Managing and Creating an Image in the Interview: The Role of Interviewee Initial Impressions

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In employment interviews, individuals use impression management tactics to present themselves as suitable candidates to interviewers. However, not all impression management tactics, or the interviewees who employ them, are effective at positively influencing interview scores. Results of this study indicate that the relationship between impression management tactic usage and interview success is contingent on the type of tactic employed. Specifically, self-promotion was found to have a positive relationship (r = .20) and slight (r = -.11) and extensive (r = -.19) image creation were found to have negative relationships with end-of-interview scores. Further, the relationships between these 3 impression management tactics were moderated by interviewees’ initial impressions of the interview (ΔR² ranged from .04 to .10). Interviewees who perceived they were seen as less suitable during rapport building were more effective when using any of the 3 impression management tactics.

Keywords: employment interviews, self-presentation, first impressions, interdependence theory, rapport building

In the employment interview, interviewees are motivated to portray a suitable image in an effort to maximize their chances of receiving a job offer (Cable & Judge, 1997; Levashina & Campion, 2006). Given the overwhelming reliance on the interview in employee selection (Schmidt & Rader, 1999), it is not surprising that researchers have spent nearly a century investigating how and why some individuals perform better in the interview than others. One resulting literature stream has shown that individuals attempt to project an image of a suitable job candidate by using self-presentation tactics, including physical appearance, verbal or nonverbal behaviors, and impression management, and that doing so positively influences interview scores (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009). In this article, we focus on a set of self-presentation tactics that has received a host of recent research attention, impression management (IM) tactics (Macan, 2009), to enhance our understanding of this topic.

IM tactics are attempts by interviewees to create, alter, protect, or maintain a desired image during the interview (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008). Research has shown that the use of IM tactics is extremely common in the interview, with empirical results suggesting that all, or nearly all, interviewees use one or more IM tactics during interviews (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Yet, organizational scholars have begun to express concerns that not all IM tactics have their intended result, a positive influence on interview outcomes (Levashina & Campion, 2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). For instance, a number of studies have found that interviewees’ use of certain IM tactics does not always convey a desirable image and may result in nonsignificant or even negative evaluations from interviewers (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Howard & Ferris, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002). A recent meta-analysis further underscored support for this idea, where a substantial amount of variance (84%) between IM and interview scores remained after accounting for sampling and measurement error (Barrick et al., 2009), indicating contingency variables to the IM–interview outcome relationship may exist.

Yet, little research has examined conditions under which different tactics are likely to be associated with higher or lower interview scores (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Thus, one is left with the question of why some IM tactics, and the interviewees who use them, are more effective than others at positively influencing interviewers during employment interviews. To address this issue, we draw on interdependence theory (Barrick et al., 2009; Kelley et al., 2002; Rusult & Van Lange, 2003), which describes interpersonal exchanges in terms of both individuals’ motives and goals as well as elements of the situation (Rusult & Van Lange, 2003) to explain why interviewees’ ability to positively influence interviewers depends on the type of IM tactic used and interviewees’ initial impressions (i.e., how suitable interviewees believed they appeared to interviewers) during the rapport-building phase of the interview.

In 1989, Gilmore and Ferris noted the need to investigate the influence of deceptive IM behaviors in interviews, but only recently have researchers begun examining the use of explicitly deceptive IM tactics in the interview (Levashina & Campion, 2006). Yet, organizational scholars have begun to express concerns that not all IM tactics have their intended result, a positive influence on interview outcomes (Levashina & Campion, 2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). For instance, a number of studies have found that interviewees’ use of certain IM tactics does not always convey a desirable image and may result in nonsignificant or even negative evaluations from interviewers (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Howard & Ferris, 1996; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002). A recent meta-analysis further underscored support for this idea, where a substantial amount of variance (84%) between IM and interview scores remained after accounting for sampling and measurement error (Barrick et al., 2009), indicating contingency variables to the IM–interview outcome relationship may exist.

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2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). A key contribution of this study is that we respond to the call for further examination of this long-neglected topic by including both truthful and deceptive types of IM tactics. Although employment interview research has long skirted the issue, interviewees can, and do, employ IM tactics that are intentionally deceptive in an attempt to present themselves in the most favorable light possible. Although lying is common in everyday life (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996), studies show that creating or maintaining a deliberately false impression requires considerable effort and attention (Feldman, Forrest, & Happ, 2002; Leary, 1995). On the basis of the response quality and difficulty associated with effectively deceiving others, we propose that interviewees who rely on more deceptive IM tactics may actually reduce their chances of interview success (Levashina & Campion, 2007).

The second contribution of this study is providing insight on how interviewees’ initial impressions in the interview influence the relationships between IM tactic usage and interview scores. Specifically, we move beyond existing research that focuses on frequency of tactic usage alone (Macan, 2009) and examine potentially more meaningful factors that are expected to influence interviewees’ motivation and effort toward managing an image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). We propose that interviewees who perceive they did not project a suitable image to the interviewer during the early rapport-building phase of the interview will concentrate their attention and place greater effort on the effective use of IM tactics during the formally scored portion of the interview. This enhanced effort and concentration is expected to influence the relationship between IM tactics and interviewer scores. Together, our study investigates elements of the interview, a dynamic social process used by most organizations, that potentially undermine its effectiveness to select future employees.

**IM and Interview Scores: Effects of Managing and Creating an Image**

Extant research in social psychology indicates that in virtually all social interactions, individuals will attempt to influence their exchange partner via some form of self-presentation tactic (Levy, Collins, & Nail, 1998). Whether it is to be seen as a friendly tenant when making small talk with a landlord or as a qualified candidate during an interview with a potential employer, people consistently strive to elicit favorable reactions, or perceptions, from their exchange partners (Goffman, 1959). Ultimately, the influencer’s goal is to maximize the likelihood of benefits or minimize the likelihood of negative consequences that result from the social interaction (Ferris et al., 2002). The pervasiveness of influence attempts across all social situations has sparked the interests of interview researchers, as the interview is a dyadic relationship between two strangers engaged in a “high-stakes” social interaction (Posthuma, Morgeson, & Campion, 2002). Moreover, interdependence theory, discussed below, has highlighted a number of situational elements inherent in the selection interview that also encourage individuals to rely on influence or self-presentation attempts to maximize the likelihood of a desired outcome. So although both researchers and practitioners have investigated the potential for applicants to distort or fabricate responses on various pen-and-paper selection tools (e.g., personality assessments; Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007), concern over self-presentation during the interview is magnified given the social nature and inherent pressure to shape one’s image in this high-stakes setting.

