Man Smart, Woman Smarter? Getting to the Root of Gender Differences in Self-handicapping

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Abstract

Research in self-handicapping has consistently demonstrated a robust yet puzzling gender difference in the use of behavioral self-handicaps. Women not only are less likely to use behavioral self-handicaps when such opportunities present themselves, but are also more punitive in their evaluations of others who utilize these types of handicaps. For years, the literature has considered several possible explanations for these consistent gender differences, with little success. The present work highlights our recent efforts suggesting that the personal value placed on effort, as indexed by the ‘Worker scale’ (McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix, Milner, & Steele, 2008), is an important mediator of these gender differences in both the use of and evaluation of others’ use of behavioral self-handicaps. Discussion centers on the implications of the present results for gaining a better understanding of the motivations and tradeoffs that underlie the use of this self-defeating strategy.

Let us put men and women together
See which one is smarter
Some say men, but I say no
The women got the men like a puppet show
Believe me, it’s the people that say
That the men are leading the women astray
But I say that the women today
Are smarter than the men in every way

‘Man smart, woman smarter’
— By the Grateful Dead, lyrics by Norman Span

Two students, Sam and Linda, have an important exam coming up in their psychology course. Though each student plans to study most of the night for the exam, both are also invited to a party that night which promises to be a lot more fun. What is each student likely to do in this situation? Which of the two students, Sam or Linda, is more likely to opt to go to the party as opposed to staying home and studying? Scenarios such as this one present individuals with the dilemma of maximizing performance or
engaging in self-protective behavior, specifically by self-handicapping. In this paper, we will be discussing the surprisingly powerful role that gender plays in self-handicapping. Moreover, we contend that an exploration of the source of the gender differences in self-handicapping provides key insight into reasons why individuals choose to employ this self-protective strategy.

The Paradox of Self-handicapping

First, we need to review the relevant background to our research question. What do we mean by the term ‘self-handicapping’? Self-handicapping is defined as ‘an individual’s attempt to reduce a threat to esteem by actively seeking or creating inhibitory factors that interfere with performance and thus provide a persuasive causal explanation for failure’ (Arkin & Baumgardner, 1985; 170). By choosing to go to the party instead of studying, the student has a potential excuse for poor performance on the upcoming exam. If the student performs poorly, s/he can blame the failure on the handicap (‘I was too hungover from the party to perform well’) rather than on a lack of ability or intelligence. Conversely, if the student performs well on the test, one must attribute success to his/her exceptional ability, given that s/he was able to overcome the debilitating effects of the handicap to perform well. Thus, self-handicapping affords the student the opportunity to augment attributions of ability in the event of task success as well as to discount attributions to lack of ability in the event of task failure (cf. Kelley, 1973). These attributional benefits are offset by the increased likelihood of task failure caused by the handicap. Thus, self-handicapping represents an exchange of poorer performance for the short-term maintenance of a desired self-image (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Rhodewalt, 2008).

Types of self-handicaps

Since the concept of self-handicapping was introduced by Jones and Berglas (1978), numerous studies have demonstrated that a broad range of behaviors can serve as self-handicaps. The literature (Arkin & Baumgardner, 1985; Leary & Shepperd, 1986) has made a fundamental distinction between two different classes of self-handicaps: (1) behavioral self-handicaps, which refer to active forms of self-sabotaging behavior, such as alcohol or drug use, effort withdrawal, or the selection of debilitating performance conditions; and (2) claimed self-handicaps, which refer to reports of debilitating circumstances, such as illness, undue stress, or prejudice. Hirt, Deppe, and Gordon (1991) argued that these two classes of self-handicaps differ in important ways. Behavioral self-handicaps are more costly actions in that they have been shown to impair subsequent performance and long-term achievement (McCrea & Hirt, 2001; Urdan, 2004; Zuckerman, Kieffer, & Knee, 1998). Claimed self-handicaps may provide a viable excuse...
without necessarily sacrificing one’s chances for success. Nonetheless, because behavioral handicaps are more overt, they may be more credible and effective than claimed self-handicaps.

