APPLICANT IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT:
DISPOSITIONAL INFLUENCES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR RECRUITER
PERCEPTIONS OF FIT AND SIMILARITY APPLICANT CHARACTERISTICS AND
IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT USE IN JOB INTERVIEWS, EFFECTS ON
RECRUITER PERCEPTIONS

AMY KRISTOF-BROWN
Henry B. Tippie College of Business
Department of Management and Organizations
108 Pappajohn Business Building
University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242
Tel. (319) 335-0928
Fax (319) 335-1956
amy-kristof-brown@uiowa.edu

MURRAY R. BARRICK
Broad Graduate School of Management
Department of Management
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1122
Tel. (517) 432-3515
Fax (517) 432-1111
Barrrick@msu.edu

MELINDA FRANKE
Royal Neighbors of America
Field Services Department
230 16th Street
Rock Island, IL 61201
Tel. (309) 788-4561 Ext. 328
Fax (309) 788-1450
frankemm@royalneighbors.org
Data for this project was collected as part of a larger study conducted by the second author. A second study using data from this investigation is currently in press at Personnel Psychology. There is no duplication in the causal relationships reported in both studies.
This study investigates how applicant characteristics influence the use of impression management (IM) tactics in interviews, and how these behaviors affect interviewer perceptions of person-job fit (P-J fit) and applicant-interviewer similarity. Results from 72 applicants demonstrated that extraverted applicants made greater use of self-promotion during their interviews, while agreeableness was associated with nonverbal cues. Self-promotion was the IM tactic most strongly related to interviewers' perceptions of P-J fit, whereas non-verbal IM influenced perceived similarity. The practical implications of these findings for applicant preparation are discussed, as well as concerns regarding the longterm effects of IM use on selection decision making. This and other research implications are discussed.
Statistics suggest that the interview is, by far, the most widely used tool for selection, and is the exclusive means of selecting candidates for 85% - 90% of companies (Bell, 1992). Although applicants’ objective credentials, such as job experience or GPA often determine who is invited to interview, they are far less important for hiring decisions than is performance in the interview itself (Dipboye, 1992). Given the importance of the interview, it is not surprising that applicants strive to be “effective” interviewees. Research has shown that applicants seek to create positive impressions during interviews by using influence strategies known as impression management (IM) tactics geared towards single interviewers (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar, Deleary, & Ferris, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). IM has been defined as an attempt to portray a particular (usually positive) image of oneself to a target person (Schlenker, 1980). Research consistently supports the finding that applicants use a variety of IM tactics spontaneously during interviews (McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 1997; Stevens & Kristof, 1995) and that these tactics predict positive interviewer evaluations, controlling for applicant qualifications and demographics (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Kacmar, et al., 1992).

Despite the growing number of studies in recent years of IM in interview settings, several questions still remain. Two issues, in particular, that have received little attention are applicant personality traits that influence IM tactic use, and the mediating processes through which IM tactics affect interviewers’ final hiring decisions (Gilmore, Stevens, Harrell-Cook, & Ferris, 1999). Although interest in the influence of personality on behavior is escalating, research relating IM use and individual traits has been scarce. Similarly, while extensive research links IM use to hiring decisions, few studies have examined the intermediary interviewer perceptions that feed into those later decisions. Preliminary evidence by Graves and Powell (1988) and Howard and Ferris (1996) suggests that interviewers' assessments of similarity and job-related competence may be important factors in stimulating their overall liking and final evaluations of
Applicant Impression Management

applicants. An important contribution of the current study is that it is the first attempt to examine how personality influences particular IM tactics, and how these tactics affect subsequent interviewer perceptions. Further, it investigates these relations in a realistic interview setting, rather than with “paper” or video applicants.

Specifically, the current research was designed to examine the relationships between two well-established personality traits associated with social exchange (extraversion and agreeableness), three types of IM (self-oriented, other-oriented, and nonverbal tactics), and two types of interviewer perceptions associated with hiring decisions (applicant-interviewer similarity and person-job (P-J) fit). To investigate these relationships, mock interviews between college students and recruiting representatives from local companies were conducted. Following their interviews, assessments of the applicant’s personality and use of IM tactics, as well as interviewer evaluations were collected. The results offer evidence regarding what applicant traits influence the use of particular IM tactics in interviews, and which strategies stimulate interviewer perceptions of similarity and P-J fit.

Applicant Personality, IM Tactics, and Interviewer Perceptions

In Figure 1 we introduce a theoretical model representing our central argument that applicant personality traits influence the types of IM tactics they use during interviews, and these in turn stimulate specific types of interviewer perceptions. In the first part of the model we emphasize the personality traits of extraversion (sociability, ambition, and surgency) and agreeableness (cooperation, consideration, and trust). We selected these traits because they are components of the Five Factor Model (FFM), a taxonomy of broad sets of personality characteristics validated across a number of different theoretical perspectives, samples of respondents, and questionnaires (Digman, 1990; Barrick & Mount, 1991), and deal specifically with one’s preferences for interacting with other people in social situations.
In the second part of the model we predict that these personality traits determine which of three types of IM tactics an applicant will elect to use during an interview. Kacmar et al. (1992) differentiated between IM tactics focused on the self versus focused on the target person. **Self-focused** IM is defined as, “maintain(ing) attention on the candidate and allow(ing) him or her to focus the direction of the conversation in areas which allow him or her to excel” (Kacmar et al., 1992: 1253). The broadest form of self-focused IM is self-promotion, or describing one's past experience and accomplishments in a positive manner in order to generate a perception of competence (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Alternatively, **other-focused** IM maintains focus on the target person by using ingratiatory strategies, designed to evoke interpersonal attraction (Schlenker, 1980). Examples include the tactics of opinion conformity (indirectly flattering the interviewer by agreeing with him or her) and other enhancement (directly flattering the interviewer or organization with compliments) (Kacmar et al., 1992). In addition to these verbal strategies, IM may also occur in the form of nonverbal or expressive behaviors, such as nodding affirmatively, smiling at the target, and making eye contact (Schlenker, 1980; Schneider, 1981).

