Given the importance of others' perceptions in social interaction, we should not be surprised that people keep an eye on how others regard them and, from time to time, try to control the impressions people have of them. The process of controlling how one is perceived by others is called self-presentation or impression management.

In the last 15 years, a perspective emphasizing the degree to which social behavior resembles actors playing different roles has grown popular in the social, behavioral, management, and organizational sciences. There has been a bevy of research revolving around the concerns of individuals for making positive impressions on others. Impression management or self-presentation framework employs a theatrical or dramaturgical metaphor to describe social life. People are actors, taking many roles, attempting to please audiences to win their moral, social, and financial support. Concern for appearances is paramount, thus the social actor engages in many impression management tactics and strategies to avoid looking bad.

In the following essays, I would like to discuss the role of self presentation in the life of university students. I will explore the social determinants of students' behavior in order to define the positive and negative aspects of self presentation and impression management strategies. Also, I will propose tactics of commonly used behavior for those wishing to succeed in the area of self presentation and to positively impress others.

One of the most common and easiest means of presenting oneself is through verbal statements about one's accomplishments, character, motives, or plans. Such claims affect the evaluations others make by providing them with personal information on which to base their evaluations. Giacalone (1985) found that when individuals in an organizational setting claimed credit for a
particular accomplishment, others were not always willing to give them that credit, whereas Riordan and colleagues showed that when individuals seriously erred on the job, excuses served to ameliorate possible resulting negative evaluations.

More broadly, much self-presentation can be regarded as a mode of social influence, specifically as a way of affecting how other people respond to oneself. Researches suggested that self-presentation serves to maintain or augment one's power in relationships with other people. When social psychologists use the word power, they are simply referring to the ability to intentionally produce desired changes in other people. One person has power over another to the extent that his or her actions can get the other person to behave in certain desired ways (Arkin, Appleman, Berger, 1980).

Self-presentation following success may ensure that one receives the recognition and credit deserved if the quality or difficulty of the accomplishment is clearly understood.

Attribution theory suggests two processes that lead to differing perceptions of the presenters, followed by differing amounts of credit given to them: These two processes are augmentation and discounting. In augmentation, individuals describe the progress of the project, emphasizing problems involved in its completion. To the extent that there are substantial impediments, individuals should be given more credit for the success of the project. Alternatively, individuals who adopt modest presentations in which they share credit with a number of other individuals presumably should be given less credit because, to the extent that others are involved, each individual's responsibility for the success would be discounted.

Research on attribution theory has shown that, in addition to developing impressions about an actor, observers develop impressions about the act itself, and that the latter impressions can be
affected by the same variables that influence the former. For instance, the ease with which an action is performed has been shown to influence its perceived difficulty.

The primary goal of self-presentation is not to be perceived positively per se, but to influence other people to respond in desired ways. In most cases, people are more likely to treat us as we want them to when they have positive impressions of us—that we are friendly, competent, ethical, and attractive, for example. Because of this, the impressions people usually try to make are positive, socially desirable ones.

In other cases, however, people are more likely to be treated as they desire if they foster undesirable impressions in others' eyes. People sometimes think their interests will be best served if they can get others to perceive them as violent, incompetent, ill, or even mentally disturbed.

The study of self-presentation assumes that people are often concerned about what others think of them and that, at least occasionally, they behave in ways that help them make certain impressions on other people. In this chapter, we explore the rather complex question of why people engage in impression management (Christensen, 1981).

To answer this question, we really must address two separate issues. The first involves why people should be concerned with others' impressions of them in the first place. Why do people go out of their way to control others' impressions of them, sometimes to the point of doing things that are self-destructive or purposefully conveying images of themselves they know are not accurate? Given the pervasiveness and strength of the self-presentational motive and people's proclivity to impression-manage, it almost seems as if people are inherently predisposed to worry about how other people view them.
The second question involves why people are more motivated to manage their impressions in some situations than in others. People don't engage in self-presentation all of the time. In some settings, they don't seem to care about what others think of them, whereas in other settings, their primary goal is to create an impression. Thus, we will address the question of why impression motivation fluctuates across situations, along with the related question of why some people are characteristically more concerned about their impressions than others.

