snyder and Ickes 1985). Thus, individuals who are high on traits that correlate with the use of closed influence tactics should be more likely to employ them consistently. Possession of certain traits is also likely to correlate with skill in the use of deception and ability to escape detection (Riggio and Friedman 1983; Exline, et al. 1970).

Also, a buyer's perception of a salesperson's personality traits may influence the attributions he/she makes for the salesperson's behavior. A buyer's perception of a salesperson's personality may provide a contextual background that influences attributions regarding the salesperson's influence tactics (Asch 1946, Haire 1950, Bierhoff 1989). For example, a buyer may attribute different motives to a compliment from a salesperson who is perceived as sincere and one who is perceived as insincere.

Traits that should logically be related to the use of closed influence tactics include self-monitoring (Snyder 1986; Spiro and Weitz 1990) and Machiavellianism (Hunt and Chonko 1985; Fandt and Ferris 1990). The same traits may also be related to ability to use closed influence tactics without the buyer interpreting them as such.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is defined as the extent to which a person adapts his/her self-presentation according to the behavioral cues provided by situations. High self-monitors are those who tend to adapt their self-presentations readily according to dictates of the situation. Low self-monitors, by contrast, are those who tend to behave in accordance with their own feelings, attitudes or beliefs, regardless of the dictates of the situation (Snyder 1974; 1986). Snyder (1986) has described high self-monitors as pragmatic and low self-monitors as principled with respect to social behavior. Previous research has shown high self-monitors to be more attentive to the images they portray to others (Snyder 1974; 1986), more inclined to manipulate information that others may use to judge their performance (Caldwell and O'Reilly 1982; Fandt and Ferris 1990), and more alert to opportunities to ingratiate (Jones and Baumeister 1976). High self-monitors have also been found to be more effective deceivers (Riggio, Tucker and Throckmorton 1987; Miller, deTurck and Kalbfleisch 1983). The social pragmatism and apparently greater deceptive ability of high self-monitors leads to propositions 3 and 4:

Proposition 3: Salespeople who are high self-monitors are likely to use closed influence strategies more often than salespeople who are low self-monitors.

Proposition 4: Salespeople who are high self-monitors are likely to be more skilled in the use of closed influence attempts than are salespeople who are low self-monitors, with