Motives underlying self-handicapping

This distinction highlights a key issue in the self-handicapping literature, namely, identifying the primary motivation underlying these behaviors. Berglas and Jones (1978) posited that the main motive behind self-handicapping is protecting one’s self-esteem from the threat posed by task failure. However, Kolditz and Arkin (1982) argued that self-handicapping is primarily an impression management strategy. They found that participants self-handicapped in public rather than in private conditions, providing some evidence that this strategy may be used for impression management purposes. Since that time, a number of studies have demonstrated the self-esteem benefits are accrued by self-handicapping. Participants who self-handicap are better able to maintain a positive sense of self-esteem (Rhodewalt et al., 1991) and sustain positive beliefs regarding their own ability in the threatened domain (McCrea & Hirt, 2001), even in the face of task failure. Thus, there is solid evidence that self-handicapping effectively maintains self-esteem. However, studies examining its effectiveness as an impression management device have met with mixed success. Although self-handicapping clearly preserves beliefs on the part of others that the handicapper has greater ability than their performance shows, there appear to be interpersonal costs associated with the use of this strategy (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Rhodewalt et al., 1995). In these studies, targets who self-handicapped were perceived as less concerned about performance, less motivated, and less desirable as study partners.

Situational antecedents

With regard to the scenario involving our two students, Sam and Linda, we asked what each student was likely to do when faced with the opportunity to self-handicap. A great deal of effort has been devoted to identifying the personal and situational antecedents of self-handicapping behavior. One of the most robust situational factors shown to encourage self-handicapping is non-contingent success feedback (Berglas & Jones, 1978). Participants are given unsolvable problems to complete, but receive (bogus) success feedback on this task. Then they are asked to perform a second, similar task under the expectation that they should replicate their earlier success. This situation evokes a great amount of uncertainty on the part of participants, who have no idea how they performed so well on the initial task and feel ill-equipped to reproduce success on the subsequent task. Research has consistently demonstrated that these conditions promote
self-handicapping behavior. Other situational antecedents that increase uncertainty and concern about possible failure such as public self-focus (Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000) or prevention focus framing (Hendrix & Hirt, 2009) likewise have been shown to increase the likelihood of self-handicapping. Moreover, these latter two studies successfully identified and measured a critical mediator in self-handicapping behavior, evaluative concern; that is, participants who demonstrated elevated levels of evaluative concern resulting from these situational antecedents were more likely to engage in self-handicapping actions.

**Individual differences**

Identifying relevant individual differences has also been a central focus in the self-handicapping literature. Parallel ing the effects of situational manipulations, findings have illustrated that it is not self-esteem per se, but the uncertainty of one’s self-esteem which is predictive of self-handicapping behavior (Harris & Snyder, 1986). The most successful individual difference measure to date has been the Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS; Jones & Rhodewalt, 1982), a face-valid, 25-item self-report measure of individual’s chronic tendencies to make excuses and use self-handicaps. Many studies have utilized this scale and found that it reliably identifies those individuals most likely to self-handicap (see Rhodewalt, 1990, for a review). Recently, we (McCrea, Hirt, & Hendrix, 2006) factor analyzed the SHS, demonstrating that the scale is comprised of both behavioral and claimed handicapping subscales: The behavioral subscale predicts use of behavioral handicaps such as reduced practice effort, whereas the claimed subscale predicts reports of handicaps such as stress.

However, one of the most consistent but perplexing individual differences found to affect self-handicapping has been gender. Men have been shown to engage in self-handicapping more often than women, though these gender differences emerge only in the use of behavioral forms of self-handicapping (Harris & Snyder, 1986; Hirt et al., 1991; McCrea et al., 2008; Rhodewalt, 1990). Interestingly, men and women have been shown to use claimed self-handicaps equally (Hendrix & Hirt, 2009; Hirt et al., 1991; Koch, Hirt, & McCrea, 2003). Paralleling these findings, McCrea et al. (2006) found that men tend to score higher on the behavioral subscale of the SHS, whereas women tend to score higher on the claimed subscale of the SHS.