Interdependence theory explains how the structure of interpersonal situations, along with individuals’ motives and goals, increases reliance on self-presentation behaviors in such situations (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). As the name suggests, interdependence theory posits that one of the key elements of any interaction is the level of dependence, or the extent to which an individual’s outcome attainment is influenced by another’s actions (Kelley et al., 2002; Van Lange, 2000). Research clearly shows that when one exchange partner is more vulnerable or dependent on another for an outcome, the vulnerable individual is more likely to strive to generate favorable evaluations by managing the image projected to the partner (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Implicit in the use of interviews to make personnel decisions, job offers are heavily contingent on interview performance, thereby creating a situation in which interviewees are largely reliant and dependent on interviewers’ decisions (Barrick et al., 2009). Second, interdependence theory indicates that in situations where exchange partners have conflicting or mixed motives (e.g., interviewee to get a job offer; interviewer to get accurate information about interviewee qualifications), there is a dramatic increase in the use of self-presentation tactics (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Fiske, 1993; Van Lange, 2000).

Finally, interactions with unfamiliar partners, or “strangers,” are often characterized by a paucity of information that consequently increases the reliance on self-presentation behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). The resulting effect of information uncertainty is particularly relevant to interviews, as interviewers and interviewees are likely to be complete strangers, yet interviewers are required to evaluate the information given by the interviewees using standardized questioning and scoring (Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994). Because little or no prior behavioral observations exist on which the interviewer can base this evaluation, interviewees may be enticed to engage in behaviors that are expected to influence the interviewers’ perceptions that they are desirable, competent, and suitable for the job. Not surprisingly, multiple empirical studies confirm the tenets of interdependence theory, as the percentage of interviewees who engage in one type of self-presentation tactic, IM, in the interview is quite high (e.g., 97.5%, Ellis et al., 2002; 99.5%, 98.8%, 93.4%, Levashina & Campion, 2007; 100%, Stevens & Kristof, 1995).

As previously noted, we elected to focus on IM tactics in this study to extend the development of this burgeoning area of interview research (Posthuma et al., 2002). Although Macan (2009) also acknowledged this recent rise in popularity for IM research, she also highlighted the relatively sparse attempts that have been made to organize the specific IM tactics into a parsimonious yet meaningful taxonomy. In an effort to elucidate this literature, Levashina and Campion (2007) developed a dichotomous typology we adopt in this study to classify all IM tactics: managing an image and creating an image.

Self-promotion is one commonly studied IM behavior and is an example of managing an image. Interviewees use self-promotion behaviors to positively describe their job-relevant abilities, accomplishments, and experiences in an attempt to favorably influence interviewer perceptions of their competence or suitability for the job (Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). In
contrast with the more deceptive tactics described later, self-promotion is used by interviewees to highlight their actual (already possessed) attributes, motivation, and qualifications for the job (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Given the definitions provided by past research, self-promotional statements are not viewed as intentionally deceptive and are generally seen as honest attempts to manage positive information (Bolino et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2007; Levashina & Campion, 2006). Specific behaviors include taking responsibility for positive experiences and positively describing qualities and abilities the interviewee possesses (Ellis et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Thus, these tactics are used to highlight or burnish one’s actual attributes and job-related credentials and are not disingenuous.

In contrast, two other IM tactics used in this study, slight image creation and extensive image creation, consist of statements that involve intentional misrepresentation and outright fabrication to influence and alter interviewers’ perception of interviewees’ suitability and are examples of creating an image (Levashina & Campion, 2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Slight image creation involves distorting prior experiences, tailoring answers to emphasize what the interviewer is looking for, and intentionally enhancing the perception of fit with the organization (Levashina & Campion, 2007). For instance, interviewees using slight image creation deviate from the truth by slightly altering responses based on what they perceive the interviewer is looking for or had previously conveyed through earlier comments or reactions. Extensive image creation occurs in the interview when interviewees purposefully fabricate responses to emphasize desirable characteristics (or minimize undesirable characteristics) and foster a false impression (DePaulo et al., 1996; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Examples of extensive image creation include intentionally constructing stories about nonexistent experiences, inventing accomplishments that did not occur, and borrowing other people’s work experiences. Simply put, these IM tactics involve interviewees attempting to create or take credit for attributes that they do not actually possess. However, these tactics differ by degree of self-construction (Baumeister, 1982, 1989), as slight image creation is a milder tactic, with some elements of truth about oneself, compared with the totally cooked-up image produced by extensive image creation.

A recent meta-analysis showed substantial evidence that self-promotion, or managing an image, is positively related to interview scores (Barrick et al., 2009). However, this meta-analysis did not examine the potential impact of deceptive IM tactics in the interview. Thus, one purpose of this study was to explore whether intentional misrepresentation, or creating an image, actually enables interviewees to obtain higher scores from the interviewer, as does the use of self-promotion tactics.

Extant research on social interactions suggests it is more difficult to distort or invent a work experience, particularly in a face-to-face social encounter, than to simply highlight one’s attributes through self-promotion (DePaulo, 1992). To effectively deceive, an interviewee must concoct a story that conveys the answer the interviewee thinks the interviewer wants to hear and simultaneously avoid contradicting past or future answers. Additionally, interviewees must also deceive in a way that controls their own basic emotions and other verbal or nonverbal behaviors (e.g., facial tics, tone of voice, etc.) that might otherwise “give them away” (Zuckerman, Larrance, Spiegel, & Klorman, 1981). Controlling these emotions and behaviors, however, requires considerable effort and concentration. As such, a qualitative review of social psychology research shows deceptive responders generally give shorter, less detailed, more negative, and less logically structured responses compared with those providing truthful responses (DePaulo et al., 2003). In line with these findings, we expect attempts at image creation to be difficult and taxing, resulting in lower quality responses compared with honest answers given by interviewees.

Related to the arguments above, a comprehensive review of social psychology literature demonstrates that people are most likely to succeed at projecting a desired image when that image is closer to their true selves (DePaulo, 1992). By definition, managing an image with self-promotion tactics involves highlighting one’s authentic qualities, or true self, whereas creating an image involves fabricating one’s qualities. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Self-promotion tactics during the interview will be positively related to interview scores.

Hypothesis 1b: Image creation tactics, particularly extensive image creation during the interview, will be negatively related to interview scores.