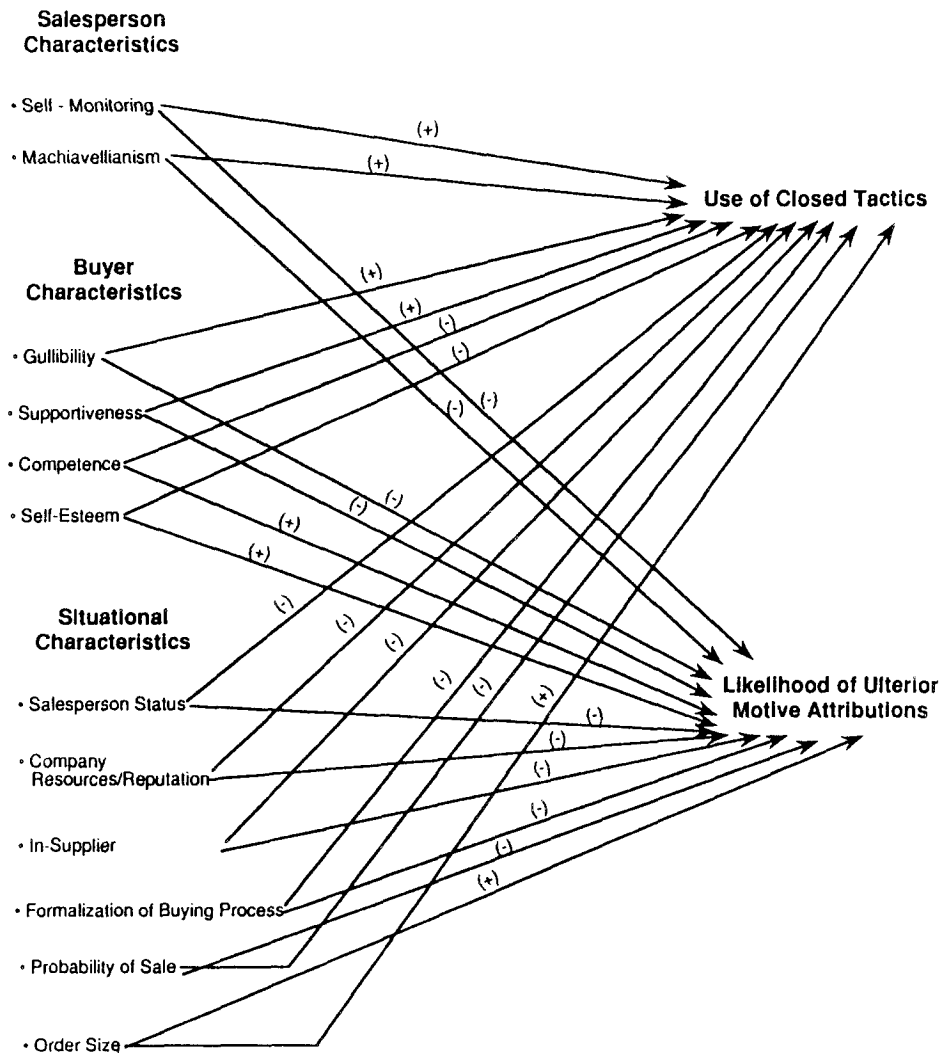


Figure 2
 Hypothesized relationships between salesperson, buyer, and situational characteristics and incidence of closed influence attempts and buyer attributions

the effect that buyers will less frequently attribute such closed influence attempts to ulterior motives for high self-monitors as compared to low.

Self-monitoring is also likely to interact with situational characteristics to determine the incidence and effectiveness of closed influence attempts. Snyder and Gangestad (1982) demonstrated that high self-monitors tend to prefer highly structured situations that offer clear cues to appropriate behavior, whereas low self-monitors tend to prefer less structured situations that allow them the freedom to "do their own thing." Salespeople are likely to encounter a range of situations, from very unstructured, infor-

mal buying decisions to highly structured, formalized ones. High self-monitors are likely to use influence tactics more effectively in the latter type of situation, in which situational cues are clear and plentiful, whereas low self-monitors are likely to use them more effectively in the former, in which they have more latitude for self-expression.

Machiavellianism

Christie and Geis (1970) describe Machiavellianism as a dispositional trait characterized by manipulativeness and having little concern for the feelings and well-being of others. They present empirical evidence that the primary objective of those high in

Machiavellianism is to control the situations in which they are involved. Jones (1964) suggests that those high in Machiavellianism should show greater tendency to ingratiate than those low in Machiavellianism. Pandey and Rastogi (1979) present supporting empirical evidence from a laboratory study, showing that high Machiavellians chose ingratiation influence tactics significantly more often than low Machiavellians. These studies suggest that high Machiavellians are more likely than low Machiavellians to use closed influence strategies.

The greater attentiveness of the high Machiavellian to opportunities to gain an advantage through deception may also be related to greater ability to avoid detection of deception on any single occasion. Exline, et al. (1970) found that high Machs were able to fabricate and deliver more plausible, convincing lies than low Machs. However, over a period of time use of deception and other closed influence tactics is likely to have negative effects on customer satisfaction and buyer judgments of the salesperson who consistently uses them (Weitz 1981). Hence, the high Mach may be able to use closed influence strategies without drawing negative attributions in a one-shot selling context, but his/her lack of concern with the feelings and well-being of others is likely to be negatively related to promotion of customer satisfaction. Thus, the high Mach is unlikely to sustain high levels of repeat business in contexts that involve calling on the same customers over time. Thus, propositions 5, 6 and 7 posit:

Proposition 5: Salespeople who are high Machiavellians are likely to use closed influence tactics more often than salespeople who are low Machiavellians.

Proposition 6: In sales contexts that do not involve repeated calls on the same customers, salespeople who are high Machiavellians are likely to be more skilled in the use of closed influence tactics than salespeople who are low Machiavellians, with the effect that buyers will less often attribute these closed influence tactics to ulterior motives than they will for low Machiavellians.

Proposition 7: Salespeople who are high Machiavellians are less likely to be successful in sustaining long-term relationships with customers than salespeople who are low Machiavellians.