Thus, in the scenario involving Sam and Linda, it is reasonable to predict that Sam is far more likely to self-handicap by going to the party than is Linda. The question is, ‘Why?’ Given the robustness of these effects, many researchers have speculated as to the source of these gender differences. Nothing in the original formulation of self-handicapping by Jones and Berglas (1978) would lead one to expect that men should be more prone to engage in this behavior. Indeed, some researchers (cf.
Harris & Snyder, 1986) have argued that behavior of men in these behavioral self-handicapping situations is quite understandable and reasonable (‘smarter?’), whereas the behavior of women in these situations is inexplicable. Several hypotheses have been proffered and tested to account for this gender difference; however, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful – until recently. The focus of the present paper is to elucidate the progress we have made in our labs toward resolving the source(s) of these persistent gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping. In the process, we hope to provide greater insight into the competing motivations and tradeoffs inherent in the use of this strategy.

**Sources of the Gender Difference in Self-handicapping**

Early attempts to explain the source of gender differences in self-handicapping focused on possible differences between men and women in the importance placed on success. Snyder, Ford, and Hunt (1985) argued that, if men feel greater pressure to demonstrate competence and are more acutely sensitive to task failure, they would be more inclined to self-handicap. Research failed to find support for this general hypothesis (Rhodewalt & Davison, 1986); furthermore, such an account does not explain why women would be just as likely as men to use claimed forms of self-handicapping. Nonetheless, it may be the case that men are more willing to incur greater costs in order to maintain perceptions of competence and ability than are women. This difference might underlie men’s greater propensity to engage in extreme forms of self-sabotage, including behavioral self-handicapping. Consistent with this notion, Hirt et al. (2000) found that whereas men responded to increased evaluative concern (induced by public self-focus) with increased behavioral self-handicapping, women did not. However, both women and men demonstrate increased claimed self-handicapping when experiencing elevated levels of evaluative concern stemming from conditions of public self-focus (Koch et al., 2003) or prevention-focus framing (Hendrix & Hirt, 2009). Alternatively, men might be more likely to self-handicap in order to ‘augment’ attributions to ability. However, evidence for augmenting in self-handicapping is rather limited (Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997; Rhodewalt et al., 1991) and, when observed, has not been restricted to men (McCrea & Hirt, 2001).

Other researchers (cf. Dietrich, 1995) believed that these differences may reside in the importance of the task domain. Most self-handicapping studies were conducted in the academic domain, using tests of intelligence or related abilities. Some argued that success in the academic domain may be more important to men than to women. The implication of this argument was that in other, less stereotypically masculine domains (cf. Swim & Sanna, 1996), women would be just as likely to behaviorally self-handicap as would men. However, research exploring gender differences in the social domain have tended to replicate this same gender

Gender differences in audience reaction to self-handicapping

In our initial foray into this question, we believed that the source of these gender differences may reside in the differential effectiveness of behavioral self-handicaps for men as opposed to women. Research by Dweck et al. (1978) demonstrates that teachers attribute the failure of girls to a lack of ability, but attribute the failure of boys to a lack of effort. Thus, we surmised that behavioral handicaps such as effort withdrawal may not ‘work’ as a handicap for women as effectively as for men, given that women’s failures tend to be blamed on lack of ability rather than lack of effort. To address this question, we (Hirt, McCrea, & Boris, 2003; Study 1) conducted a study modifying the paradigm used by Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991). Participants read a scenario describing a character named Chris (either male or female) who had an important test the following day. Chris either calls a friend and invites him to a movie (self-handicapping condition) or spends the evening at home studying (control condition). The grade the target received on his or her test was also varied. Participants then evaluated Chris on a number of dimensions (e.g., liking, similarity and desire to have as a friend) and made attributions for his or her performance.