Although Barrick et al. (2009) found that the relationship between self-promotion and interview performance is positive, in general, this was not true across all situations for all the IM tactics they studied. Further, sampling error and measurement error accounted for only 33% of the variance in correlations across studies looking at the self-promotion–interview performance relationship and 16% of variance in correlations across all studies investigating IM–interview performance relationships. These results indicate that significant moderators to these relationships exist (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Relying on interdependence theory to describe social exchanges with strangers (Kelley et al., 2002), we identified a possible moderator that may influence the strength of the IM–interview score relationships: interviewee initial impressions.

**IM Behavior and Interview Scores: Role of Initial Impressions**

As stated earlier, “stranger meetings,” such as employment interviews, begin with inadequate information upon which to base expectations of an exchange partner’s behavior, which can give rise to ambiguity and possible misunderstandings during the interaction (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In such settings, initial interactions are used to fill informational voids to facilitate and guide the remainder of the interaction (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). In fact, following these brief interactions, individuals adjust their behavior such that they increase attention and effort in the exchange to maximize likelihood of desired outcomes (Kelley et al., 2002; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In the interview context, initial information is exchanged during rapport building, when interviewers and interviewees meet and greet one another and engage in light conversation (Chapman & Zweig, 2005).
Given the benefits of initial interactions, as well as the social expectations associated with such introductions, it is not surprising that organizations often begin structured interviews with a rapport-building phase, which is expected to elicit more candid and predictive information during the remainder of the interview (Chapman & Zweig, 2005). Stated differently, organizations use rapport building in stranger meetings to put interviewees at ease and improve prediction using scores from high-stakes interactions. However, the rapport-building phase of the structured interview may have effects beyond merely putting interviewees at ease prior to standardized interview questions. Consistent with tenets of interdependence theory, recent research shows that interviewers do in fact form impressions of the interviewee during rapport building (Barrick, Swider, & Stewart, 2010; Chapman & Zweig, 2005) and may even make evaluations about interviewee suitability within 4 minutes of beginning the interview (Judge, Higgins, & Cable, 2000). Although recent studies have outlined how initial interactions influence interviewers, we are unaware of any studies that address how initial interactions influence interviewees’ behavior during the remainder of the interview. Consistent with interdependence theory, our expectation is that initial interactions will be used not only by the interviewer to guide behavior throughout the social exchange (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008), but also by the interviewee. We argue that interviewees form their own initial impressions—defined here as interviewees’ assessment of how suitable they were perceived to be by the interviewer during the rapport-building phase of the interview—and these initial assessments should influence interviewees’ effort and attention levels throughout the remainder of the interview to ensure fulfillment of their interaction goals (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), including to be seen as suitable.

Building on past work, we argue that interviewees’ initial impressions of their rapport-building performance should be critical to IM–interview performance relationships, as interviewees who perceive they did not convey their suitability to interviewers during rapport building should become more motivated to actively manage their impressions (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This notion is consistent with goal-setting research, as individuals are expected to retrospectively assess their performance during discrete performance episodes (i.e., rapport building vs. structured interview questions), evaluate the remaining discrepancy between goals and performance, and adjust effort and persistence to reach desired goals (Donovan & Williams, 2003). Tay, Ang, and Van Dyne (2006) discussed this possibility in the interview when using a preinterview measure of motivation that does not account for the social interaction of a given interview, noting that interviewees who “enhance their effort and persistence in mastering challenges in the employment interview domain [show] appropriate and effective verbal, nonverbal, and image-management behaviors during interviews” (p. 446). We expect this effect to be even more pronounced following initial interactions, when interviewees are expected to fill informational voids and adjust their behavior to maximize the likelihood of desired outcomes (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008).

Yet, previous research has cautioned overlooking effort, or intensity, of IM tactics and focusing simply on frequency of usage (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). Previous work has actually led us to believe that changes in effort will not necessarily lead to the abandonment of automated patterns of IM behavior usage (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). In fact, Pontari and Schlenker (2000) argued that attempts at managing one’s image will not be eliminated following positive initial interactions, but rather the intensity of effort directed to “self-presentation agendas can be placed in the background when the goal is less important or its achievement is less in doubt” [emphasis added] (p. 1093). In the interview, evidence regarding frequency of use uniformly shows more than 90% of interviewees already rely on these influential behaviors (Ellis et al., 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), suggesting motivated interviewees may not dramatically increase their usage of IM tactics relative to less motivated interviewees. Thus, we go beyond frequency ratings and argue that interviewee initial impressions are an important influence on candidate motivation and effort, or intensity, when using IM tactics.

Considering the limited amount of time interviewees have to speak positively about their competencies and abilities during the interview, interviewees who perceive they did not effectively convey their suitability for the job initially will perceive the need to be more effortful in order to trigger interviewer perceptions that they are suitable, relative to those interviewees who did feel they appeared suitable during rapport building (Judge & Cable, 1997; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). This should result in interviewees providing more focused and persuasive descriptions of their positive attributes (Nienhuis, Manstead, & Spears, 2001), or self-promotion, during the structured portion of the interview. In fact, previous research has shown students who did not believe they would receive multiple job offers (i.e., believed they were seen as less suitable) were more persuasive and provided more support for their claims during an on-campus interview (Stevens, 1997). Conversely, when interviewees believed they were likely to receive multiple job offers while interviewing on campus, they were not as intense or motivated when managing their image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Stevens, 1997). Therefore, we expect that when interviewees perceive they were seen as less suitable early in the interview, they will put forth more effort and be more persuasive when engaging in self-promotion during the remainder of the interview. As such, we expect the positive relationship between self-promotion and interview scores to be stronger when interviewee initial impressions are lower. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Interviewees’ initial impressions will moderate the relationship between self-promotion and interview scores such that the positive relationship will be stronger when interviewees’ initial impressions are lower.