The final section of our model describes anticipated relationships between IM tactics and two interviewer judgments that have been found to predict hiring decisions. The first is the assessment of whether or not the applicant is a good fit with the job to be filled. This judgment of **P-J fit** encompasses the applicant's perceived competence and whether he or she is seen holistically as the "right type of person" for a particular position (Kristof, 1996). The second judgment is perceived **applicant-interviewer similarity**, a primary determinant of interviewers' liking of applicants (Baskett, 1973; Frank & Hackman, 1975). Research suggests that both perceived P-J fit and similarity play a larger role in hiring decisions than do objective applicant qualifications, such as GPA or work experience (Cable & Judge, 1997; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000).
Applicant Impression Management

In the model we also include applicant GPA and the amount of interview training previously received by the applicant as control variables. The first is included because it is common practice in interviewing research to control for applicant GPA when assessing the effects of IM above and beyond applicant qualifications (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989). Because qualifications are one component of P-J fit, we include a path in the model between GPA and this recruiter perception. We also controlled for prior interview training because applicants are often exposed to "interview prep" sessions, which may encourage them to use IM tactics. To isolate the effects of personality on IM tactic use, it was necessary to control for the impact of such training. Therefore, training was included in the model as a predictor of each IM tactic.

**Personality Influences of Applicant IM**

Little research has examined what prompts applicants to use IM, and much of what has been done has emphasized the interview context. Stevens and Kristof (1995) reported that the use of a structured interview format was negatively related to the applicant's use of other-focused IM. They explained this finding by the limited amount of time which a structured versus unstructured interview provides for applicants to take control of the interview. McFarland et al. (1997) found that applicants were similarly constrained from self-promoting when situational interviews contained a large role-play component. Although these results suggest that the interview context may constrain applicants' use of IM strategies, individual differences are likely to predict which tactics applicants prefer to use.

A few studies have examined personality predictors of IM, but the results have generally been weak. Fletcher (1990) found that applicants high in Machiavellianism (a trait reflecting pursuit of self-interest at any expense) reported that they were more willing to be dishonest during an interview, perhaps indicating more openness to using IM in a deceptive manner. However, because this study did not examine behaviors actually used during an interview, it is
difficult to generalize to specific IM tactics. Another personality factor often associated with IM is self-monitoring, the ability to monitor personal behavior based on cues received from one's social setting (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors should be more adept at changing their behavior to maximize performance in a given situation, making them more likely to use IM during interviews. However, three studies have failed to find support for a relationship between applicant self-monitoring and IM tactic use (Anderson, Silvester, Cunningham-Snell, & Haddleton, 1999; Delery & Kacmar, 1995, 1998). Alternatively, Delery and Kacmar (1998) did find that applicants having low self-esteem and an internal locus of control were more likely to use self-focused tactics ($r=-.41$ self-esteem; $r=-.25$ locus of control) than their counterparts.

In light of this mixed initial support, Gilmore et al. (1999) called for research on additional personality traits that may relate to IM tactics. Today the most widely studied typology of personality is the FFM, which has gained acceptance through its relationships with work outcomes including performance and turnover (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Because the FFM traits of extraversion and agreeableness deal specifically with one’s preferences for interacting with others in social situations, they appear most likely to impact the use of IM strategies. As an interview is simply a social interaction with defined goals, it follows that these elements may affect the applicant’s use of IM behaviors. Recall that the defining characteristics of extraversion include sociability and talkativeness, as well as assertiveness and ambition (Goldberg, 1990). More importantly, the desire to obtain rewards has also been identified as a basic motivation of extraverts (Gray, 1987; Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000; Stewart, 1996). Thus, an individual with these characteristics should be more capable of expressing himself or herself in an interview and will be highly motivated by the opportunity to gain rewards. An extravert may, therefore, speak more about past accomplishments, and highlight his
or her strengths more effectively than someone who is introverted. Thus, we propose a positive relationship between applicant extraversion and the use of the self-promotion.

**Hypothesis 1**: Applicants who are high in extraversion will make greater use of self-promotion during job interviews than will applicants with low levels on this trait.

The same characteristics of talkativeness and assertiveness may lead extraverted applicants to use other-focused IM tactics. Applicants who are more talkative are more likely to flatter and express affirming opinions than those who are less talkative, simply because they are taking a more active role in the conversation. In addition, there is some empirical evidence that an assertive communication style is related to increased perceptions of applicant-interviewer similarity and liking (Buttner & McEnally, 1996; Gallois, Callan, & Palmer, 1992). One reason for this relationship may be the use of other-focused forms of IM by assertive communicators (Kacmar et al., 1992; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999).