Buyer Characteristics

Personal characteristics of buyers are also likely to affect the incidence of closed influence tactics by salespeople and the nature of buyer attributions. The salesperson's decisions regarding influence tactics are likely to be made, in part, on the basis of perceived personal characteristics of individual buyers (Liden and Mitchell 1988; Bohra and Pandey 1984). Liden and Mitchell (1988) suggest that individuals in organizations are more likely to employ ingratiation when dealing with people they perceive as gullible, very supportive or not highly competent. Buyers characterized as cynical are likely to be difficult to influence using closed tactics.

The buyer's level of self-esteem may affect the effectiveness of closed influence strategies (Schlenker 1980). Buyers low in self-esteem are likely to be more anxious to receive approval from others than those high in self-esteem (S. C. Jones 1973; Mettee and Aronson 1974). Hence, they are likely to accept ingratiation attempts from salespeople more readily. However, such low self-esteem buyers may tend to interpret ambiguous comments as disparaging rather than as complimentary (Jacobs, Berscheid and Walster 1971).

Some empirical research indicates that high self-monitors tend to be better at detecting deception than low self-monitors (Geizer, Rarick and Soldow 1977; Brandt, Miller and Hocking 1980). This would suggest that closed influence attempts are less likely to succeed when aimed at high self-monitoring buyers. These observations lead to propositions 8 and 9.

Proposition 8: Perceived buyer characteristics, such as gullibility, supportiveness will tend to increase the use of closed influence strategies by salespeople. Other perceived buyer characteristics, such as competence, will tend to decrease such use.

Proposition 9: Use of closed influence strategies by salespeople will be less effective when used on high self-monitoring buyers than when used on low self-monitoring buyers.

Situational Characteristics

A number of situational variables are likely to affect the incidence and effectiveness of closed influence tactics by salespeople. Certain types of situations are likely to give salespeople the perception that closed influence tactics offer the best (or only)

prospect of closing a sale. For example, in a situation in which a salesperson has much to gain (e.g., a large order) and little to lose (e.g., a low probability of closing), he/she may consider a high-risk closed influence tactic (e.g., offering a questionable inducement) to be a possible last resort for retrieving the situation.

Situational variables are also likely to provide a context that affects buyers' interpretations of salesperson behavior. The same salesperson behavior may be interpreted differently, for example, depending on whether he/she represents a high or low status firm. Other situation variables that may affect buyer attributions include the length of the salesperson's relationship with the prospect, the status of the salesperson, the reputation and resources of the salesperson's company, in-supplier versus out-supplier status of the salesperson, the degree of formalization of the buying process, the probability of closing a sale, and the size of the order at stake.

Length of Salesperson's Relationship with the Buyer

The salesperson using closed influence tactics attempts through behavior at one point in time to increase the probability of gaining a favorable outcome at a subsequent time. He/she seeks to create a personal obligation or bond on the part of the buyer that will make rejecting the salesperson's proposition at a future time more difficult. Thus, the effectiveness of closed influence tactics depends on the availability of lead time to develop the strategy. When lead time is lacking, closed influence tactics are less likely to succeed because the connection between the influence attempt and potential reward is too obvious. Lack of lead time detracts from the salesperson's opportunity to create the kind of obligation on the part of the buyer on which the effectiveness of closed influence attempts depends.

The success of influence attempts also depends on the buyer's attribution of the behavior to a sincere motive. This type of attribution will depend, in turn, on the salesperson's credibility. Credibility is likely to be positively related to a track-record of professional service to the buyer over time.

A salesperson with a long track-record of professional service may also have developed a sort of "credit account" of credibility, favors and obligations vis-a-vis prospects and customers that can be drawn on when needed (Hollander 1958). A salesperson well known to and respected by a buyer may be able to elicit favorable attributions for ingratiation be-

havior more easily than salespeople not so well known and respected. Thus, proposition 10 states:

Proposition 10: The effectiveness of closed influence attempts by salespeople will be positively related to the length of time calling on the account.