To be effective, both slight and extensive image creation require the interviewee to actively monitor and modify responses during the exchange in such a way that the projected image consistently fits with interviewer expectancies (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciaccioco, 2005). However, slight and extensive image creation attempts that do not conform to interviewers’ ideal candidate, or their “right type” (Cable & Judge, 1997), may result in interviewers perceiving that interviewees lack the requisite competencies and reducing their interview scores. We expect interviewees who perceive that the interviewer views them as less suitable for the job at the end of rapport building will be more effective when using both image creation tactics, as these interviewees are ex-
pected to be more purposeful and attentive in their search for environmental cues that they can use to manufacture their impression (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Previous research has shown that individuals who have a greater desire to impression manage, such as interviewees who feel that they did not perform well and were seen as less suitable to interviewers during rapport building, are more likely to assimilate feedback cues into successful response strategies, become more aroused and persuasive, display increased creativity, and conceal missing attributes when attempting to create an image (Feldman et al., 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2007; Nienhuis et al., 2001). As we argued earlier, image creation tactics also require interviewees to expend considerable effort and concentration to create an image consistent with previous responses (Colwell, Hiscock, & Memon, 2002; Vrij, Edward, Roberts, & Bull, 2000). Interviewees with lower initial impressions should be better able to recall elements and information about the interaction (Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001; Galinsky, Mussweiler, & Medvec, 2002), such as previous responses, resulting in more congruent image creation attempts. Thus, interviewees who do not believe they were seen as suitable during rapport building are likely to exert more effort later in the interview, resulting in more complete, clear, consistent, and direct responses. Conversely, interviewees who believe they have been seen as suitable by the interviewer during rapport building should be less effective in using deceptive image creation tactics during the remainder of the interview. On the basis of this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: Interviewees’ initial impressions will moderate the relationship between slight image creation and interview scores such that the negative relationship will be stronger when interviewees’ initial impressions are higher.

Hypothesis 3b: Interviewees’ initial impressions will moderate the relationship between extensive image creation and interview scores such that the negative relationship will be stronger when interviewees’ initial impressions are higher.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants in this study were undergraduate students (N = 112) enrolled in a program for professional accountants. Fifty-seven percent of the participants were women and 43% were men; 84% were Caucasian, 10% were Asian, 2% were Hispanic, 2% were African American, and 2% were other. The mean age was 20.5 years (SD = 0.69). As part of their enrollment in the program, students participated in a mock interview to prepare for upcoming interviews with actual accounting firms to be held 2 weeks following the mock interviews.

The structured interview used in this study was developed in accordance with recent research (Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Chapman & Zweig, 2005) and consisted of a short, 2- to 3-minute rapport-building phase, followed by a structured interview that lasted approximately 30 minutes. The brief rapport-building phase focused on non-job-relevant questions, with sample questions including “Where are you from?” and “Do you do any traveling?” The lengthy structured interview focused on constructs employers consider essential to the job of an accountant, namely, interpersonal skills, problem solving, and work motivation. The structured interview consisted of six behavioral and six situational questions.

Interviewees were instructed to treat the mock interview as they would an actual job interview. Further, interviewees were encouraged to prepare and dress as they would for upcoming interviews with accounting firms. Following the interview, interviewees were asked to report how seriously they took the mock interview using a three-item measure. Interviewees reported a mean score of 4.52 (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), indicating that they did treat the mock interview as they would an actual job interview.

Forty graduate students with concentrations in human resource management who were unfamiliar with the interviewees served as interviewers in this study. Seventy-two percent of the interviewees were women and 28% were men; 60% of interviewers had prior experience conducting interviews. In total, interviewers averaged 11.9 months (SD = 26.2) of practical interview experience. It is important to note that analyses indicated that there were no rating differences between interviewers with experience and without experience. Before conducting any interviews, interviewers participated in a 2-hour training session that included a discussion of an accountant’s job description, structured interview questions, behaviorally anchored rating scales, rapport building, and current research on the structured interview (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Posthuma et al., 2002). Interviewers were instructed to treat the mock interview as if they were conducting an actual interview. Following the interview, interviewers were asked to report how seriously they took the mock interview using a three-item measure. Interviewers reported a mean score of 4.81 (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), indicating that they did treat the mock interview seriously. Each interviewer conducted at least two, but no more than four, interviews (M = 2.83).

Measures

Interviewee initial impression. At the end of the rapport building but prior to asking the structured interview questions, interviewees completed a measure that instructed them to assess how suitable they appeared to the interviewer based solely on the information exchanged during rapport building. The measure consisted of four items (α = .77) that have been previously used to assess interviewee suitability at the end of the interview (Cable & Judge, 1997; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Items were “I appear to be very qualified,” “On the basis of all the information I’ve given, I would expect to receive a job offer,” “On the basis of my qualifications, I feel I would be a good hire for this job,” and “On the basis of all the information I’ve given so far, I feel my overall qualifications are suitable for this job.” All questions were rated on a 5-point scale (response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

Self-promotion. Upon completing the structured interview, interviewees indicated their agreement with five items (α = .70) describing self-promotion tactics (Higgins & Judge, 2004). All questions were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Representative scale items include “I described my skills and abilities in an attractive
way” and “I took charge during the interview to get my main points across.”

Slight image creation. Slight image creation was measured after the structured interview using five items (α = .87) from Levashina and Campion (2007). Interviewees were asked to report the extent to which they agreed with each statement using 5-point scales (response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Sample items include “During the interview, I distorted my answers to emphasize what the interviewer was looking for” and “During the interview, I distorted my answers based on the comments or reactions of the interviewer.”

Extensive image creation. Six items from Levashina and Campion (2007) were used to measure extensive image creation. Following the structured interview, interviewees reported their agreement with six items (α = .79) using a 5-point scale (response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Representative items included “I made up stories about my work experiences that were well developed and logical” and “I used other people’s experiences to create answers when I did not have good experiences of my own.”

Interview scores. Structured interview questions and behaviorally anchored ratings scales were developed by three subject matter experts and assessed three constructs: interpersonal skills, problem solving, and work motivation. Subject matter experts agreed that each question was relevant to the job of an accountant and allowed the interviewer to evaluate interviewee responses relative to the corresponding construct. A total of 12 questions were developed. Six questions assessed interpersonal skills, four questions assessed problem solving, and two questions assessed work motivation. A sample interview question for the interpersonal skills construct was “How would you effectively communicate to others something that was difficult or complex?” A representative problem-solving item was “Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision and how you made that decision.” Finally, work motivation was indicated by items similar to “Give me an example of a time you went above and beyond to get the job done.” Each interviewee response was evaluated using a behaviorally anchored rating scale ranging from poor (1) to superior (5). As an example, the corresponding behaviorally anchored rating scale used by the interviewers for the sample interview question for the interpersonal skills construct was as follows: 1 = poor—failed to address the topic; did not provide an answer; 2 = below average—failed to consider audience skill level, needs, or perspective; used complex terminology or jargon without appropriate explanation; 3 = average—expressed complex thoughts clearly and simply; listened and responded clearly to questions; 4 = above average—used examples to clarify ideas; emphasized key points; checked for understanding; summarized key points of any discussion; used appropriate nonverbal techniques; and 5 = superior—adapted communication to diverse audience; observed nonverbal cues from audience and responded appropriately; anticipated audience reaction and prepared responses. Interview scores were calculated using the mean score of the 12 response ratings provided by the interviewer (α = .84).