The FFM trait of agreeableness, characterized by warmth, cooperativeness, and politeness, can also reasonably be expected to be associated with the use of other-focused IM. Agreeable individuals are altruistic, sympathetic, eager to help others, and unselfish. Moreover, agreeable people do not draw attention to themselves; rather, they do what they can to accommodate the people they interact with and make them feel comfortable. Both opinion conformity and other enhancement are IM tactics that focus attention on the target of the interaction, rather than the actor. Thus, individuals who are high in agreeableness should use them easily and frequently. In sum, we propose positive relationships between the applicant traits of extraversion and agreeableness and the use of other-focused IM tactics.

**Hypothesis 2a**: Applicants who are high in extraversion will make greater use of other-focused IM tactics, including other-enhancement and opinion conformity, during job interviews than will applicants with low levels on this trait.
Applicant Impression Management

Hypothesis 2b: Applicants who are high in agreeableness will make greater use of other-focused IM tactics, including other-enhancement and opinion conformity, during job interviews than will applicants with low levels on this trait.

The final category of IM tactics, non-verbal behaviors, is not easily classified. Positive nonverbal behaviors such as making eye contact are often interpreted as expressions of confidence and competence (Dipboye, 1992; Imada & Hakel, 1976). These may be considered a self-focused strategy because they draw attention to the applicant and may help to underscore past accomplishments. However, nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and nodding one's head in affirmation also convey the impression of enthusiasm, interest, and agreement, which are more focused on the target of the interaction (Dipboye, 1992; Imada & Hakel, 1976). Because their use may be so widely interpreted by interviewers, there are multiple motivations for why an applicant might engage in these behaviors. Extraverted applicants may make eye contact and smile as encouragement for the other person to continue interacting with them; whereas, agreeable applicants may nod their heads in order to demonstrate agreement with the interviewer or show support for their point of view. Therefore, both extraversion and agreeableness are predicted to relate to greater use of positive nonverbal behavior during interviews.

Hypothesis 3a: Applicants who are high in extraversion will make greater use of non-verbal IM during job interviews than will applicants with low levels on this trait.

Hypothesis 3b: Applicants who are high in agreeableness will make greater use of non-verbal IM during job interviews than will applicants with low levels on this trait.

Interviewer Perceptions as Consequences of IM

Studies conducted in both the lab and the field consistently support a positive relationship between applicant IM and interviewer evaluations. In a study using video-taped applicants, Gilmore and Ferris (1989) showed that applicants’ overall level of IM positively influenced
Applicant Impression Management

interviewers' ratings of likelihood of hiring, perceived qualifications, and interview performance, regardless of the applicant's resume qualifications. Another lab study conducted by Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris (1992) addressed the question of whether self or other-focused tactics were more effective. Eighty students, acting as interviewers, evaluated the performance of a trained applicant who used either self-focused or other-focused IM during a brief interview. Results showed that when the confederate used self-focused behavior, he received higher overall ratings, more job offers, and fewer rejections. Field studies using actual interviewers have reaffirmed the effectiveness of self-focused IM in interviews. Kacmar and Carlson (1999) found that human resource professionals gave higher performance ratings to hypothetical applicants using self-focused versus other-focused IM tactics, and Stevens and Kristof (1995) reported that both self-promotion and non-verbal behaviors were positively related to interviewers' evaluations of perceived suitability of actual applicants. Although these studies suggest that self-focused tactics are more predictive of final interview outcomes than are other-focused IM strategies, Kacmar and Carlson (1999) found that other-focused strategies do have the intended effect of increasing interviewer attraction to the applicant. Their results reinforce those found by Wayne and colleagues (Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Liden, 1995) in non-interview settings, that other-focused tactics succeed in stimulating liking.

Although these studies suggest that applicant IM influences interview outcomes, we know little about the processes that mediate the relationship. Ferris and Judge (1991) proposed that interviewer perceptions of applicant competence, fit, similarity, and liking are potential intermediary variables. Yet, despite the vast amount of research supporting the influence of these perceptions on hiring decisions (e.g., Adkins, Russel, & Werbel, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1997; Frank & Hackman, 1975; Kristof-Brown, 2000), few studies trace these perceptions back to applicant behaviors. A study by Howard and Ferris (1996) examined the effects of specific
IM tactics on interviewer perceptions and reported that high levels of nonverbal behavior increased interviewers' perceptions of applicant competence, but self-promotion had little effect. Instead, self-promotion actually had a negative relationship with perceptions of applicant-interviewer similarity. Kacmar and Carlson (1999) found that other-focused tactics were effective at increasing interviewers' liking of the applicant in interview settings, despite the fact that self-focused tactics had a greater effect on their evaluations of overall performance.

Although all types of IM seek to generate favorable impressions, it appears that self-focused versus other-focused tactics may achieve this goal through different mechanisms. By concentrating attention on the interviewer, other-focused ingratiatory strategies are likely to influence interview outcomes by increasing perceptions of similarity and liking of the applicant (Schlenker, 1980). Both other enhancement and opinion conformity should lead to perceptions of similarity because they each strive to convince the interviewer that the applicant and interviewer share many of the same likes and dislikes, experiences and interests. Byrne's (1971) theory of interpersonal attraction suggests that increasing perceived similarity between individuals stimulates mutual liking because it validates their views and opinions. Thus, when an applicant uses other-focused IM strategies, the interviewer should perceive him or her as similar, and subsequently be more attracted to that applicant more than someone perceived as dissimilar.