Status of the Salesperson

Much of the research on ingratiation by Jones and his colleagues (summarized in Jones 1964 and Jones and Wortman 1973) concerns the effects of status differentials between the ingratiation and the target. Low status of the salesperson relative to the buyer will generally have the effect of making attributions of ulterior motive more likely. High status of the salesperson, by contrast, should be positively correlated with probability of effectiveness of closed influence attempts because high status salespeople will be less dependent on any individual buyer. High status salespeople typically have greater material and reputational resources to call on, which reduces the need to use closed tactics and thereby reduces the probability of ulterior motive attributions when closed tactics are actually used. High status salespeople also generally maintain greater volumes of business and wider customer bases than low status salespeople. This reduces the dependence of the high status salesperson on any one individual buyer. It also reduces the need to use closed influence tactics to obtain favorable outcomes and hence reduces the probability of ulterior motive attributions. Also, high status, as measured by occupational prestige, leads to greater perceptions of trustworthiness (Swan and Adkins 1981). This leads to proposition 11.

Proposition 11: Buyers will less often attribute closed influence attempts by high-status salespeople to ulterior motives than closed influence attempts by low-status salespeople.

Reputation/Resources of the Salesperson's Company

Company resources and reputation confer status on the salesperson. To the extent that they enhance the salesperson's status, they will facilitate the effectiveness of closed influence tactics. The salesperson backed by a prestigious, resourceful company is likely to be perceived as having stronger product- and service-related sales arguments to make and hence less need to use closed influence tactics.

These perceptions make attributions of ulterior motive less probable. Thus, for reasons similar to those presented in the previous section, the reputation and resources of the salesperson's company are likely to be positively related to effectiveness of closed influence attempts. Hence, Proposition 12 states:

Proposition 12: The salesperson's company's resources and reputation will be positively related to the effectiveness of closed influence attempts.

In-Supplier versus Out-Supplier Status

Leigh and McGraw (1989) present evidence that salesperson interaction objectives differ substantially depending on whether the call is on a regular customer or on a new prospect. Trawick, Swan and Rink (1989) show that industrial purchasing agents also tend to make a distinction between "in-suppliers" and "out-suppliers" in terms of the ethical implications of gift-giving. Purchasing agents in that study evaluated gifts from in-suppliers as more "ethically appropriate" (p. 34) than gifts from out-suppliers. They suggest that this result may be owing to buyers' interpretations of gifts from in-suppliers as rewards for past business, whereas gifts from out-suppliers are interpreted as "bribes." Such attributions suggest that closed influence attempts by in-suppliers are likely to be more favorably interpreted than similar attempts by out-suppliers. Accordingly, Proposition 13 posits:

Proposition 13: Use of closed influence attempts by salespeople who are in-suppliers are likely to be more effective than closed influence attempts by salespeople who are out-suppliers.

Formalization of the Buying Process

Some firms, recognizing the possibility that personal influence of salespeople may cloud the objectivity of their purchasing agents, may institute formalized buying processes designed to reduce such influence (Liden and Mitchell 1988; Corey 1978). Such formalization is likely to reduce the potential effectiveness of closed influence attempts by limiting access to buyers and by standardizing evaluation procedures and focusing them on criteria relevant to the proposal for economic exchange (Liden and Mitchell 1988). This reasoning leads to the following propositions:

Proposition 14: The greater the formalization of

buying procedures, the lower the incidence of closed influence tactics by salespeople.

Proposition 15: The greater the formalization of buying procedures, the lower the effectiveness of closed influence tactics.

Probability of Making a Sale

The salesperson's version of the ingratiation's dilemma entails the irony that the higher the probability of making a sale, the higher the probability that closed influence tactics will succeed. This should be true because the more other resources the salesperson has in an interaction, the less he/she needs to resort to closed influence tactics, and hence the less likely the buyer is to attribute closed tactics to ulterior motives. It should also be true that the lower the probability of making a sale, the lower the probability that closed tactics will succeed. This also follows from the "ingratiation's dilemma." The fewer other resources the salesperson has in an interaction, the more need he/she has to resort to closed influence tactics and the more the buyer is likely to attribute such tactics to ulterior motives. This leads to Proposition 16.

Proposition 16: The effectiveness of closed influence tactics will be positively related to the probability of making a sale.

Order Size

The size of the order at stake in a sales interaction may also influence the effectiveness of closed influence tactics. A large potential order is likely to attract considerable competition among sellers, which makes the potential gain to the salesperson highly salient. Under these circumstances, it will be difficult for the salesperson to convince the buyer that he/she has no ulterior motive for closed influence tactics. This difficulty is likely to be compounded by the fact that competing salespeople are likely to be using such tactics on their own behalf. Buyers are thus likely to be primed to defend against such tactics. Hence, Proposition 17 states:

Proposition 17: The effectiveness of closed influence tactics is negatively related to order size.