Control variables. Because characteristics of both the dyadic interaction and interviewees themselves have been implicated as potentially important influences on interviewee interview behavior and subsequent interview scores, we included a number of controls in our analyses.

We attempted to account for the dyadic nature of the employment interview by controlling for early impressions held by the interviewer and the amount of time each dyad spent in the non-job-relevant rapport-building phase. To measure interviewer initial evaluations after rapport building, we used the same four items (α = .93) we adapted for our interviewee initial impression measure (Cable & Judge, 1997; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Example items include “This applicant appears to be very qualified” and “On the basis of all the information I’ve received, I would extend this applicant a job offer.” All questions were rated on a 5-point scale (response options ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). To measure rapport-building time, two trained independent raters viewed video copies of each interview and objectively recorded the amount of time elapsed between the start and end of rapport building. Correlational and agreement statistics were high (r = .99; intraclass correlation coefficient [ICC]1 = .99, ICC2 = .99); thus, we used an average of the two times. Consistent with previous research (Chapman & Zweig, 2005), interviewers and interviewees spent an average of 2 minutes and 20 seconds in the rapport-building phase (SD = 55 seconds). Thus, by controlling for these two variables, we limited the extent to which the effects of interviewee initial impressions and IM tactics on interview scores are attributable to interviewer behavior during rapport building.

Interviewee’s interview training, experience, and self-efficacy as well as qualifications may influence interviewee interview behaviors (Barrick et al., 2010; Schmitt, 1976; Tay et al., 2006), including usage of IM tactics as well as initial impressions. For instance, interviewees with more interview training, experience, self-efficacy, and better qualifications may be more likely to perceive they came across as suitable during rapport building. To assess interview training, we used the item “the amount of formal training you have received regarding interviewing as a candidate,” with response options ranging from none (1) to a great deal (5). For interview experience, interviewees were asked to report the number of interviews they had had in the last year. We measured interview self-efficacy using five items (α = .82) adapted from Tay et al. (2006). Items asked interviewees to respond with their confidence in their ability to “persuade the interviewer to hire you for a job” and “convince the interviewer you are a good fit for the job.” All questions were rated on a 5-point scale (response options ranged from 1 = not at all confident to 5 = highly confident). Although candidates were aware that resumes and other information regarding their qualifications (i.e., coursework completed) were withheld from interviewers, in an effort to avoid biasing interviewer ratings (Dougherty, Turban, & Callender, 1994), resumes were objectively and independently coded by two trained raters to assess candidate qualifications. In accordance with previous studies that have objectively coded resumes (McDonald & Hakel, 1985; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003), resumes were coded for work experience (i.e., number of companies and total months worked/interned), extracurricular activities, leadership positions held, and academic honors. Agreement between raters was 89%, with disputes being resolved through discussion between the two raters and the fourth author. By controlling for these interviewee-based factors, we are confident that the influence of interviewee initial impressions was based on interviewees’ perceptions of how suitable they appeared to interviewers during the initial few minutes of the interaction rather than overall
qualifications, training, experience, and interview self-efficacy. Finally, interviewee gender was included as a control variable to ensure that our findings explained variance above and beyond any gender effects.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and zero-order correlations among the variables used in this study. Resume scores, interview training, interview experience, gender, time spent rapport building, and interview self-efficacy were not significantly related to interview performance \( (r = .37, 95\% \text{ CI } [.20, .54], p < .01) \), suggesting that interviewer initial evaluations may influence subsequent interview scores. Consistent with prior research (i.e., Barrick et al., 2010; Springbett, 1958), interviewers’ initial evaluations of interviewee suitability were significantly and positively related to interview performance \( (r = .37, 95\% \text{ CI } [.20, .54], p < .01) \), suggesting that interviewer initial evaluations may influence subsequent interview scores. However, interviewee initial impressions were not significantly related to either interviewer initial evaluations \( (r = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.12, .25], ns) \) or interview scores \( (r = -.12, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.31, .07], ns) \). It is also important to note that interviewers’ interview self-efficacy and initial impressions were only modestly correlated \( (r = .24, 95\% \text{ CI } [.06, .41], p < .05) \), indicating that interviewees’ initial impressions of the interview appear to be primarily influenced by the first few minutes of the interview rather than interview self-efficacy. In line with our theoretical expectations, interviewee reports of self-promotion were significantly and positively related to interview scores \( (r = .38, 95\% \text{ CI } [.20, .54], p < .01) \), and interviewee reports of extensive image creation were significantly and negatively related to interview scores \( (r = -.19, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.38, -.01], p < .05) \). Although the relationship between slight image creation and interview scores was in the expected direction, the relationship was not significant.

Next, all three IM behaviors were simultaneously entered into a regression model to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, as shown in Table 2. Hypothesis 1a argued that interviewee self-promotion would be positively related to interview performance. As expected, self-promotion positively impacted interview scores at a significant level \( (\beta = .28, 95\% \text{ CI } [.08, .48], p < .01) \). Hypothesis 1b proposed that interviewee image creation would be negatively related to interview scores. As hypothesized, both slight and extensive image creation negatively related to interview scores, although neither was a statistically significant predictor. Thus, Hypothesis 1b was not supported after accounting for all of our control variables and self-promotion.

After examining the main effects of each IM behavior on interview scores, we considered whether these relationships differed on the basis of interviewee initial impressions. All variables included in the hypothesized interactions were centered to remove nonessential multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2002). Prior to testing our hypotheses, we followed the recommendations of Aguinis (2004) for testing multiple two-way interactions. First, we assessed whether the change from the model with first-order effects (control and main effects) to the model including all two-way interactions was statistically significant. Results indicated that moving from the model including the lower order effects (control and main effects only) to the model including the higher order effects (added all two-way interactions) produced a significant increase in \( R^2 \) (\( \Delta R^2 = .12, p < .01 \)). After determining that our omnibus test was statistically significant, we examined each two-way interaction independently to formally test our hypotheses in accordance with the procedures recommended by Aguinis.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that the relationship between self-promotion and interview scores would be positive and stronger for interviewees with lower (vs. higher) initial impressions of their performance during the rapport-building phase of the interview. To test this hypothesis, we first entered the control variables (initial evaluations of interviewee suitability and rapport-building time as well as interviewee resume scores, interview training, interview experience, interview self-efficacy, and gender) to ensure our empirical results would persist after accounting for these alternative explanations. Then, we entered the main effects of interviewee initial impressions, self-promotion, slight image creation, and extensive image creation. In the final step, we entered the interaction between interviewee reports of initial impressions and self-promotion.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Resume</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Interview training</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Interview experience</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.19**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Initial evaluations (interviewer rating)</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Rapport-building time (seconds)</td>
<td>140.13</td>
<td>55.43</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Interview self-efficacy</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Interviewee initial impression</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Self-promotion</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Slight image creation</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Extensive image creation</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Interview score</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 112 \). Interview self-efficacy, initial impression, self-promotion, slight image creation, and extensive image creation were rated by interviewees. Interview scores and initial evaluations were provided by interviewers.