Alternatively, the self-focused IM tactic of self-promotion involves talking favorably about one's own accomplishments and painting one's experiences in a positive light. This strategy appears geared toward producing perceptions of competence, rather than similarity. When candidates articulate that they have job-relevant skills, experiences and personal characteristics, they portray an image of good P-J fit. Kristof-Brown (2000) recently demonstrated that recruiters' perceptions of P-J fit are a better predictor of hiring recommendations than are other fit perceptions (i.e., person-organization fit) or objective
qualifications (i.e., GPA). Thus, it is likely that self-promotion affects interview outcomes through its influence on the intervening variable of interviewers' perceptions P-J fit.

Finally, the use of positive non-verbal behavior is likely to produce both perceptions of P-J fit and applicant-interviewer similarity. Non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact convey an image of confidence and competence, and will likely improve interviewers' evaluations of the applicants' qualifications. Alternatively, behaviors such as head nodding and smiling when the interviewer speaks indicate interest and may be judged as signaling agreement with what the interviewer is saying. This will result in increased perceptions of applicant-interviewer similarity. Therefore, we predict the following three relationships between applicant IM tactics and interviewers' perceptions of P-J fit and similarity.

**Hypothesis 4a**: In interviews, applicants who use high levels of other-focused IM tactics, including other-enhancement and opinion conformity, will be perceived as more similar to the interviewers than will applicants who use low levels of these tactics.

**Hypothesis 4b**: In interviews, applicants who use high levels of the self-focused IM tactic, self-promotion, will be judged as having a better P-J fit than will applicants who use low levels of this tactic.

**Hypothesis 4c**: In interviews, applicants who use high levels of positive non-verbal behavior, will be judged as having both a better P-J fit and greater applicant-interviewer similarity than will applicants who use low levels of this tactic.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants included 73 undergraduate business or pre-business students (68% female, 32% male) from a large mid-western university, of the following class standings: 16% sophomores, 41% juniors, and 42% seniors. These participants represent 97% of the students
contacted for participation in the study. The sample contained students majoring in finance (27%), accounting (22%), marketing (15%), management (14%), human resources (11%), and other business concentrations (11%). Outlier analyses suggested that our data was normally distributed for all variables except for Agreeableness, which was strongly kurtotic due to one individual who scored four standard deviations below the mean on this scale. We thus eliminated data from this participant, leaving a sample of 72 individuals.

Procedure

In return for developmental feedback regarding their personal strengths and weaknesses in interviews, participants completed a half-hour mock interview with a human resources interviewer from a local business. To increase the realism of the situation, professional dress was required, and applicants were informed that several of the interviewers worked for companies that were actively recruiting at the time of the study. When they arrived for the mock interview, a researcher informed the students to interview as if they were applying for an entry-level position within their major field of study (e.g., finance, human resources). Each participant received a general job description to review briefly before the interview. This description contained information regarding the primary responsibilities, tasks, and necessary qualifications for the hypothetical position. We used information from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, as well as information from the Business and Liberal Arts Placement office regarding common entry-level duties, to create representative descriptions for entry-level positions in each field.

With assistance from the local Society for Human Resource Management chapter we invited 25 human resource representatives to conduct mock interviews with the student participants. There was 100% participation from the interviewers approached regarding the study. Interviewers were instructed to conduct a thirty-minute interview with each student, using the format they would normally use when hiring an entry-level employee. The interviewers were
blind to the study's hypotheses. Each interviewer interviewed at least two participants (M=2.92, sd=.95), with no interviewer conducting more than six interviews.

Once the interview was completed, the student was taken to a different room and both the student and the interviewer filled out post-interview questionnaires. Applicants answered questions regarding their personality characteristics and their use of IM tactics during the interview. Interviewers answered questions regarding their perceived similarity to the applicant, and their assessment of the applicant’s P-J fit.

Measures

Applicant personality. The applicants' post-interview questionnaire contained two separate elements that we analyzed in this study. The first was a FFM personality inventory, adapted from a larger version developed by Goldberg (1992). This measure contains 50 adjectives (e.g., moody, undependable, warm) commonly used to describe people. Participants were asked to read each adjective, and determine the extent to which they agreed that it described their typical behavior. Ten adjective items, measured on 5-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree), assessed applicants' personality on each of the five FFM factors. Scale reliabilities for the two personality traits examined in this study reached acceptable levels: extraversion (α = .77) and agreeableness (α = .83).

Applicant impression management. The second component of the applicants' post-interview questionnaire measured self-reported use of IM tactics. We asked applicants, rather than interviewers', to rate the use of IM tactics in order to avoid confounding these measures (intervening variables) with interviewers' reports of their perceptions of the applicants (criterion variables). We also were concerned that interviewers, as the targets of the IM tactics, would not be able to accurately judge IM use when it was used effectively. Stevens and Kristof (1995) demonstrated empirical support for the validity of applicants' self-reports of IM. They collected
Applicant Impression Management

IM ratings from three sets of individuals - applicants, interviewers, and observers who listened to audio-tapes of the interviews - and found evidence that applicants' ratings were more similar to the observers ratings than were interviewers' ratings of IM.