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Self-presentation is usually viewed as the process by which people convey to others that they are a certain kind of person or possess certain characteristics. Self-presentational tactics that attempt to convey that a person possesses particular characteristics or is a particular kind of person are called attributive tactics. Often, however, people are more interested in conveying that they aren't a certain kind of person. Tactics that deny that the person possesses particular characteristics or is a particular kind of person are called repudiative tactics. When the movie starlet of the 1950s stops the leading man's romantic advances with a slap and says "I'm not that kind of woman," she's indicating to him the kind of woman she's not (that is, she's using a repudiative tactic), but not telling him much about the kind of woman she is.
Nearly any aspect of behavior can be controlled for self-presentational purposes. One's clothing, the recounting of a particular personal experience, a well-timed laugh, or even one's choice of food at a restaurant can all be used to create certain impressions in others' minds. The staggering variety of behaviors that can serve self-presentational goals prevents us from creating an exhaustive list of self-presentational tactics, but it should be sufficient to demonstrate how virtually any behavior can be used for impression management on certain occasions.

The most straightforward way for people to convey information about themselves involves verbal descriptions. By telling others about their personalities, likes and dislikes, previous experiences, accomplishments, families, occupations, emotional reactions, fears, and so on, people can create particular impressions in others' eyes. Although self-descriptive self-presentations usually occur in face-to-face interactions, people often describe themselves to others in writing. For example, job applicants engage in self-presentation when they write a letter of application or prepare their resume. Likewise, the personal ads that people place in newspapers to attract dating partners are essentially self-presentational advertisements ("Intelligent, attractive, affectionate man seeks committed professional woman....").

For many people, the concept of impression management implies that people go through their days lying about themselves for their own social gain. In the case of self-descriptions, however, people are more likely to selectively present true information about themselves than they are to lie. In a given interaction, you have a nearly infinite variety of facts you could reveal about yourself—all of which are absolutely true. When you have the opportunity to tell someone about yourself, what you choose to say is heavily influenced by the kind of impression you would like the other person to have of you.
Self-descriptions differ along a continuum of explicitness. On one hand, people may make explicit claims about themselves, as when Richard Nixon announced to the country, "I am not a crook." As a self-presentational tactic, such explicit claims are risky, however. Because people rarely reveal information about themselves so directly, listeners may be alerted to the possibility that the person's claim is tactical, if not deceptive.

For this reason, people's self-descriptions are often more indirect or tacit. In making an indirect claim, people state a fact about themselves that they believe will lead others either to make a particular inference or to ask a question that calls for a self-presentational claim. For example, rather than baldly claiming, "You know, I was a football player in college—and a damn good one at that," a man discussing sports with a new colleague might simply note that "football sure has changed—the big money and all—since I played the game." (Fontana, Klein, 1998). At minimum, such an indirect tactic conveys that he played football; at maximum, the colleague may be enticed to ask for more information, allowing the man to legitimately talk about his glory days on the gridiron.

Just as important as what people say about themselves to others is what they could say about themselves, but don't. People manage their impressions not only by describing themselves in particular ways, but by excluding certain information from their self-descriptions. As Goffman put it, self-presentation involves "the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others." As one might imagine, people use these exclusionary self-presentation tactics when they think that accurate self-descriptions will make an undesired impression.

Although real life self-presentation often involves exclusion and editing, if not downright evasion, most psychological research on self-presentation has failed to investigate these kinds
of self-descriptive tactics. In the typical experiment, self-presentation is measured by asking subjects to rate themselves on a questionnaire that will subsequently be seen by another person (usually the researcher or another subject). Because the subject completes the questionnaire knowing that his or her answers will be seen by others, these ratings can be regarded as self-presentations.

The shortcoming of this standard approach to measuring self-presentation is that it more or less forces subjects to disclose information about themselves on the dimensions specified by the questionnaire items; leaving certain ratings blank is usually not an option. When subjects are told they may leave certain items blank or that they can choose which self-ratings they will show to another person, they tactically exclude information from their self-descriptions that will create an undesired impression.

As conclusion remark, I would like to say that self-presentation is an important tool in life of students as well as at any area where social interaction takes place.
Bibliography:


