Self-esteem, self-presentation, and future interaction: A dilemma of reputation

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Abstract

The influence of chronic self-esteem on self-presentation was explored. Male subjects were confronted with an experimentally created reputation, in the form of public (bogus) feedback from a personality assessment. High self-esteem subjects used compensatory self-enhancement in their self-descriptions and behaved in ways contrary to what their reputations would imply. Low self-esteem subjects did not employ compensatory self-enhancement. Moreover, the behavior of low self-esteem subjects conformed to the randomly generated feedback when it (the feedback) was public but not when it was confidential. The expectation of future interaction was shown to be a mediating variable.

Baumeister and Jones (1978) identified consistency and compensation as two patterns of self-presentation. Persons seem to feel constrained to make their self-presentations *consistent* with what others know and expect of them. But if the audience has formed an unfavorable impression of them, people will try to counteract that impression by presenting new (unrelated) and highly favorable information about themselves, which may *compensate* for the bad image. The two strategies are compatible; one can conform to one's reputation as it stands while at the same time introducing new and positive material that is intended to compensate for the bad aspects of the existing image.

Despite this compatibility, consistency and compensation seem to reflect different approaches to self-presentation. Compensation is an active, selfaggrandizing tactic in which one incurs the risks that one's self-enhancing statements could be disconfirmed by subsequent events. Consistency, on the other hand, is a passive conforming of one's self-presentation to the way others have defined one's person-

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ality; it does not involve any risk of making claims about oneself, but of course it also does not enhance oneself in any way. In self-presentational consistency, one's preexisting public image functions as a constraint on one's behavior whereas the strategy of compensatory self-enhancement uses the preexisting public image only as a point of departure for self-aggrandizement. Although Baumeister and Jones found both consistency and compensation effects to be generally evident in their sample, the present research was based on the notion that the two effects would be differentially used by persons with different levels of self-esteem.

The present hypotheses were derived from the following premises. First, people assume that there is some objective accuracy in their self-evaluations, so that they expect another to agree with their self-evaluations if given enough information. The person with high self-esteem expects respect and admiration; the person with low self-esteem anticipates disapproval and rejection. Second, confidence increases the willingness to take risks. One gambles more when expecting to win than when expecting to lose. Thus, people who expect others generally to like them will be more willing than others to claim favorable attributes, despite the risk of disconfirmation. Past research has shown that subjects do recognize and are often reluctant to take the risk of making self-enhancing statements that could be disconfirmed by subsequent events (Eagly & Acksen, 1971; Schlenker, 1975; Schneider, 1969). Third, confidence in oneself and in one's own judgment makes one willing to behave in an autonomous fashion, independent of the expectations and influences of others. Research has indeed shown that lack of self-esteem increases susceptibility to external influence (Cohen, 1959; Janis, 1954, 1955).

The self-presentation of the person with high self-esteem may thus be based in part on the confidence that others will like him or her, in general. Persons high in self-esteem presumably expect the audience to come to share their good opinion of themselves as the audience learns more about them. Therefore, when confronted with an audience that regards them unfavorably, they would be willing to make positive claims about themselves even despite the expectation of future interaction—partly *because* of the expectation of future interaction which they hope will vindicate their self-enhancing claims. Compensatory self-enhancement was therefore predicted to be a strategy used by high self-esteem persons. In the same situation, however, persons with low self-esteem cannot claim compensatory virtues so readily, because they lack the confidence that further interactions will support such claims (cf. Jones, 1973). They do not believe that they have many excellent qualities, and so they may

be reluctant to pretend otherwise for the sake of self-presentational advantage. Compensatory self-enhancement was therefore not expected for individuals low in self-esteem.