Nine questions, adapted from scales originally created by Stevens and Kristof (1995), assessed the extent to which applicants used impression management tactics during their interview. Four items regarding self-promotion were included (“During the interview I demonstrated my knowledge and expertise,” “I described my skills and abilities in an attractive way,” “I took charge to get my point across,” and, “I described my skills and experience”). Reliability for this four-item scale was acceptable ($\alpha=.77$). Three questions assessed the use of other-focused IM tactics, including “I discussed non-job-related topics with the interviewer,” and “I discussed interests I shared in common with the interviewer,” to assess opinion conformity and the item “I complemented the interviewer” to measure other enhancement. Because both types of tactics are other-focused and represent attempts at ingratiation, the three items were combined into a single scale ($\alpha=.54$). A final scale assessed nonverbal IM using two items, “I smiled a lot or used other friendly nonverbal behavior,” and “I maintained eye contact with the interviewer” ($\alpha=.64$) All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree), to assess how much applicants engaged in each of the IM-related behaviors.

**Interview outcomes.** Interviewers' post-interview questionnaire contained 12 questions about the applicant's similarity to the interviewer and qualifications for an entry-level position. Four questions asked the interviewers to evaluate how similar they felt they were to the applicant; (e.g., “This applicant and I have many of the same beliefs and values,” and “This applicant reminds me of myself”). Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Eight questions assessed the interviewer's judgment of the applicant’s fit with an entry-level job in their company. Six of these items addressed the
applicants’ comprehension of and overall qualifications for the job, (e.g., “This applicant knows what is important for this position,” and “On the basis of all the information I’ve received, I would evaluate this applicant’s overall qualifications for the position,” (all scored 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). The item "Generally speaking, I feel this applicant compares to other applicants seeking the same position on the basis of his/her qualifications" (scored 1=very poorly, 2=somewhat poorly, 3=average, 4=somewhat favorably, 5=very favorably,) was also included. In addition, two items asked the interviewers to assess the applicants’ P-J fit based on educational and work experience, scored on the following five-point scale (1=very poor fit, 2=poor fit, 3=average, 4=good fit, 5=very good fit). Alpha reliabilities for perceived applicant-interviewer similarity and P-J fit were high at (α = .81) and (α = .95) respectively.

Control variables. Two control variables were included in the analysis - applicant GPA and prior training on interviewing. GPA was self-reported and verified with university records. Applicants’ prior interview training was assessed with a single item "Amount of training you have received in preparation to interview" (4-point Likert scale; 1=None at all, 2=very little, 3=moderate amount, 4=quite a lot).

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables are provided in Table 1. Because of the wide range of scale reliabilities (α=.54-.95), the correlation matrix was corrected for attenuation due to measurement error. Looking at the scale means, we can see that applicants rated their use of non-verbal IM behaviors substantially higher than the self-focused and other-focused IM tactics. We also see that applicants, on average, had relatively little prior interview training before participating in this study (M=2.07, s.d.= .79). As in prior research, all the IM tactics were positively correlated with each other, suggesting that use of one tactic is related to use of the others.
Model Testing

To test the proposed model, we used the EQS computer program for structural equation modeling (SEM) (Bentler, 1995). SEM was chosen for the analyses because it allowed us to take into account measurement error (a concern because of the wide range of reliabilities), simultaneously estimate all path coefficients, and evaluate the fit of the overall model to the data. Although the “rule of 5” (Bentler & Chou, 1987), which suggests that there should be at least five participants for every parameter that is to be estimated, is often recommended when determining adequate sample size for SEM, this constraint can be relaxed when the data are normally distributed (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996). Our data were normally distributed (after removing the outlier on Agreeableness), therefore, we used SEM to test the theoretical model.

The global fit indices ($\chi^2=33.65$, df=19, $p<.05$; CFI = .77; GFI = .991; RMSEA = .11) indicate that the proposed model does not fit the data well. Lagrange multiplier tests (Bentler, 1995) indicated that the model could be improved by the addition of parameters between GPA and other-focused IM tactics, and GPA and perceived similarity. We originally included GPA in the model to control for its influence on perceptions of P-J fit, not considering that it might also influence applicants' choice of IM tactics and other recruiter perceptions. Yet, there are theoretical reasons for why GPA would relate to these other factors. Applicants with lower GPAs may feel the need to engage in other-focused tactics to shift attention away from what they view as a negative mark on their resume. Although past research has not found GPA to heavily influence interviewers' decisions (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000), it is likely to be highly salient to applicants and affect how they behave in the interview. In addition, because interviewers are subject to normal human biases they are likely hold and seek to maintain a favorable image of themselves. Therefore, they may be inclined to see applicants with high GPAs as more similar to themselves than are those with lower GPAs. Hence, we freed
the paths between applicant GPA and other-focused IM and reran the model with these respecifications. The results showed a significant improvement over the initial model (difference in $\chi^2 = 18.71$, df=21, $p<.05$), with fit indices ($\chi^2 = 14.94$, df=17, ns; CFI = 1.00, GFI = .90-96 and RMSEA = .000). Figure 2 reports the standardized parameter estimates for the revised model.