Much to our chagrin, target gender had no effects on any of our dependent measures. Participants rated the male and female versions of Chris similarly. However, the gender of the participant profoundly affected reactions to Chris. Women rated the self-handicapper far more negatively on the general evaluative dimensions than did men. In addition, women were less likely to give the self-handicapper ‘the benefit of the doubt’ and discount lack of ability as the cause of the target’s poor performance than were men. A second experiment replicated these results, demonstrating that women were unaffected by potential mitigating circumstances such as whether the friend initiated the behavior or whether the target had already done some prior preparation. Thus, even when we rendered the target’s self-handicapping actions open to alternative explanations, women did not change their negative view of self-handicapping behavior. We also observed that women were far more likely to attribute dispositional motives such as laziness or lack of self-control to the handicapping target than were men and were the only ones who endorsed the possibility that the target might be acting out of a desire to excuse failure (i.e., self-handicap). Men tended to endorse exclusively situational motivations for Chris’ actions, attributing the behavior to peer pressure, anxiety, the need for a study break, or the erroneous belief that s/he was adequately prepared. Differences in these inferred motives also mediated gender differences in the evaluations of the target.
It appears from these results that women feel that the expenditure of effort is normative, and that any type of effort withdrawal is unacceptable. Certainly, there is a considerable amount of research that supports the notion that women value effort more than men. For example, female students report studying harder, procrastinate less, and adopt more effortful learning goals and strategies than do male students (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998; Cooper, Baumgardner, & Strathman, 1991; Stricker, Rock, & Burton, 1993; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). However, it is not clear what specific effort beliefs might be relevant to or account for the gender differences in both engagement in and reactions to behavioral self-handicapping. Thus, we embarked on the task of developing measures of effort beliefs that might explain gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping.

The critical role of effort beliefs: Developing the ‘Worker Scale’

McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix, Milner, and Steele (2008) created several measures assessing a broad range of beliefs about effort and academics. The Prescriptive effort norm scale measures the belief that people who put forth effort should be admired, whereas the ability vs. effort tradeoff scale measures the extent to which displaying intelligence or ability is viewed more favorably by others than is displaying effort. In contrast to these measures of normative beliefs, the Worker scale was designed to assess the extent to which the individual sees him/herself as a hard worker and personally values these characteristics. Large sample studies confirmed the convergent and discriminatory validity of these scales. Most importantly, we consistently found gender differences on these measures, such that women placed a higher value on effort than did men. However, over and above the effects of normative measures of effort value or the importance of demonstrating ability, the Worker scale alone significantly mediated gender differences on the behavioral subscale of the SHS (cf. McCrea et al., 2006; Rhodewalt, 1990). The Worker scale also partially explained the negative relationship between the behavioral subscale of the SHS and GPA in these studies. Taken together, these findings suggest that the increased personalized value that women place on effort might explain their lower likelihood of behaviorally self-handicapping.

Does the Worker scale predict gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping?

Given these encouraging initial results, we next investigated whether the Worker scale might mediate the robust gender differences that emerge in reactions to a self-handicapping target. A study by McCrea, Hirt, and Milner (2008; Study 1) replicated the finding that women disparage self-handicapping targets on general evaluative dimensions more than men. Path analyses revealed that this effect was mediated by the Worker
scale and not other types of effort beliefs. Because women more frequently endorsed this internalized belief in the value of being a hard worker, they evaluated those who violate that norm — namely, behavioral self-handicapping targets — more punitively than did others not personally ascribing to that same belief.