Regarding self-presentational consistency—i.e., conforming one's behavior to the image that others have of one—the difference between high and low self-esteem persons may depend on mediating factors. As Baumeister and Jones pointed out, a person attempting a favorable self-presentation cannot simply deny the unflattering aspects of the audience's preexisting impression of him or her. To do so risks one's credibility and makes one seem delusionally conceited. (Hence the use of compensatory self-enhancement that emphasizes virtues *unrelated* to the unfavorable particulars of one's public image.) Thus, there is strategic self-presentational advantage in avoiding a direct public denial of one's known faults, even if one privately does not acknowledge those faults in oneself. The present investigation predicted that neither the high nor the low self-esteem individuals would make self-presentational claims that *directly* contradicted what the audience already believed about them, when these beliefs concerned undesirable traits. However, the motives behind this self-presentational consistency were hypothesized to be different for persons with different levels of self-esteem. The high self-esteem individual may conform his or her self-presentational claims to the public image because of the strategic advantage in doing so. By acknowledging their known faults, such persons give themselves credibility, which facilitates their other (self-enhancing) claims. Low self-esteem persons need less credibility because they are not making compensatory, self-enhancing claims. But they may lack the confidence in themselves and in their own judgment that was mentioned above as prerequisite for autonomous behavior that contradicts the expectations and influences of others (e.g., De Charms & Rosenbaum, 1960).

If the high and low self-esteem persons do indeed have different reasons for conforming their self-descriptions to their reputations even when bad, then a further prediction could be made: High self-esteem subjects *would* be willing to contradict their unfavorable public images directly if they could do so without losing credibility. The difference between a mere self-presentational statement and actual self-presentational behavior becomes relevant here. Actual behavior may be more convincing (credible) than mere verbal claims. For example, describing oneself as generous might be mere idle bragging, but generous behavior constitutes the proof (and the reality) of one's generosity (cf. West & Brown, 1975, on the discrepancy between actual and hypothetical generosity). Thus, when

persons are confronted with opportunities to dispute their unfavorable reputations, those high in self-esteem may not do so verbally but may indeed do so behaviorally. However, insofar as persons low in self-esteem lack the confidence and autonomy to contradict what others expect of them, they would conform in behavior as well as verbal self-description to their reputations.

The present experiment was designed to test the predictions made in the preceding paragraphs. In the critical part of the experimental design, subjects were confronted with prefabricated (bogus) reputations, in the form of personality profiles that had allegedly been shown to another subject. The subjects then described themselves on a series of trait dimensions, some of which were relevant to the profile content and some of which were not. Then the subject and the partner engaged in a behavioral interaction that was relevant to the profile content. It was predicted that subjects high in self-esteem would conform to the bad reputations verbally but not behaviorally, and that they would engage in compensatory self-enhancement. Low self-esteem subjects were predicted to conform to their bogus reputations both verbally and behaviorally, and they were not expected to show compensatory self-enhancement.

Private evaluation conditions were included in order to ascertain that the effects did indeed indicate self-presentational motivations and not, for example, that persons low in self-esteem simply have malleable self-concepts so that they believe about themselves whatever they are told (in which case no difference would be predicted between the public and private conditions). A second experiment was conducted to verify the importance of personal contact and the expectation of future interaction in mediating the self-presentational effects.

Experiment 1

Method

Overview

Subjects filled out a questionnaire that was allegedly a personality inventory. At a second session, each subject received a personality profile that was supposedly based on his responses to the questionnaire. The profile portrayed him either as selfish and exploitative or as generous and cooperative. Half of the subjects were told that their partner also saw this profile, half were not. Subjects described themselves for their partner. Subjects then played prisoner's dilemma with this partner. Prisoner's dilemma (cf. Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977) forces the subject to choose either exploitative and defensive moves or cooperative moves. In this way, the subject's behavioral conformity to the (public or confidential) profiles was measured.

Pretest

Good and bad personality profiles (see below) were written to emphasize traits that on an a priori basis were deemed relevant to prisoner's dilemma play. Following this, 18 pretest subjects were each shown one of the two profiles and asked to rate a series of traits according to how likely it seemed that a person who fit the profile would also have each of the traits on the list. In this way it was possible to establish empirically two clusters of traits: those that were related to the profile content (including generous, self-seeking, and exploitative) and those that were not related to it (including creative, courageous, and reliable). In addition, pretest subjects were asked to rate the favorability of the two profiles on four scales. The mean total favorability rating for the good profile (34.7) was significantly, $t(17) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, more positive than that of the bad profile (14.9).