Managerial Implications

Use of closed influence strategies in personal selling has important ethical implications for salespeo-

ple and their managers (Bellizi and Hite 1989). True closed influence tactics and tactics that are not in fact characterized by ulterior motives but which are interpreted as closed by buyers are likely to have the effect of tarnishing the reputation of the salesperson and his/her company and souring relations with buyers. Thus, it is important for salespeople and their managers to understand the difference between open and closed influence tactics.

It is also important for them to understand the attributional processes that buyers use to interpret and evaluate salesperson behavior. It would be particularly useful for salespeople who are not given to using closed influence tactics to understand what kinds of circumstances make buyers likely to perceive influence tactics as closed. Awareness and recognition of these circumstances when they occur can cue the salesperson to exercise particular caution so that their behavior is not misperceived or misinterpreted.

Sales interactions are laced with strategic self-presentations and attempts to exercise influence. An awareness of these strategies and the kinds of impressions that they make may be valuable to salespeople and managers. Sensitivity to self-presentational and attributional issues may enable salespeople to become mindful of self-presentational tendencies that were formerly performed "by reflex." Extensive research by Langer (1989) and her colleagues suggests that people perform much more effectively when they consciously process cues from social stimuli and avoid being lulled into "mindless" behavior by the routine repetitiveness of events. Conscious awareness of the type of influence tactics and other self-presentational behaviors being used and their probable impacts on buyers in different situations is likely to increase salespeople's ability to adapt to different prospects and circumstances.

The research literature on self-presentation and attribution draws heavily on the common-sense perspective of man as "naive psychologist," attempting to ascribe causes to the actions of others (Heider 1958). As a result, research findings on self-presentation and attribution require relatively little translation from the idiom of the behavioral scientist to that of the sales manager and salesperson. Both academics and practitioners have an interest in knowing what the buyer thinks when the salesperson affects certain behaviors under given sets of circumstances. The fact that both are interested in the same questions, stated in approximately the same terms, may facilitate communication and understanding between sales researchers and managers.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has argued that study of self-presentational and attributional processes can provide important insights into personal effectiveness. It has suggested some directions that such research might take through a conceptual discussion of and propositional inventory related to the use of closed influence tactics in personal selling. The paper has argued that the presence of deception and/or manipulative intent on the part of the salesperson differentiate closed from open influence tactics. The buyer's perception of the salesperson's intent play a large role in determining the salesperson's effectiveness in sales interactions.

The paper has argued that variables that have the effect of increasing the salesperson's status or of decreasing the salesperson's dependence on a given buyer should increase the effectiveness of closed influence tactics by decreasing the likelihood that such tactics are attributed to ulterior motives. It has posited a model that suggests characteristics of the salesperson, characteristics of the buyer and characteristics of the situation that influence the incidence and effectiveness of closed influence attempts.

Research on adaptive selling has contributed considerable insight into the nature and determinants of selling effectiveness. Study of self-presentational and attributional processes in sales interactions promises to extend this research stream by examining how buyers perceive and interpret particular types of salesperson behavior in particular circumstances. Many researchers now accept the notion that there is "no one right way to sell." Investigation of self-presentational and attributional processes may enlighten the question of which of the many ways to sell are appropriate in different situations.

References

- Asch, Solomon E. (1946), "Forming Impressions of Personality," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 41, 258-290.
- Bellizi, Joseph A. and Robert E. Hite (1989), "Supervising Unethical Salesforce Behavior," *Journal of Marketing*, 53 (April), 36-47.
- Bierhoff, Hans-Werner (1989), *Person Perception and Attribution*, New York: Springer Verlag.
- Bohra, Kayyum A. and Janak Pandey (1984), "Ingratiation toward Strangers, Friends and Bosses," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 122, 217-222.
- Brandt, David R., Gerald R. Miller and John E. Hocking (1980), "Effects of Self-Monitoring and Familiarity on Deception Detection," *Communication Quarterly*, (Summer), 3-10.