Is it also the case that males engage in behavioral self-handicapping more because they do not share with their female counterparts a personalized belief in the value of hard work and effort? McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix et al. (2008; Study 3) used a standard behavioral self-handicapping paradigm to investigate this question. Participants were told the study involved completing a nonverbal intelligence test. They first completed a battery of individual difference measures, including the Worker scale. They were then told that they would complete the nonverbal test, but would first have an opportunity to practice for the exam. Half of the participants were told that the nonverbal test was not particularly diagnostic of one’s true level of intelligence unless one had prior experience with the items. These ‘practice matters’ instructions set up failure to practice as a potential behavioral self-handicap for poor performance (cf. Smith, Snyder, & Handelsman, 1982). The other half of the participants were told that prior research had shown that scores on the nonverbal test were unaffected by the amount of prior experience. These ‘practice doesn’t matter’ instructions eliminate failure to practice as a viable excuse for poor performance and thus serve as a control condition. Consistent with previous studies (Hirt et al., 1991, 2000), men practiced significantly less than women in the practice matters condition. This effect was partially mediated by the Worker scale, providing evidence that personalized effort beliefs underlie the gender difference in behavioral self-handicapping.

In a conceptual replication of this finding, we (McCrea, Hirt, & Milner, 2008; Study 1) measured the amount of study effort students reported prior to the midterm exam in their psychology course. As expected, male students reported putting forth less study effort than did female students. Moreover, students who reported less study effort performed more poorly on the subsequent exam yet showed no significant reduction in self-esteem or ability beliefs, suggesting that reduced study effort served as a behavioral self-handicap (cf. McCrea & Hirt, 2001). Worker scale scores also completely mediated the gender effect on study effort.

Taken together, these findings provide strong support for the notion that the effort beliefs indexed by the Worker scale explain not only gender differences in audience reactions to self-handicapping, but also the robust gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping. Women who have personalized this effort norm do not engage in behavioral forms of self-handicapping when given the opportunity to do so, and display more negative reactions to others who engage in these behaviors. Thus, for the first time, we have identified a mechanism that can reliably account for the oft-observed gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping.
Remaining Questions

Breadth of this account of gender differences

Nonetheless, a host of important unanswered questions remain. Certainly, one critique of the present findings is that we have focused exclusively on the use of effort withdrawal as our manifestation of behavioral self-handicapping. Although effort withdrawal is one of the most prevalent forms of behavioral self-handicapping, it seems premature to expect that the Worker scale would account for gender differences in the use of drugs or alcohol or other forms of behavioral self-handicapping. However, to the extent that the Worker scale taps into an individual’s more general desire to always put forth one’s best effort, we believe that we would obtain similar results for other types of behavioral handicaps. Recall that the Worker scale has been shown to mediate gender differences on the behavioral subscale of the SHS (cf. McCrea, Hirt, Hendrix et al., 2008). Indeed, a more fine-grained analysis of these data revealed that the Worker scale not only mediated gender differences on items referring explicitly to practice and effort, but also on items related to getting inadequate sleep and eating or drinking to excess. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that the Worker scale mediates gender differences in reactions to a target who drinks too heavily the night before an important test (Kretchmann, 2008), and that the Worker scale is correlated with the selection of distracting music as a self-handicap (Flamm, 2007). Thus, while more research clearly needs to be done to definitively address this issue, it appears that the range of behavioral self-handicaps predicted by the Worker scale is quite broad.

At the same time, several studies we have conducted have documented that the Worker scale does not correlate with claimed self-handicapping. Thus, it would be erroneous to believe that the effort beliefs indexed by the Worker scale would predict all forms of self-handicapping. Indeed, this research has further emphasized the importance of the distinction between these two forms of self-handicapping. Gender differences do not emerge in the use of claimed forms of self-handicapping. Although both forms of self-handicapping seem to be driven by the same antecedent conditions and evaluative concerns, claimed forms of self-handicapping do not appear to be related to effort beliefs in any of our work to date.

Another question with regard to the issue of breadth is whether our account of gender differences in behavioral self-handicapping would extend to non-student populations (e.g., in a work context). Given that we argue that these effort beliefs have become internalized values, we expect that our effects would replicate. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on self-handicapping outside of student populations, and so this remains an important question for future research.
Symptoms of general adherence to norms?