Although our data did not violate the assumption of normality, because of prevalent concerns with using SEM for small sample sizes, we also tested the revised model using Hunter and Hamilton's (1990) ordinary least squares path-analysis program (a copy of this program is available from the first author). Path analysis relies on fewer restrictions than the maximum likelihood estimates used in SEM, making it a good alternative when sample sizes are small. We selected the Hunter and Hamilton program in particular because it corrects the standard errors of the path coefficients for attenuation from random error of measurement (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Results from the OLS analysis indicate that the path coefficients were similar in magnitude to those obtained using SEM. As with the revised SEM model, the path model fit the data well $\chi^2 (16, N=72) = 15.42$, ns.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 the effect of applicant extraversion on self-promotion was positive ($\beta = .47$, $p<.05$), as was the influence of previous interview training ($\beta = .34$, $p<.05$). These results indicate that applicants with high levels of extraversion and previous interview training engaged in more self-promotion during their interviews than their counterparts.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b predicted that the personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness would affect applicants’ use of other-focused IM tactics. Neither of these predicted relationships were supported ($\beta = -.09$, ns for extraversion, and $\beta = .20$ ns for agreeableness), nor was a relationship between previous interview training and other-focused IM ($\beta = .18$). However, the path added in the revised model shows a strong negative effect of GPA on other-focused IM ($\beta = -.47$, $p<.05$). This suggests that the lower the applicant's GPA, they more likely he or she was to
use other-focused IM. We predicted that the final set of IM tactics, non-verbal behaviors, would be influenced by applicants’ extraversion (Hypothesis 3a) and agreeableness (Hypothesis 3b). Figure 2 shows that the path coefficient for agreeableness was statistically significant ($\beta = .31, p<.05$), but the coefficient for extraversion was not ($\beta = .25, \text{ns}$), providing support for only Hypothesis 3b. Taken as a whole, these results provide some evidence that applicant personality traits influence the types of IM they choose to use in interviews. Applicants’ extraversion was positively related to the use of self-promotion, and agreeableness was similarly related to the use of non-verbal behaviors. Other-focused IM was most strongly influenced by a non-personality individual difference -- GPA.

The second set of predicted relationships described links between applicants’ use of IM tactics and interviewer perceptions of applicant P-J fit and similarity. Hypothesis 4a predicted that applicants’ use of other-focused IM tactics would influence interviewers’ perceptions of applicant-interviewer similarity. Figure 2 reports that the path coefficient for this relationship was not statistically significant ($\beta = .08, \text{ns}$). Alternatively, Hypothesis 4b which proposed a positive relationship between applicants’ use of self-promotion and interviewer perceptions of P-J fit was supported ($\beta = .60, p<.05$). GPA did not appear to influence perceptions of fit ($\beta = .11, \text{ns}$), consistent with findings in other studies (e.g., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kristof-Brown, 2000); however, it had a strong positive influence on interviewers’ perceptions of similarity ($\beta = .41, p<.05$). Finally, the effect of nonverbal IM on perceived similarity was statistically significant ($\beta = .37, p<.05$), but the same was not true for P-J fit ($\beta = .24, \text{ns}$), providing partial support for Hypothesis 4c. In sum, the applicant IM tactic of self-promotion influenced interviewer perceptions of P-J fit; whereas, applicant GPA and nonverbal behavior influenced perceptions of applicant-interviewer similarity. No evidence was found for a relationship between the use of other-focused IM tactics and interviewer perceptions.
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine what applicant characteristics influence their use of IM tactics in interviews, and how these behaviors affect various interviewer perceptions. Building on prior research our results provide evidence that certain personality traits are related to applicant IM use. In addition, these results confirm the positive relationship often reported between self-focused IM tactics and interviewer perceptions (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kacmar, et al., 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), while casting further doubt on the effectiveness of other-focused tactics during interviews. Our results also reveal that nonverbal behavior plays a role, by influencing perceptions of applicant – recruiter similarity. This supports the assertion “it’s not what you say, but how you say it,” (Imada & Hakel, 1976). Taken together, this study provides more detailed evidence of the variety of connections between applicant personality, their use of IM tactics, and interviewer perceptions.

We first examined the influence of applicant characteristics, including the traits of extraversion and agreeableness, on the use of IM tactics. Both agreeableness and extraversion were found to predict IM use, but each was related to a different tactic. As predicted, applicants who were more extraverted made greater use of self-promotion during their interviews. This relationship is likely due to the extravert’s comfort with social interaction and desire to compete for and obtain rewards (Lucas et al., 2000), in this case by getting a job offer. Extraversion did not predict other types of IM, including other-focused tactics and non-verbal behavior, suggesting that it is most strongly related to the use of assertive, verbal statements about one's qualifications. Alternatively, agreeableness was related to applicants use of positive nonverbal cues. When examining the questions asked to applicants to capture the use of non-verbal cues (“I smiled a lot or used friendly non-verbal behavior,” “I maintained eye contact,”) this relationship is understandable. A highly agreeable individual is someone who is cooperative,
good-natured, and likeable. As actions speak volumes, it is not surprising that friendly behaviors are a natural expression of this personality factor. In light of these encouraging results, we encourage additional research on personality predictors of IM tactic use. In particular, we suggest examining how traits such as conscientiousness influence IM use by improving applicants' preparation for the interview.

Our results also suggest that prior interview training is related to self-promotion, the tactic most consistently associated with positive interview outcomes (Kacmar, et al., 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Because applicants were not asked to report what type of prior training they had received, we cannot draw strong conclusions about the usefulness of particular types of interview preparation. Nevertheless, our results suggest that self-promotion may be a trainable skill, which is encouraging news for introverted applicants who may not be as comfortable talking about their accomplishments as their extroverted counterparts. Future research should investigate which training techniques (e.g., role-play, self-preparation books) are most effective for teaching self-promotion skills, and what types of applicants benefit most from this type of interview preparation.

In the second portion of the study we examined the relationship between applicants' use of IM tactics and interviewer perceptions. Previous studies have found that final interview outcomes are more strongly related to self-focused tactics than any other type if IM (Kacmar et al., 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Our results suggest that self-promoting behaviors such as describing one's skills and experiences in a positive light and underscoring how one's own characteristics and competencies match the demands and requirements of the work context may lead interviewers to see the applicant as a good fit with the job. Although interviewers form and consider a wide variety of perceptions prior to making their final hiring recommendation, the perception of P-J fit is one of the most important (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Therefore, when self-
promoting behaviors are aimed at creating the perception of high P-J fit, the applicant is likely to benefit by using this IM tactic. However, in light of evidence that experienced interviewers are less influenced by self-promotion than their inexperienced counterparts (Howard & Ferris, 1996), future research is necessary on what conditions make self-promotion most advantageous to applicants. Specific questions include whether the applicant's presentation style and political skill, or transparency of the influence tactic is an important factor in its success (Gordon, 1996; Jones, 1990). Ferris, Fedor, and King (1994) suggest that impression management is a political behavior, and as such, will be more effectively carried out by those with political skill. It is also likely that self-promotion may have a non-linear relationship with perceived fit, where moderate amounts are more effective than low or high amounts. Additional research might also examine other types of self-focused IM, such as making entitlements (claiming responsibility for positive events) or enhancing one's past experiences (Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

The second type of interviewer judgment we predicted was perceived applicant-interviewer similarity. As hypothesized, applicants' use of non-verbal behaviors such as smiling and making eye contact was positively related to perceived similarity. This is in contrast to the non-significant relationship between non-verbal behavior and P-J fit. Thus, it appears that applicants who smile and make extensive eye contact are more likely to influence the interviewer to see them as similar and perhaps more likable (Byrne, 1971) than to persuade them that they are qualified to do the job. Because non-verbal behavior is physically expressive, additional research might be conducted on its interaction with other visual cues associated with interviewer judgments, such as applicant attractiveness. Our results also supported a positive relationship between GPA and perceived similarity, suggesting that academic success may influence interviewers' affective reactions to applicants more than their evaluations of competence.
Unlike the IM tactics of self-promotion and non-verbal behavior, other-focused IM tactics did not predict either type of interviewer evaluation. Neither were they predicted by applicant personality or by prior interview training. The only relationship that was demonstrated with the other-focused IM tactics was the strong negative link between these behaviors and applicant GPA. Although this was not originally included in our model, this negative relationship is noteworthy because it suggests that applicants with lower GPAs make greater use of ingratiation, found in prior research to either not predict or be negatively related to hiring decisions (e.g., Kacmar, et al.; 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). It is possible that applicants with poor GPAs are using these tactics defensively, in order to shift attention away from what they perceive as a weakness in their qualifications. Rather than having the intended consequence, however, these applicants may in fact be worsening their chances. Because other-focused tactics have been determined beneficial in other settings (e.g., performance appraisal meetings, Kacmar & Carlson, 1999), future research on the attributions made by targets of these tactics might shed light on when they are most appropriate and why.

One issue that is important to raise in any study of applicant IM is the long-term implication of such tactics for hiring procedures. We discuss the idea that IM leads to "positive interview outcomes", but this term decidedly reflects the applicants' point of view. This perspective ignores the questions of “for whom is it positive if an applicant is hired on the basis of recruiter – applicant similarity?” and “to what extent should we rely on recruiter judgments, particularly since the P-J fit literature suggests these judgments are biased?” To more fully account for outcome “effectiveness”, future research should consider the various stakeholders involved in these hiring decisions.

Another concern revolves around the decision-making process itself. First, future research should consider the role of (often a single) interviewer(s) when making hiring decisions.
The importance of multiple decision-makers becomes particularly salient as interviewers consider applicants' fit to the organizational culture, in addition to their likely performance in a specific job (Cable & Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000). Second, Howard and Ferris (1996) reveal interviewer training made interviewers less susceptible to influence tactics from applicants. This underscores the need for additional research on the influence of recruiter characteristics on these decisions. Future research should explore the decision-making process more fully, investigating the effect of IM from various perspectives, using multiple evaluators, while considering sources of bias and the effects of various types of training on this process.

As with any study, this investigation has limitations and strengths. First, because the interviews were practice sessions (i.e., mock interviews), rather than for a fulltime position, the generalizability of our results to real hiring contexts is not known. Applicants were not applying for actual positions, and thus could not prepare for the interview as they might normally, through activities such as reviewing the company's web site or attending an information session. This meant that we were unable to assess the affects of IM on interviewers' perceptions of person-organization fit, another predictor of hiring decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000). However, applicants expressed that they were highly motivated in order to get useful feedback on their interviewing skills, and to impress the interviewers who might have the authority to hire for real positions (two job offers were in fact extended and accepted as a result of these interviews). Additionally, the internal validity of the study was strengthened by the use of real interviewers, with an average of 12 years recruiting experience, and "live" applicants, rather than "paper" or "video" people that have been used in many prior studies of IM.