Subjects

Forty-three male Princeton University freshmen were contacted in their dormitory rooms and asked to participate in a study of "research on personality" for "about three dollars." Three were excluded from the final sample for failure to follow instructions, suspiciousness, or unavailability for the second session.

Procedure

Each subject was given a personality inventory in his room. The main functions of this inventory were to lend credibility to the subsequent treatments and to measure chronic self-esteem. The latter was accomplished by Silverman's (1964) adaptation of the Janis and Field (1959) self-esteem scale. Subjects were told that an appointment would be arranged for the second session that would involve "playing a psychological game." Subjects were later contacted by telephone and appointments were made for the laboratory session, which took place between one and five weeks after initial contact.

Self-presentation session. Subjects were run in pairs. Care was taken to ensure that the two subjects at any given session were not previously acquainted. At each session the two subjects were in different experimental treatment conditions and their apparent interactions were actually controlled and intercepted by the experimenter. For each subject, the presence of the other served only to make it plausible that he was interacting with another person.

The initial instructions were based on those of Baumeister and Jones (1978) except that somewhat greater emphasis was placed on the game interaction than in that study. Subjects were told that they would be moved to separate rooms, would exchange some information about themselves, and then would engage in the game interaction which would involve a mixture of competition and working together. Subjects were told that the exchange of information would not necessarily be equal.

Profile feedback. Subjects were then separated. Each subject was shown

a personality profile that was allegedly based on his earlier personality inventory. In fact, each subject was randomly assigned to receive one of the two standard profiles.

The "good" profile described the subject as stable, cooperative, not materialistic, intellectually curious, emotionally mature (normal), generous, altruistic, self-confident despite normal moments of insecurity, sensitive to others, and not exploitative. The "bad" profile described the subject as stable, competitive, materialistic, intellectually curious, emotionally mature (normal), self-centered, insecure, insensitive to others, and exploitative.

All profiles were in sealed envelopes, and the experimenter professed ignorance of their contents. In the confidental condition, he said that his use of the data was strictly numerical and anonymous, and he stressed that no one else had seen or would ever see those results. He said his only reason for showing the profile to the subject was to comply with a requirement of the ethics committee. The profiles in the confidential condition were identified only by social security number and referred to the subject as "subject."

In the public condition, however, the experimenter said that he had just given a second copy of the subject's profile to the partner (other subject) "so that he can get some idea of what you are like." These profiles listed the subject's name at the top and in the text.

Each subject was told that he would not receive any information about the personality of his partner, because of the experimental design.

Self-ratings. Each subject was then asked to fill out a questionnaire on which he rated his personality on a number of items—the two clusters determined by the pretest as related to and unrelated to the profile content, and some filler items. The subject was told that his questionnaire would be shown directly to the other subject. Thus, the subject could describe himself to the other in any way he liked; but in the "public" condition he knew that the other already had some information about him.

Prisoner's dilemma game. The rules for prisoner's dilemma were explained to each subject on a typewritten sheet. He was given time to study the rules and matrix, and the experimenter visited each subject to answer any questions.

The rules explained that on each round both subjects would choose either an "A" or a "B" response without knowing what the other was doing. After both players had responded the experimenter would inform each of what the other had done. The amount of money won or lost by each subject was determined jointly by both persons' plays, according to an outcome matrix that is reproduced in Table 1. The subject was told that his object was to win as much money for himself as possible regardless of what the other subject won or lost.

As can be seen from Table 1, the outcome matrix was set up so that "A" represented attempts to work for maximum mutual gain while risking a large personal loss, whereas "B" responses enabled a subject to exploit the other's cooperativeness but risked establishing a pattern of bilateral loss if reciprocated. The strategic paradox of a prisoner's dilemma player is that although the "B" response is the safest play (i.e., it is the play with the least

Table 1. Outcome table for prisoner's dilemma game.

Your play	Other player's play	Your outcome	Other player's outcome
A	A	+4	+4
A	B	−5	+8
B	A	+8	−5
B	B	−2	−2

risk and the greatest potential gain) on any given trial, in the long run the only effective joint strategy for two players is for both to continue to play the cooperative "A."

Subjects played 20 trials of prisoner's dilemma. However, the experimenter did not inform the subjects of each other's plays but rather administered the feedback about the "other player" according to a predetermined schedule. The schedule used was as follows: on the first ten trials, the "other subject" played a very cooperative game, playing "A" on every trial except trial 4. On the second ten rounds, the experimenter followed the delayed tit-for-tat strategy in which the "other player" apparently played on each round whatever play the subject himself had played on the preceding round.

Subjects were given score sheets which enabled them to record their own plays, the other player's plays, their score for each trial, and their cumulative score over all trials.

Debriefing. The true purpose of the study and the necessity for the deceptions were explained to the subjects. Of course, the debriefing emphasized the bogus nature of the personality feedback. Subjects were offered a choice between receiving $3.25 and receiving the precise amount of their winnings.

Results

Manipulation checks. Specific verbal questioning in the postexperimental discussions established that all subjects correctly understood whether the profile was supposed to have been shown to the partner or not. No data about subjects' perceptions of the profile favorability were collected, because the results of the pretest (presented above) left little doubt about the differential favorability of the two profiles.

A median split of self-esteem scores was used to differentiate between low and high self-esteem.

Self-presentation. Each subject had three opportunities for self-presentation in this study. Each subject had received a profile attributing certain traits (e.g., exploitativeness) to him. He then rated himself for the partner on those same traits; he rated himself on traits that were *not* related (e.g., creativity) to the profile content;

Table 2. Mean favorability of self-description on items related and not related to profile content and mean number of exploitative or defensive responses.

	Self-esteem	*n*	Not related cluster	Related cluster	Prisoner's dilemma game
Bad profile					
Public	High	6	23.0	2.7	3.7
	Low	4	13.75	3.0	13.0
Confidential	High	4	17.75	8.0	8.5
	Low	6	19.5	7.7	7.5
Good profile					
Public	High	1	21.0	8.0	15.0
	Low	9	18.0	11.9	3.8
Confidential	High	8	18.9	15.4	7.4
	Low	2	22.0	16.0	15.5

Note.—Higher score on "related" or "not related" indicates more favorable self-rating on that cluster.

and he could use his behavior during the game to show exploitativeness or cooperativeness. The data for these three measures were each standardized. Mean raw scores are reported in Table 2.

A $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ analysis of variance with repeated measures was performed on these data. Only one significant effect emerged, and that was the interaction of all four variables (publicity, profile favorability, self-esteem level, and measure, $F(2,64) = 6.13$, $p < .005$.

As noted above, the primary focus of the study was on the bad profile cells. They will be emphasized here both for that reason and because of the unfortunate imbalance in the cell frequencies in the other (good profile) cells, which demands caution in interpreting them. An analysis of the bad profile cells alone yields a significant interaction among the three remaining variables (publicity, self-esteem level, and measure, $F(2,32) = 7.00$, $p < .005$.

One prediction for the present study was that compensatory self-enhancement would be found only among the high self-esteem subjects. Compensatory self-enhancement (Baumeister & Jones, 1978) consists of responding to a public bad evaluation by describing oneself very favorably on dimensions *not* related to the evaluation. The prediction was confirmed. On the cluster of items not related to the profile content, in the public/bad profile condition, high self-esteem subjects described themselves significantly more favorably than did

subjects low in self-esteem, $t(32) = 2.39$, $p < .05$. That this difference was due to the self-presentational tactics and not to the more favorable self-concepts of high self-esteem persons was indicated by the fact that the corresponding difference in the *confidential*/bad evaluation condition was negligible, $t(32) < 1$, *ns*. Compensatory self-enhancement was found only among subjects high in self-esteem.

On items directly related to the content of the evaluations, no difference was predicted between how high and low self-esteem subjects would describe themselves. Indeed, no such effect for self-esteem was found. In particular, in the public/bad profile condition, the difference between self-descriptions of high and low self-esteem subjects on items related to the profile content was neglible, $t(32) < 1$, *ns*. On this measure, the effects of the other two variables were independent of each other, indicated by two main effects found if these data are analyzed alone. Subjects receiving good evaluations described themselves significantly more favorably than subjects receiving bad evaluations, $F(1,32) = 6.28$, $p < .02$, and subjects receiving confidential evaluations were marginally significantly more favorable about themselves on related items than were subjects receiving public evaluations, $F(1,32) = 2.24$, $p = .08$. The additivity of these two effects can also be seen by comparing the very favorable self-descriptions of the confidential/good profile subjects with the unfavorable self-descriptions of the public/bad profile subjects, $t(32) = 3.86$, $p < .001$. Although this is a post hoc comparison, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference technique (HSD: Kirk, 1968) confirms its significance at the .01 level.

It was further predicted that self-esteem would influence behavioral (as opposed to verbal) conformity to the public evaluations, and this was also confirmed. In the public/bad profile conditions, conforming to the profile would be reflected in a large number of "B" (exploitative/defensive) responses during the prisoner's dilemma game. Low self-esteem subjects responded in that way significantly more than did high self-esteem subjects, $t(32) = 2.65$, $p < .02$. Conforming to the *public/good* profile would consist of a *low* number of "B" responses, and again this was found more among low than high self-esteem subjects, $t(32) = 1.95$, $p < .07$. Thus, overall, subjects low in self-esteem conformed to their reputation more than did subjects high in self-esteem. That this was due to self-presentational concerns was indicated by the fact that it occurred only in the public conditions. In the confidential conditions, differences between the high and low self-esteem subjects did not approach significance. Another way of establishing the importance of self-presentational

concerns is to compare the responses of low self-esteem subjects to the public and private evaluations. When the good profile portrayed them as cooperative, they behaved cooperatively if the profile was publicly known but not if it was confidential, $t(32) = 2.75$, $p < .01$. When the bad profile portrayed them as exploitative and defensive, they tended (with marginal significance) to behave in that fashion more when it was public than confidential, $t = 1.56$, $p < .13$.[1] Analysis of variance on the prisoner's dilemma data alone revealed no main effects nor simple interactions, but the interaction of all three variables (Type of Profile × Publicity × Self-Esteem level) was highly significant, $F(1,32) = 11.48$, $p < .005$. Thus, although self-esteem did not affect how subjects described themselves on dimensions relevant to an evaluation, it did influence their subsequent *behavior* on relevant dimensions.

An additional way of considering the conformity of low self-esteem subjects to the public evaluations is to compare their responses to the good and bad profiles (in the public conditions). Subjects low in self-esteem described themselves more negatively, $t(32) = 1.99$, $p < .06$, and behaved more exploitatively, $t(32) = 2.81$, $p < .01$, in response to the public bad ("exploitative") profile than in response to the good ("cooperative") one.

Discussion

A basic question in this line of investigation is this: Are people constrained by their reputations so that they feel obliged to behave consistently with what others think of them? The evidence from Experiment 1 appears to support a clear "Yes" answer for subjects low in self-esteem, but not for subjects with high self-esteem. The latter were indeed also affected by their reputations, but they seemed to respond to public information less as a constraint than as a starting point for their self-aggrandizing strategies.

As noted in the Results section, the behavior of high self-esteem subjects disconfirmed both the public profiles, in that they played exploitatively following the good ("cooperative") profile but cooperatively following the bad profile. When the profile portrayed them unfavorably, they immediately used their behavior to disprove it. When their virtues were already a matter of public record, they

1. A replication of Experiment 1 was conducted that changed only the sequence of the measures; subjects played prisoner's dilemma immediately after the profile manipulations, without the verbal self-description coming first. The specific comparisons reported for the behavioral data in Experiment 1 were all replicated except the weakest one: Low self-esteem subjects receiving a bad evaluation behaved about the same regardless of publicity.

were willing to devote their behavior to maximizing their financial rewards. Thus, subjects high in self-esteem did not appear to feel constrained to be consistent with their public reputations.

Moreover, the self-descriptions of high self-esteem individuals followed strategies of consistency and compensation outlined by Baumeister and Jones (1978). Confronted with a bad reputation, the high self-esteem male did not contradict it verbally but sought to offset its negative tone by insisting that he had other, more positive qualities that the profile had overlooked. Compensatory self-enhancement—"Perhaps I'm not generous, but I *am* creative"—was in this study a tactic of the high self-esteem individual, and not of the low.

The cooperative behavior of the high self-esteem subject elicited by the public portrayal of him as exploitative (in the public bad profile condition) was also apparently a self-presentational tactic, because it did not occur when the evaluation was confidential. High self-esteem subjects seemed to believe that behavior is more convincing than mere verbal self-description. Thus, although their self-ratings did not directly contradict the bad profile, their behavior did.

The low self-esteem individual was, like the high self-esteem individual, sensitive to the structure of the situation, but the low self-esteem person appeared to react to it chiefly as constraining rather than offering possibilities. Unlike the high self-esteem person, whose behavior tended to deviate from that implied by the public information, the low self-esteem person conformed to the public expectancies about his behavior. An earlier study by De Charms and Rosenbaum (1960) found that low self-esteem subjects conformed to an obviously false majority judgment more than high self-esteem subjects did. These authors speculated that this was due to the feeling (on the part of low self-esteem subjects) that conformity was a means of gaining approval. The present study does not provide evidence about whether low self-esteem subjects expected to gain social approval by their conformity, but the tendency of the low self-esteem subjects to accept the profile feedback and its implications does appear to be a self-presentational ploy because it did not obtain in the "confidential" evaluation treatments.

Of course, it is possible that other motives could be involved in a game as complex as prisoner's dilemma when played for real money. In particular, it could be argued that the exploitative play of low self-esteem subjects who had received bad public profiles was an active attempt to salvage something (i. e., money or success) from a failure situation. In a sense, this exploitative behavior could thus

be construed as an attempt to compensate for the self-presentational damage. Previous research has suggested that subjects low in self-esteem do strive to improve or succeed after failure (e.g., Jones, 1973; Silverman, 1964). If that motive was indeed behind the exploitative play of low self-esteem subjects in that condition, their game behavior contrasts sharply with their self-descriptions, in which they showed no evidence of compensatory attempts and in which they conformed to their reputations. The hypothesis that these subjects waited until the behavioral interaction to attempt compensation cannot be ruled out and may warrant further research. For the present, however, it seems more parsimonious simply to note that the low self-esteem subjects conformed to their reputations and did not attempt compensatory self-aggrandizement; this explanation accounts for both the self-descriptions and the behavioral responses for both the bad and the good profile conditions.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 examined two issues related to the situation of Experiment 1. The more important of these was the expectation of future interaction. In Experiment 1, this expectation was induced in order to make the experimental situation resemble ongoing human relationships. It was felt that this expectation could well be a boundary condition of the findings. After all, it is plausible that one should only be concerned with how others evaluate one if one expects further interactions with them. Baumeister (1982) noted that self-presentational concerns are diminished by the absence of an expectation of future interaction. Experiment 2 investigated the notion that the difference found in Experiment 1 in the public bad profile condition would vanish if the subjects were denied any personal contact with the other subject.

Specifically, it was predicted that the cooperative behavior of high self-esteem subjects would not obtain if the expectation of future interaction was removed. This cooperative behavior put the subject at risk of monetary loss in order to make a self-presentational point (i.e., that the subject was not uncooperative and exploitative as the profile had suggested). If the subject did not expect the other to know who he was, it would certainly be useless to take such a risk, because there would be no self-presentational gain. Additionally, the absence of personal encounter would render unnecessary any strategic self-presentation on the self-descriptions, such as the compensatory self-enhancement and strategic self-derogation. In short, it was predicted that the "no encounter" subjects would respond quite similarly to the subjects in the *confidential* bad evaluation condition

subjects in Experiment 1, even though the "no encounter" subjects were confronted with evaluations that were allegedly public.

The second concern of Experiment 2 was methodological. In Experiment 1 the experimenter professed ignorance of the profile even in the "public profile" conditions. Experiment 2 included a condition in which the experimenter did appear to have access to the profile, in order to see whether including him in the "public" that was aware of the subject's profile would affect the subject's behavior. It seemed plausible that the relation of the experimenter to the subject might be unusual, due to the privileged role or higher status of the experimenter or to demand characteristics. An additional reason for investigating the importance of experimenter knowledge was to make the results comparable to those of Baumeister and Jones (1978), in whose procedure the experimenter was always perceived as being aware of the public profiles. If experimenter awareness were to make an important difference, it could account for a discrepancy between the results of Experiment 1 and those of Baumeister and Jones.

Method

Subjects

Thirty Princeton male undergraduates participated in Experiment 2 under the same terms as the subjects in Experiment 1. The two studies were run concurrently, overlapping in scheduling and recruitment of subjects and having similar procedures. Subjects were randomly assigned to the three treatments.

Procedure

The procedures for this experiment followed the procedures of the public bad profile condition of Experiment 1 except as noted below.

In the "open profile" variation, the personality profile was not in an envelope (sealed or otherwise) at all. The experimenter handed the subject the sheet on which the profile was printed, and he made no claim that he had not seen the profile. These subjects were thus led to believe that the experimenter had seen their profiles.

The "regular" version of this treatment was the bad profile condition exactly as reported in Experiment 1. (The same subjects were in both experiments.)

Finally, in the "no encounter" treatment condition, the two subjects for the given session were ushered into separate rooms as soon as they arrived and they were given the initial instructions separately rather than together. These instructions were augmented with a statement that it was necessary that subjects not meet each other because this meeting would contaminate and confound the experimental control over the information exchange. Subjects in this condition were told that all exchanges of information would be

Table 3. Mean favorability of self-description on items related and not related to profile content and mean number of exploitative defensive responses.

	Self-esteem	*n*	Not related cluster	Related cluster	Prisoner's dilemma game
Open profile	High	3	22.0	3.3	9.0
	Low	7	17.0	6.3	10.7
Regular	High	6	23.0	2.7	3.7
	Low	4	13.8	3.0	13.0
No encounter	High	6	19.7	5.8	13.0
	Low	4	17.5	−4.75	11.5

Note.—Higher numbers indicate more favorable self-descriptions and more exploitative or defensive responses.

strictly anonymous and that following the experiment they would leave separately, so that they would never learn the identity of the other subject.

Obviously, the nature of these two manipulations required that both subjects at any given session be in the same treatment condition.

Results and Discussion

The three variables in this experiment (Treatment, Measures, and Self-Esteem level) showed a significant interaction, $F(4,48) = 2.59$, $p < .05$. Table 3 gives the means. Two central findings emerged. First, none of the "open profile" means differed significantly from the regular treatment means. This implies that the methodological issue addressed by this manipulation is indeed trivial, as hoped. The inclusion of the experimenter in the "public" that saw the subject's profile did not alter the subject's behavior. Indeed, exclusion of these conditions resulted in a significant interaction, $F(2,32) = 4.29$, $p < .025$.

The "no encounter" treatment did appear to reduce the self-presentational pressures on the subject. As noted in Experiment 1, having a bad reputation apparently induces subjects high in self-esteem to do two things to alter that situation: They engage in compensatory self-enhancement and they attempt to use their behavior to furnish evidence of their good qualities. In the "no encounter" condition, however, neither of these patterns obtained. Thus, while in the regular version of the public/bad profile condition high self-esteem subjects showed more compensatory self-enhancement on the items not related to the profile than did low self-esteem subjects, $t(32) = 3.06$,

$p < .01$, the difference between high and low self-esteem subjects in the "no-encounter" version of that treatment was trivial, $t(32) < 1$, *ns*. No differences were obtained on the self-descriptions on items directly relevant to the profile content. On the behavioral (prisoner's dilemma) data, high self-esteem subjects in the regular public/bad profile treatment were significantly more cooperative than were low self-esteem subjects, $t(32) = 2.63$, $p < .02$. But in the "no encounter" version of this treatment, the difference between high and low self-esteem subjects was negligible, $t(32) < 1$, *ns*.

Thus, Experiment 2 demonstrated the importance of face-to-face meeting and expected future interaction on self-presentational concerns and on responses to a self-presentational dilemma. Experiment 1 showed compensatory self-enhancement to be a function of self-esteem; Experiment 2 showed that this occurs only in the context of an ongoing personal relationship (at least to the extent of one prior meeting and expected future interaction). Similarly, Experiment 1 showed that self-esteem influences whether one behaves contrary to public expectations implied by one's reputation; Experiment 2 showed that the expectation of future interaction is an essential mediator of that effect.

Conclusions

The present investigation was concerned with the effect of self-esteem on how male subjects respond to a self-presentational dilemma. A reputation, in the sense of a preexisting public impression, was created for subjects (in the "public" conditions) by experimental manipulations, and subjects' behavior was observed. The responses of subjects high in self-esteem differed from those of low self-esteem subjects, implying that self-esteem does influence self-presentational strategy.

Subjects with high self-esteem did not appear to feel constrained to conform to others' expectations. Their behavior frequently contradicted their experimentally manipulated reputations. Describing themselves prior to the behavioral interaction, these subjects presented themselves in a way that would make the best possible impression. When their reputation was unfavorable, they did not deny it—to do so would have seemed like empty bragging—but sought to compensate for it by emphasizing unrelated good qualities that they had (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). Then they used the "proof" of their actual behavior to contradict the bad reputation directly. When the reputation was favorable, they were slightly modest, thereby avoiding the possibility of seeming conceited. Thus relieved (by the public good profile) of the necessity of proving that

they were generous, they geared their game behavior toward performing competitively, so as not to be exploited or humiliated themselves. In essence, the self-presentation of subjects with high self-esteem seemed oriented toward "winning"—by achieving a good impression on others and then by achieving competitive financial success.

The responses of low self-esteem subjects were quite different from those of the highs, however, and they appeared to lack the self-aggrandizing orientation that characterized the highs. Rather, they appeared to regard their reputations as obligating them to behave in certain ways; their behavior scrupulously conformed to the profile content when it was publicly known. They did not show compensatory self-enhancement following public bad evaluations.

The results of the present investigation suggest that the self-presentational constraints implied by a reputation are acknowledged by both high and low self-esteem persons, but it seems that persons respond to these constraints differentially as a function of their self-esteem. Persons who habitually expect successful and self-enhancing interactions with others seem guided by the desire to benefit themselves by material gain and by impressing others as favorably as possible. They appear to take note of such constraints as public knowledge only in order to aid them in devising their self-presentational strategies in the service of these ends, and they apparently feel free to disconfirm implicit public behavioral expectancies. On the other hand, persons who habitually expect failure, rejection or humiliation appear reluctant to disconfirm public behavioral expectancies and generally behave as if they experienced the situational structure more as a source of constraints and guidelines than as a source of opportunities.

The results are consistent with the model that high self-esteem makes individuals willing to make self-aggrandizing statements (presumably because they are confident that these statements will not be disconfirmed by subsequent events) even when their reputations are unfavorable, and makes individuals willing to deviate from the behaviors that others expect of them. Low self-esteem appears to leave persons unwilling to take the risks of contradicting the expectations of others and of making unverified and disprovable claims about their positive qualities.

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