Some might argue that the gender differences reflected in Worker scale scores simply reflect a more general tendency among women to adhere to societal norms. There is plenty of evidence indicating that men are more likely than women to engage in risky, self-destructive, and antisocial behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, aggression, and reduced medical compliance (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Courtenay, McCrea, & Merighi, 2002; Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Gender stereotype and sex role theory researchers point to the fact that women are likely to be in positions of less power, necessitating their compliance with relevant social norms. Men, typically in positions of higher power, have greater latitude in choosing whether to adhere to social norms.

Although these arguments are quite persuasive, our data suggest that gender differences in effort norms as indexed by the Worker scale appear distinct from a more generalized adherence to social norms. We in fact controlled for measures of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and social desirability in these studies. Even though these measures correlated with the Worker scale, Worker scale scores uniquely predicted reactions to behavioral self-handicapping. Furthermore, the fact that the Worker scale (and not the Prescriptive effort norm scale) accounted for these effects suggest that it is the personal value placed on effort that mediates the gender differences we observe.

Finally, our research suggests that women do not blindly adhere to these effort beliefs, independent of the social context. Indeed, in further replications of our audience reaction studies, we have identified one situation in which women express some leniency to individuals who withdraw effort. McCrea, Hirt, and Myers (2008; Study 2) varied whether the target failed to study for an important test because he went out or because he volunteered to give a friend a ride to the airport so that he could visit a sick relative. In the ‘helping a friend’ situation, women were no more critical than men in their evaluations of the target. Moreover, the Worker scale did not predict evaluations of Chris in the ‘helping a friend’ condition, suggesting that the role of effort beliefs in determining reactions was compromised when the target’s effort withdrawal behavior satisfied other socially prescribed norms. We believe that an important and exciting avenue for future research will be a more thorough examination of the interplay among the various normative and personal beliefs that affect achievement behavior across a variety of different situations and social contexts.

Social implications of these gender differences

We began this paper with the lyrics of a song titled, ‘Man smart, woman smarter’. Throughout our consideration of this body of research, it appears...
that women are definitely taking the ‘smarter’ approach by putting forth their best effort in performance situations and not succumbing to the temptation of engaging in acts of behavioral self-handicapping. Indeed, the consequences of behavioral self-handicapping are clear. By sabotaging one’s chances for success, the likelihood of task failure is increased. However, the literature has always argued that the attributional benefits accrued from the presence of the handicap may offset the performance costs, making self-handicapping a potentially attractive tradeoff for males with uncertain self-esteem (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Nonetheless, more recent evidence has illustrated that the consequences of self-handicapping are far greater than these early characterizations had supposed, suggesting this behavior is truly self-defeating. Indeed, Zuckerman and Tsai (2005) have highlighted the negative long-term consequences of self-handicapping: poorer performance outcomes, higher levels of negative emotions, loss in competence satisfaction and intrinsic motivation, and increased substance use. Thus, the short-term attributional benefits carry significant long-term costs.

Moreover, our work denoting the social consequences inherent in the use of behavioral self-handicapping adds further costs to the equation. Why would men incur these negative interpersonal sanctions (particularly from their female peers) on top of the negative short and long-term performance consequences, when there seem to be other, less costly avenues by which they can maintain a positive sense of self-regard (cf. Hirt & McCrea, 2002)? Our recent research efforts have been devoted toward answering this question. One possibility we have considered is that men are unaware of how negatively behavioral self-handicapping actions are perceived by others. Given that men tend to give the benefit of the doubt to the self-handicapper, might they project similar reactions from others to these behaviors? A recent set of studies by Devers and Hirt (2009) suggests that this is indeed the case. Using the empathic-accuracy paradigm developed by Ickes and his colleagues (Ickes, 1997; Ickes et al., 1990), these authors asked men and women to view a tape of another student in which s/he did or did not reveal a story involving self-handicapping. The results indicated that men were not only more lenient in their own evaluations of the self-handicapper, but were less accurate in projecting the likely responses of others to that behavior. Similarly, recent work we have conducted suggests that self-handicappers (as measured by the SHS) expect others to be more critical of a target who tried his best and fails than do non-self-handicappers. These expectations also predict subsequent defensive behavior (McCrea, Hirt, & Myers, 2008; McCrea, Myers, & Hirt, forthcoming). Thus, it may be that men are unaware how negatively behavioral self-handicapping is perceived by others, and this failure of insight may be critical to understanding why they persist in this self-defeating strategy.

We have also explored whether these gender differences in observer reactions have implications for the social lives of men who engage in
behavioral self-handicapping. We initially thought that these data might suggest that male self-handicappers might have fewer friends (particularly female friends) in their social network, due to the generally negative reactions that others have toward these behaviors. Bridgett Milner (2007) addressed this question in her dissertation research, but did not find evidence of systematic differences in the friendship networks of male self-handicappers. However, she posited that perhaps male self-handicappers adjust their behavior around their peers, so as not to reveal their behavioral self-handicapping tendencies. In one study, men came to the lab with a male or female friend. All participants were given practice matters instructions and the opportunity to practice for an intelligence test while in full view of their friend. The results were intriguing: men practiced less (and thus self-handicapped more) when a male (as opposed to a female) friend was present. We are currently in the process of replicating this effect with both male and female participants and in the presence of friends or strangers in order to assess the generality with which self-handicappers modulate their behavior in the presence of male or female peers.

_Coda_

Suffice to say, when it comes to the use of self-defeating behaviors like self-handicapping, women do appear ‘smarter’ than men. Women are much less willing to engage in destructive forms of self-handicapping, choosing more subtle self-protection strategies (such as claiming hindering conditions) and trying to maximize their performance. The research that we have described provides some preliminary evidence for the role of personalized effort beliefs in creating the often observed gender differences in the use of behavioral self-handicapping. The effort beliefs indexed by the Worker scale have been shown not only to mediate gender differences in the use of behavioral self-handicapping but also reactions to others who engage in such actions. Furthermore, the exploration of the etiology of these effort beliefs has raised some important and exciting new questions about the strategic nature of these behaviors. The extent to which self-handicappers strategically reveal their use of these behaviors in the presence of others speaks to the dramatic interplay between self-esteem and impression management motives inherent in this strategy. Clearly, there is much still to be learned about the reasons why men opt to engage in behavior self-handicapping, despite its numerous costs. We hope that this work spawns further efforts toward the goal of getting to the root of this paradoxical self-defeating behavior.

_Short Biographies_

Edward Hirt’s research deals with self-protective behaviors and their implications for performance and self-concept. He has co-authored papers

Sean McCrea is currently an Assistant Professor for Social and Motivational Psychology at the University of Konstanz in Konstanz, Germany. McCrea holds a BA in Psychology from Bucknell University and a PhD in Social Psychology from Indiana University-Bloomington.

**Endnote**

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**References**


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<td>Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)</td>
<td>/ through characters</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to italics</td>
<td>— under matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to capitals</td>
<td>— under matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to small capitals</td>
<td>— under matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to bold type</td>
<td>~ under matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to bold italic</td>
<td>~ under matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to lower case</td>
<td>Encircle matter to be changed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change italic to upright type</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change bold to non-bold type</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert ‘superior’ character</td>
<td>/ through character or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/ where required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert ‘inferior’ character</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert full stop</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert comma</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert single quotation marks</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert double quotation marks</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert hyphen</td>
<td>(As above)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start new paragraph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No new paragraph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up</td>
<td>linking characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert or substitute space</td>
<td>/ through character or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/ where required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce space between characters or words</td>
<td>between characters or words affected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>