- Busch, Paul and David T. Wilson (1976), "An Experimental Analysis of a Salesman's Expert and Referent Bases of Social Power in the Buyer-Seller Dyad," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 13 (February), 3-11.
- Caldwell, David F. and Charles A. O'Reilly, III (1982), "Responses to Failure: The Effects of Choice and Responsibility on Impression Management," *Academy of Management Journal*, 25 (1), 121-136.
- Carnegie, Dale (1936), *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, New York: Pocket Books.
- Christie, R. and F. L. Geis (1970), *Studies in Machiavellianism*, New York: Academic Press.
- Corey, E. Raymond (1978), "The Organizational Context of Industrial Buying Behavior," Marketing Science Institute Working Paper, Report No. 78-106.
- DePaulo, Bella M., Julie I. Stone, and G. Daniel Lassiter (1985), "Deceiving and Detecting Deceit," in Barry R. Schlenker, ed., *The Self and Social Life*, New York: McGraw-Hill, pp. 323-370.
- Ekman, Paul and W. V. Friesen (1974), "Detecting Deception from the Body or Face," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 29, 288-298.
- Exline, R., J. Thibaut, C. Hickey, and P. Gumpert (1970), "Visual Interaction in Relation to Machiavellianism and an Unethical Act," in R. Christie and F. Geis, eds., *Studies in Machiavellianism*, New York: Academic Press, pp. 53-75.
- Fandt, Patricia M. and Gerald R. Ferris (1990), "The Management of Information and Impressions: When Employees Behave Opportunistically," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 45, 140-158.
- Fein, Steven, James L. Hilton, and Dale T. Miller (1990), "Suspicion of Ulterior Motivation and the Correspondence Bias," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58 (5), 753-764.
- Frazier, Gary L. and John O. Summers (1984), "Interfirm Influence Strategies and Their Application within Distribution Channels," *Journal of Marketing*, 48 (Summer), 43-55.
- French, John and Bertram Raven (1959), "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies in Social Power*, Dorwin Cartwright, ed., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 150-167.
- Geizer, R. A., D. L. Rarick and G. F. Soldow (1977), "Deception in Judgment Accuracy: A Study in Person Perception," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 3, 446-449.
- Gilbert, Daniel T., Brett W. Pelham, and Douglas S. Krull (1988), "On Cognitive Busyness: When Person Perceivers Meet Persons Perceived," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 733-740.
- Goffman, Erving (1955), "On Face-Work," *Psychiatry*, 18, 213-231.
- Haire, Mason (1950), "Projective Techniques in Marketing Research," *Journal of Marketing*, 14 (April), 649-656.
- Heider, Fritz (1958), *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Hollander, E. P. (1958), "Conformity, Status, and Idiosyncrasy Credit," *Psychological Review*, 65 (2), 117-127.
- Jacobs, L., E. Berscheid and E. Walster (1971), "Self-Esteem and Attraction," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 17, 84-91.
- Jones, Edward E. (1964), *Ingratiation: A Social Psychological Analysis*, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts.
- and Roy F. Baumeister (1976), "The Self-Monitor Looks at the Ingratiator," *Journal of Personality*, 44, 654-674.
- and Kenneth E. Davis (1965), "From Acts to Dispositions: The Attribution Process in Person Perception," in *Advances in Experimental Psychology*, ed., Leonard Berkowitz, Vol. 2, New York: Academic Press.
- and Thane S. Pittman (1982), "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Self-Presentation," in *Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, Vol. 1, ed., Jerry Suls, 231-260.
- and Camille Wortman (1973), *Ingratiation: An Attributional Approach*, Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press.
- Jones, S. C. (1973), "Self- and Interpersonal Evaluations: Esteem Theories vs. Consistency Theories," *Psychological Bulletin*, 79, 185-199.
- Kelley, Harold II. (1967), "Attribution Theory in Social Psychology," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kelman, Herbert C. (1961), "Processes of Opinion Change," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25 (Spring), 57-78.
- Kipnis, David (1976), *The Powerholders*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kleinke, C. L. (1975), *First Impressions: The Psychology of Encountering Others*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- , R. A. Staneski and P. Weaver (1972), "Evaluation of a Person who Uses Another's Name in Ingratiating and Noningratiating Situations," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 8, 457-466.
- Kotter, John P. (1977), "Power, Dependence, and Effective Management," *Harvard Business Review*, (July-August), 125-136.
- Kraut, Robert E. (1978), "Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues in the Perception of Lying," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 380-391.
- and Johnston (1979), "Social and Emotional Messages of Smiling: An Ethological Approach," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37 (9), 1539-1553.
- Langer, Ellen J. (1989), *Mindfulness*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Leigh, Thomas W. and Patrick F. McGraw (1989), "Mapping the Procedural Knowledge of Sales Personnel," *Journal of Marketing*, 53 (January), 16-34.
- Lefebvre, L. (1975), "Encoding and Decoding of Ingratiation in Modes of Smiling and Gaze," *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 15, 33-42.
- Liden, Robert C. and Terence R. Mitchell (1988), "Ingratiation Behaviors in Organizational Settings," *Academy of Management Review*, 13 (4), 572-587.
- Mettee, D. R. and Elliot Aronson (1974), "Affective Reac-