1p \( \leq .10 \). 2p \( \leq .05 \). 3p \( \leq .01 \).
The results in Table 2 indicate that the interaction of interviewee initial impressions and self-promotion was a significant predictor ($\beta = –.30$, 95% CI [–.42, –.13], $p < .01$) and explained additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = .09$, $p < .01$) in interview scores, supporting Hypothesis 2. To gain a better understanding of this relationship, we plotted the interaction in Figure 1. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, interviewees with lower initial impressions who also self-promoted frequently had higher interview scores than did interviewees who perceived they were seen as more suitable by the interviewer during rapport building and self-promoted frequently. We further probed the nature of the interaction between interviewee initial impressions and self-promotion by running a simple slope analysis (Cohen et al., 2002). Supporting Hypothesis 2, for interviewees with lower initial impressions, the relationship between self-promotion and interview scores was strongly positive ($\beta = .61; t = 5.16; p < .01$). This relationship was positive but not significant for interviewees with higher initial impressions ($\beta = .01; t = 0.09; n.s.$).

Hypothesis 3a predicted that interviewee initial impressions would moderate the relationship between slight image creation and interview scores, such that the relationship between slight image creation and interview scores would be more strongly negative for interviewees who had higher initial impressions. Again, the control variables were entered first, followed by the main effects. In the final step the Initial Impression × Slight Image Creation interaction was entered. In support of Hypothesis 3a, Table 2 reports that the Initial Impression × Slight Image Creation interaction term was significant ($\beta = –.33$, 95% CI [–.48, –.16], $p < .01$) and explained additional variance in interview scores ($\Delta R^2 = .10$, $p < .01$). Figure 2 depicts this relationship and indicates that interviewees who had higher initial impressions had lower interview scores when using more slight image creation tactics than did interviewees who had lower initial impressions and used more slight image creation tactics. Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, the simple slope for the relationship between slight image creation and interview scores was negative for interviewees with higher impressions of their performance during rapport building ($\beta = –.50; t = –3.54; p < .01$). However, for interviewees with lower initial impressions, this relationship was nonsignificant ($\beta = .16; t = 1.13; n.s.$).

Hypothesis 3b proposed that the relationship between extensive image creation and interview scores would be negative and stronger for interviewees with higher (vs. lower) initial impressions of their performance during the rapport-building phase of the interview. As with analyses for our previous hypotheses, the control variables were entered first, followed by the main effects, and then the Initial Impression × Extensive Image

![Figure 1. Plot of the two-way interaction between self-promotion and interviewee initial impressions.](image-url)
Creation interaction term was entered. Table 2 indicates that this interaction was a significant predictor of interview scores ($\beta = -.21, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.38, -.03], p < .05$) and explained incremental variance beyond the main effects ($\Delta R^2 = .04, p < .05$). The graph of this relationship appears in Figure 3. Supporting Hypothesis 3b, interviewees who believed they were seen as less suitable initially but frequently used extensive image creation tactics achieved higher interview scores than did those interviewees who perceived themselves as more suitable initially and used extensive image creation tactics frequently during the interview. Results from the simple slope analysis suggest that for interviewees with higher initial impressions, the relationship between extensive image creation and interview scores was significantly negative ($\beta = -.40; t = -2.82; p < .01$). Conversely, for interviewees with lower initial impressions, this relationship was not significant ($\beta = .02; t = 0.14; ns$), thus providing additional support for Hypothesis 3b.

Discussion

People naturally engage in influence tactics during social interactions (Leary, 1995; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). It is not surprising, then, that candidates can and do accentuate, embellish, and intentionally misrepresent their attributes or qualifications during the employment interview (Levashina & Campion, 2007), just as they do on resumes, biographical application blanks, personality tests, and integrity tests (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2008). Although the effect of response distortion has long been studied when candidates take tests or complete inventories (Messick, 1960; Rothe, 1950), only in the past 20 years have researchers rigorously considered the impact of interviewees’ IM attempts on interviewers’ job-relevant assessments (Fletcher, 1990; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kinicki, Lockwood, Hom, & Griffeth, 1990). Application of interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 2002; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) clarifies why the mutually dependent (interviewees depend on the interviewer for job offers; interviewers depend on the interviewee to accurately disclose qualifications), agenda-driven (to get a job offer; to obtain job-relevant qualifications), face-to-face social exchanges between strangers that are interviews provide an opportunity for interviewees to actively manage the image presented to interviewers. This study not only examined the impact that different types of IM behaviors had on the interview scores of highly structured interviews but also considered the moderating influence of interviewees’ initial impressions on these relationships. Consequently, this study considers how and when interviewee IM influences structured interview outcomes.

Levashina and Campion (2007) recently noted that the large body of interview research on IM has rarely studied or reported on the distinction between self-promotion behaviors used to highlight one’s job-related credentials to manage an image (Baumeister, 1982, 1989) and deceptive IM behaviors that are intentional misrepresentations used to create an image. As such, our study fills a void in this area. Our results reveal, consistent with prior research, that self-promotion positively affects interview outcomes ($r = .20$ in this study; observed mean $r = .24$, Barrick et al., 2009). Interviewers expect, even demand, that interviewees describe their past experiences positively when given an experience-based question during the structured interview. Thus, when savvy interviewees “polish” their image and convey they are valuable employees (i.e., self-promotion), they benefit. When interviewees “cross the line” into creating an image through intentional misrepresentation, however, our results suggest that the positive effect may actually disappear, or perhaps even become negative ($rs = -.11$ and -.19, for slight and extensive image creation, respectively).