Measures for this investigation were collected at one point in time, but from two distinct sources. Applicants assessed their use of IM immediately following their interviews because Stevens and Kristof (1995) have shown these reports to be accurate. Interviewers also completed
Applicant Impression Management

their evaluations of the applicants immediately following the interview, so that impressions were still fresh in their minds. Because data was collected from two distinct sources, the path coefficients estimated between IM tactic use and interviewer perceptions provide a stringent test of the true relationships. However, the relationships between applicant personality and IM tactic use may have been inflated by common method bias. Self-report measures of both personality and impression management were used because they have been reported as less biased by reputation than are others' assessments (Hogan, 1991; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Although the use of cross-sectional, self-report data may have overestimated the relationships between personality and IM use, it is unlikely to have produced the specific pattern of results that was found (i.e., the significant relationship of self-promotion only with extraversion and non-verbal behavior only with agreeableness).

We introduced this study by emphasizing the high financial costs and time commitments to prepare for conducting high-quality interviews. Job seekers are advised to take heed of our findings and utilize interview training (provided by either career centers, books, or help-groups) to capitalize on their strengths. One implication of our results is that training applicants on how to self-promote themselves as a good fit with the available job appears to be beneficial to applicants. Although extraverted applicants may be more at ease with such tactics of self-promotion, training may increase the likelihood of even timid individuals using self-promotion effectively. Applicants should also be aware that non-verbal behavior may make interviewers see them as more similar and like them more, but is unlikely to have a large pay-off in terms of increasing their perceived qualifications. Moreover, we strongly caution applicants to limit their use of other-focused IM tactics during interviews, despite advice to the contrary frequently provided in the popular press (e.g., Lyden & Chaney, 1997). Our results suggest that applicants will be better served by focusing their energies on promoting their
strengths, than on trying to distract the interviewer with compliments or non-job related conversations. This advice is particularly important for applicants with low GPAs, who may have a natural proclivity to use these less effective tactics. Finally, we encourage interviewers to draw out introverted applicants who might have difficulty talking about their past accomplishments. If they do not, it is likely that highly qualified individuals may be passed over, for those who are simply more assertive self-promoters.

Future research in this area should continue to develop causal models that seek to explain relationships between antecedents and consequences of the use of IM tactics. To fully realize the value of such models, longitudinal designs are recommended. One perspective would be that the use of IM to “beat” the interview would result in a reduced relationship between interview and on-the-job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1996). An opposing viewpoint would suggest that any “distortion” that results from IM would actually increase the relationship between the interview evaluation and later job performance. This might occur because IM not only consists of a desire to make a good impression, but also the ability to create it. Taken together, this is characteristic of competence, which itself is related to job success. To fully realize the value of such models, researchers must also further clarify the dimensional structure of IM tactics in order to explore the consequences of various combinations of strategies. In addition, it would be useful to distinguish between the desire to create a good impression and the ability to actually do so. Such research would necessitate comparing perceptions of IM use from applicants and recruiters, emphasize longitudinal designs, in which the long-term performance consequences of IM use may be studied. One perspective would be that the use of IM to “beat” the interview would result in a reduced relationship between interview and on-the-job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1996). An opposing viewpoint would suggest that any “distortion” that results from IM would actually increase the relationship between the interview...
evaluation and later job performance. This might occur because IM not only consists of a desire
to make a good impression, but also the ability to create it. Taken together, this may reflect
competence, which itself is related to job success. Also, as with the approach taken in the present
study, future investigations should further clarify the dimensional structure of IM tactics to
explore how various tactics work in combination. In addition, it may be useful to distinguish
between the desire to create a good impression and the ability to actually do so. Such research
would necessitate collecting perceptions of IM use from both applicants and recruiters. Finally,
future research should consider moving beyond a focus on recruiter perceptions and hiring
decisions, and begin to examine the effect of these processes on job performance.

In conclusion, our results support previous research demonstrating the importance of self-
focused IM use by job applicants. It is clear that IM has an impact on interviewer perceptions,
which in turn, are likely to affect hiring decisions. Additionally, these results provide
compelling evidence of stable applicant traits that predict IM use. Building on these findings,
future research will strive to enhance our understanding of the antecedents and consequences of
applicant impression management on interview decisions, and provide a clearer picture of their
effects on the decision process.
REFERENCES


DeLacy, J.E., & Kacmar, K.M. 1995


**TABLE 1**

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Interview Training</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>38.55</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>46.25</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Self-promotion IM</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>(.77)</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Other-focused IM</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>(.54)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Non-verbal IM</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>(.64)</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Perceived Similarity</td>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>P-J Fit</td>
<td>30.40</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a (N=72). Scale reliabilities are reported on the diagonal. Correlations below the diagonal have been corrected for attenuation based on scale reliabilities. Raw correlations are reported above the diagonal.

*p<.05
FIGURE 1

Proposed Causal Model of Applicant Characteristics, Impression Management Tactics, and Recruiter Perceptions

Applicant Characteristics
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Prior Interview Training
- GPA

Applicant IM Tactics
- Self-Promotion
- Non-Verbal Behavior
- Other-Focused IM

Recruiter Perceptions
- PJ Fit
- Applicant-Recruiter Similarity
FIGURE 2
Revised Causal Model of Applicant Characteristics, Impression Management Tactics, and Recruiter Perceptions

* p<.05