- tions to Appraisal from Others," in *Foundations of Interpersonal Attraction*, ed., T. L. Huston, New York: Academic Press.
- Miller, Gerald R. (1983), "Self-Monitoring, Rehearsal, and Deceptive Communication," *Human Communication Research*, 10 (Fall), 97-117.
- Pandey, Janak and R. Rastogi (1979), "Machiavellianism and Ingratiation," *Journal of Social Psychology*, 108, 221-225.
- Riggio, Ronald E. and H. S. Friedman (1983), "Individual Differences and Cues to Deception," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 899-915.
- , Joan Tucker and Barbara Throckmorton (1987), "Social Skills and Deception Ability," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 13 (December), 568-577.
- Ross, Lee (1977), "The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process," in Leonard Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 10, New York: Academic Press, 173-220.
- Swan, John E. and Robert T. Adkins (1981), "The Image of the Salesperson: Prestige and Other Dimensions," *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 1 (1), 48-56.
- Schlenker, Barry (1980), *Impression Management: The Self-Concept, Social Identity, and Interpersonal Relations*, Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Snyder, Mark (1974), "The Self-Monitoring of Expressive Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30 (4), 526-537.
- (1986), *Public Appearances/Private Realities: The Psychology of Self-Monitoring*, San Francisco: Freeman.
- and Steve Gangestad (1982), "Choosing Social Situations: Two Investigations of Self-Monitoring Processes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 123-135.
- and William Ickes (1985), "Personality and Social Behavior," in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, eds., *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 3rd ed., Vol. 2, New York: Random House.
- Soldow, Gary F. and Gloria Penn Thomas (1984), "Relational Communication: Form Versus Content in the Sales Interaction," *Journal of Marketing*, 48 (Winter), 84-93.
- Spiro, Rosann L. and William D. Perreault, Jr. (1979), "Influence Use by Industrial Salesmen: Influence-Strategy Mixes and Situational Determinants," *Journal of Business*, 52 (3), 435-455.
- and Barton A. Weitz (1990), "Adaptive Selling: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Nomological Validity," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27 (February), 61-69.
- Trawick, I. Frederick, John E. Swan and David Rink (1989), "Industrial Buyer Evaluation of the Ethics of Salesperson Gift Giving: Value of the Gift and Customer vs. Prospect Status," *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 9 (Summer), 31-37.
- Velasquez, Manuel G. (1988), *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases*, 2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Weitz, Barton A. (1981), "Effectiveness in Sales Interactions: A Contingency Framework," *Journal of Marketing*, 45 (Winter), 85-103.
- , Harish Sujana and Mita Sujana (1986), "Knowledge, Motivation, and Adaptive Behavior: A Framework for Improving Selling Effectiveness," *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (October), 174-191.
- Wright, Peter (1986), "Schemer Schema: Consumers' Intuitive Theories about Marketers' Influence Tactics," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Richard J. Lutz, ed., 1-3.
- Zuckerman, Miron, Bella M. DePaulo and Robert Rosenthal (1986), "Humans as Deceivers and Lie Detectors," in *Nonverbal Communication in the Clinical Context*, ed., Peter David Blanck, Ross Buck and Robert Rosenthal, 13-35.