Although only the most extreme form of image creation, extensive image creation, was significantly negatively related to interview scores, our results show when interviewees intentionally distort their responses to deceive the interviewer, these interviewers often scored interviewees’ responses to questions lower throughout the structured interview. In hindsight, the fact that we did not find a significant negative relationship between slight image creation and interview scores is not completely surprising.
given the support for our moderation hypotheses discussed below. Our results also confirm findings of Levashina and Campion (2007) that the frequency of tactic use decreases as the degree of self-construction (Baumeister, 1982, 1989) increases.1 This is an important finding, as interviewees clearly expect the use of image creation to enhance their prospects in the interview (Levashina & Campion, 2007), even though it may not. Our theoretical perspective and empirical results suggest that the type of IM behavior does matter and that exaggerating in a manner that is inconsistent with one’s true self or actual behavior may adversely affect the interviewee.

The potential for candidates to intentionally distort their image through faking or lying, particularly when their responses cannot be verified, is a frequent criticism leveled against a number of selection procedures. Although it is human nature to present ourselves in a favorable way, it seems highly unlikely that an employer would want to hire a person who improved their standing or rank order in the applicant pool by intentionally deceiving the interviewer or hiring manager (Sackett & Lievens, 2008). The issue of faking is a growing line of inquiry in human resources and social psychology (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996; Levashina & Campion, 2006, 2007) and, hence, one interview researchers must continue to consider. This is, however, a complicated issue and less straightforward than one might hope. Managing one’s image can be quite beneficial to the organization, and in other instances, quite harmful (Hogan et al., 2007). For example, evidence shows that two personality traits that have been shown to predict job performance across jobs, conscientiousness and emotional stability (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2010), also tend to be found in individuals who score high in social desirability (McCrae & Costa, 1983; Mueller-Hanson, Heggieset, & Thornton, 2003; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996). Future research must determine if IM usage, including slight and extensive image creation, during the interview predicts job performance, and if so, under what conditions this relationship is strongest. Perhaps effective IM usage in the interview predicts job performance in jobs that involve higher levels of interpersonal interaction with relative strangers (i.e., sales people) but is detrimental in situations that demand cooperation (i.e., workgroups).

Our second critical contribution lies in introducing differences in interviewee initial impressions, which are expected to influence interviewee IM motivation, as an important moderator of the relationships between the usage of IM tactics and interview scores. All interviewees hold the same primary objective, to be seen by the interviewer as suitable for the job to maximize their chances of receiving a job offer (Cable & Judge, 1997). However, drawing on interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 2002; Rusbulit & Van Lange, 2003), we proposed that interviewees who think they were not seen as very suitable early in the interview will be more effortful and motivated when employing IM tactics than interviewees who perceive they performed well and were seen as suitable during rapport building. This does not mean that interviewees who are under the impression that they presented an image of a suitable interviewee during rapport building will not engage in self-promotion, or even image creation, because previous research has shown that most will (Ellis et al., 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2007). Instead, interviewees with lower initial impressions will be more attentive and effortful when managing the image they are projecting to the interviewer (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Our results, shown in Figure 1, demonstrate that interviewees who felt they were seen as less suitable during the initial phase of the interview were significantly more effective at using self-promotion tactics than interviewees with higher initial impressions of their rapport-building performance, even when both interviewees frequently used the tactics (+1 SD above the mean). Furthermore, interviewees who believed they were seen as suitable early in the interview, yet still reported using image creation tactics more than did the average interviewee, received significantly lower interview scores from interviewers. Conversely, interviewees who believed they were seen as less suitable by interviewers initially in the interview were able to avoid significantly lower interview scores when employing slight image creation and extensive image creation tactics (see Figures 2 and 3). These findings offer meaningful contributions to human resources research investigating the role of motivation in managing or creating an image in the interview (Levashina & Campion, 2006, 2007). This study goes beyond the debate of whether attempts at faking bias predictions or not (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Van Iddekinge, McFarland, & Raymark, 2007) and instead sheds light on who benefits from these IM attempts.

Our focus on interviewees’ initial impressions during the interview extends a currently fledgling, yet rapidly developing, stream of research on the role of rapport building in the interview. Augmented by foundational studies that focused on the relationship between initial information transmitted and interviewer decisions (Anderson, 1960; Springbett, 1958; Tucker & Rowe, 1977), recent studies have begun to examine the influence that interviewer initial evaluations (Barrick et al., 2010), even of the handshake given to the interviewer (Stewart, Darnold, Barrick, & Dustin, 2008), have on end-of-interview decisions. Yet, unlike these studies that have primarily focused on how interviewer behavior and judgment is affected by the first few minutes of the interview, we examine how interviewee behavior is influenced by their initial impressions of rapport-building performance. It is

1 Both the associate editor and a reviewer noted that the inverse relationship between IM tactic usage and degree of self-construction may be a function of socially desirable responding. Although this is something we could not entirely rule out, we feel the likelihood of social desirability driving these results is substantially reduced for two reasons. First, the interviewees in our sample were using the interviews as an opportunity to practice and gain feedback prior to actual job interviews. They were told that their responses were going to be used to generate feedback about their interaction and were not to be treated as an actual job interview. Second, as part of the postinterview feedback, a subset of interviewees reviewed a video copy of their interview a week after the mock interviews and again reported their usage of IM tactics. We calculated the correlations between self-reports of IM tactics collected during the interview and the video self-reports of these same tactics. Correlations were high (and significant) for all three tactics (self-promotion: r = .52; slight image creation: r = .89; extensive image creation: r = .61), suggesting that interviewees were consistent in reporting their use of IM tactics during the interview whether they did so in the strong situation of the interview or on their own time. These results are also consistent with existing research findings (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Thus, we are confident that the lower means being reported for more deceptive tactics are products of actual differences in IM usage rather than depicting bias.
interesting that interviewees’ preinterview confidence to interview effectively (interview self-efficacy) was only modestly related to interviewee initial impressions of rapport building ($r = .24$). That is, even though interviewees may be confident that they will be seen as suitable by interviewers prior to the interview, the first few minutes of the social interaction (i.e., rapport building) may drive interviewees to make a dramatically different assessment of their standing in the interview. This finding, as well as others made in this study, are consistent with interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003) and indicate that similar to interviewers, interviewee attitudes and behaviors during the remainder of the interview (e.g., IM motivation) may be contingent upon the initial interaction with the exchange partner.

This is an especially critical finding when one considers that only non-job-relevant information is exchanged during rapport building (Chapman & Zweig, 2005). It appears from our results that interviewees’ initial impressions based on a non-job-relevant information exchange significantly influence how successfully they are able to apply various IM tactics during job-relevant questions to generate more favorable evaluations. Thus, this fundamental transition between rapport building (non-job-relevant) and structured interview questions (job-relevant) can give interviewees who believe they did well initially a misleading guide to future interview dynamics (Audia, Locke, & Smith, 2000) and undermine their use of IM tactics. One possible way to curb this potential distortion of interviewee behavior would be to eliminate rapport building entirely. However, we feel more research is warranted before such a drastic step is taken, considering rapport building is positively related to interviewer affective reactions (Chapman & Zweig, 2005), and initial impressions of strangers may develop even when rapport building is eliminated (Barrick et al., 2010; Leary, 1995).

The interview is an important social function during the application process, and our focus on IM tactics contributes to this growing line of inquiry in interview research (Barrick et al., 2009; Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Posthuma et al., 2002). To fully understand the value of an employment interview, researchers need to investigate the dynamics that emerge during this social encounter, including those that occur during rapport building. Researchers recognize that factors beyond the level of interview structure and question type influence interview outcomes and, as such, must continue to investigate the processes that define this agenda-driven, social exchange between strangers.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Our study is not without limitations. First, this study was based on mock interviews. Recent reviews of the employment interview discouraged researchers from conducting interview studies in mock settings (Jelf, 1999; Posthuma et al., 2002), as results are not expected to generalize to high-stakes employment interviews. However, no empirical evidence has been presented to support this contention. In fact, a recent meta-analysis showed that the magnitudes of the influence IM tactics have on interviewer scores and job offers were similar (mean $r = .26$ vs. .21 for field and experimental designs, respectively; Barrick et al., 2009) whether the interviewers made actual selection decisions or had reduced accountability (e.g., a mock interviewer quasi-experimental design). These meta-analytic findings provide some evidence that results from high-fidelity mock interviews will generalize to high-stakes employment decisions in actual (field) interviews. Although our results should be interpreted cautiously, we do anticipate they will generalize, as both interviewees and interviewers reported taking the interview seriously, and our interviews were the highest fidelity possible (compared with low-fidelity “paper people” interviews; Gorman, Clover, & Doherty, 1978), and these types of interviews provide a way to explore issues (e.g., lying) that are fundamentally important to know but are difficult to study in actual interviews.

Second, we focused on IM tactics associated with discussing one’s own attributes, but there are other ways through which interviewees may manage their image during the selection process. Physical appearance, verbal and nonverbal behavior, and even the handshake represent other mechanisms through which the interviewee strives to influence the interviewer. It is important to examine whether the moderating effect of interviewees’ initial impressions generalizes to other self-presentation tactics. For instance, initial impressions following rapport building may influence not only the content of interviewee communication but also the communication behaviors (verbal and nonverbal behaviors) themselves. Further, some of the above-mentioned self-presentation tactics (i.e., physical appearance) may influence interviewee initial impressions. Clearly, future research is needed to more fully understand self-presentation in the interview.

Third, although our theoretical framework leads us to conclude that interviewee motivation when using IM tactics is influenced by their initial impressions, we did not explicitly assess interviewee IM motivation during the interview. Future research is needed to empirically establish the relationship between interviewee initial impressions and IM motivation. Furthermore, this relationship should be examined along with other possible predictors of IM motivation such as self-monitoring, desire for the job, or IM self-efficacy (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) to clarify the role of frequency and intensity of IM usage in the interview. Assessing interviewee IM motivation throughout the interview, including before the interview starts, following rapport building, and at the conclusion of the interview, along with usage of various IM tactics, would allow researchers to better understand how interviewee IM motivation is influenced by various individual- and interaction-based variables, including initial impressions.

Finally, two of the IM tactics used in this study, self-promotion and slight image creation, are not completely orthogonal, or independent, in nature. Some of the items used to measure these constructs appear to have at least a small level of conceptual (and statistical) overlap. However, we do not believe this overlap ($r = .45$) to be large enough to call our results into question. Indeed, two constructs capturing the same information would be expected to provide similar predictions for a common dependent variable. However, we found that these constructs predict interview performance in unique, theoretically hypothesized directions. Thus, if substantial overlap were to exist between self-promotion and slight image creation, it would suggest that results for Hypotheses 1a and 1b are conservative in nature. Furthermore, considering the difficulty in detecting interactions, particularly when nonexperimental data are used (McClelland & Judd, 1993), support for the unique moderating relationships in Hypotheses 2 and 3a lends additional support for the distinctiveness of these two constructs.
A related challenge is for future researchers to reconcile the conceptual distinctions between self-promotion, slight image creation, and extensive image creation. In our study, we viewed IM behaviors as residing on a continuum of deception, with self-promotion representing the least “dishonest” of IM tactics, extensive image creation (i.e., lying) representing the most deceptive of behaviors, and slight image creation somewhere between these two poles. Thus, we were intuitively able to make a distinction between self-promotion and extensive image creation (i.e., outright lying) but struggled to find clear delineations between these two and slight image creation. Ultimately, we concluded that the demarcation between self-promotion and slight image creation (and slight image creation and extensive image creation, for that matter) is a somewhat gray area. A seemingly helpful analog to the self-promotion–slight image creation distinction that helped us reach this conclusion is the age-old argument about what distinguishes “white lies” from honesty (and outright lying). In this vein, we argue that although most researchers would agree that meaningfully different constructs exist (i.e., self-promotion/honesty vs. slight image creation/white lies), they may disagree on the demarcation between the two. We encourage future research to examine this issue in greater detail.

Our research offers important implications for interview research and practice. Not all IM tactics are favorable, even for the interviewee. Furthermore, interviewee initial impressions, which are expected to influence their motivation to adjust effort and persistence when using IM tactics, moderated the relationships between these tactics and interview outcomes. Thus, this study indicates that the interpersonal dynamics associated with these tactics are complex and that the field is in need of further elucidation to better understand their influence throughout the interview.

2 Our study draws attention to the fact that various IM scales were developed from different theoretical perspectives and, not surprisingly, were created with different goals in mind. For example, self-promotion (e.g., Higgins & Judge, 2004) scales emerged from the organizational behavior literature and tend to view IM as a negotiating tactic, whereas slight and extensive image creation (i.e., Levashina & Campion, 2007) scales emerged from the selection literature and are more concerned with faking and distorting responses during employment testing. This distinction, in which self-promotion is commonly viewed as an honest skill used to enhance one’s own benefit and image creation as being comparable to lying to alter someone else’s assessment (Levashina & Campion, 2007), highlights the fact that these scales were not designed to be entirely independent from one another, but rather were created to assess different sets of individual intentions and behaviors.

References


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