

“I Know You Self-Handicapped Last Exam”: Gender Differences in Reactions to Self-Handicapping

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Past research has shown that self-handicapping involves the trade-off of ability-related attributional benefits for interpersonal costs. Study 1 examined whether perceiver or target sex moderates impressions of self-handicapping targets. Although target sex was not an important factor, female perceivers were consistently more critical of behavioral self-handicappers. Two additional studies replicated this gender difference with variations of the handicap. Study 3 examined the motives inferred by perceivers and found that women not only view self-handicappers as more unmotivated but also report greater suspicion of self-handicapping motives; furthermore, these differences in perceived motives mediated sex differences in reactions to self-handicappers. Implications for the effectiveness of self-handicapping as an impression management strategy are discussed.

Instead of studying, a student goes to a movie the night before an exam. If he performs poorly, he can attribute his failure to a lack of studying rather than to a lack of ability or intelligence. On the other hand, if he does well on the exam, he may conclude that he has exceptional ability, because he was able to perform well without studying. This behavior is an example of self-handicapping, 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, p. 170). The goals of self-handicapping are to disregard ability as the causal factor for a poor performance and to embrace ability as the causal factor for a successful one.

Indeed, the literature on self-handicapping has demonstrated quite consistently that (a) a broad range of behaviors are performed for the motive of self-handicapping and (b) self-handicapping results in the discounting of ability attributions following failure and the augmenting of ability attributions following success.¹ However, two important questions remain largely unanswered and continue to generate considerable debate within this literature. The first concerns the intended audience of this strategy. Berglas and Jones (1978) argued that the major motivation behind self-handicapping is to protect one’s self-esteem from the potentially

damaging effects of failure. However, Kolditz and Arkin (1982) have argued that self-handicapping is primarily an impression management strategy. They varied the publicity of the handicap and found that participants self-handicapped primarily in public rather than private conditions, providing some evidence that this strategy may be used for impression management purposes. Although there now appears to be good evidence that self-handicapping maintains global self-esteem (Rhodewalt, Morf, Hazlett, & Fairfield, 1991) and ability beliefs (McCrea & Hirt, 2001) even in the face of task failure, researchers know relatively little about the effectiveness of self-handicapping as an impression management strategy. Thus, one major focus of the present work is to test the viability of the impression management motive for self-handicapping behavior by exploring how others perceive individuals who engage in self-handicapping.

A second issue that has plagued the self-handicapping literature concerns sex differences in the use of self-handicapping. The self-handicapping literature (Arkin & Baumgartner, 1985; Leary & Shepperd, 1986) makes a fundamental distinction between two different forms of self-handicapping: behavioral self-handicaps (the more active forms of self-sabotage, e.g., alcohol and drug use or effort withdrawal) versus self-reported handicaps (claims of debilitating circumstances, e.g., illness or undue stress). Numerous studies (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Harris & Snyder, 1986; Hirt, Deppe, & Gordon, 1991; Hirt, McCrea, & Kimble, 2000; Shepperd & Arkin, 1989) have found that men are more likely to self-handicap than women, although these differences emerge only with the behavioral forms of self-handicapping. Both men and women use self-reported handicaps. A number of explanations

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¹ Although evidence for both augmenting and discounting have been found in the self-handicapping literature (cf. Feick & Rhodewalt, 1997), discounting following failure is a far more robust effect than is augmenting following success. Indeed, many studies (e.g., Rhodewalt et al., 1991) have failed to find an augmenting effect, leading many researchers to conclude that self-handicapping is primarily a self-protective (rather than a self-enhancement) mechanism.

have been offered for this sex difference in behavioral self-handicapping, but, to date, the mechanisms underlying this difference have not been adequately specified. In the present work, we test two potential explanations for the sex differences observed in behavioral self-handicapping by examining how male and female perceivers evaluate male and female targets who behaviorally self-handicap. For reasons that will become clearer later, we hypothesize that women may fail to engage in these forms of self-handicapping because (a) female targets may not be afforded the same attributional benefits by perceivers as are male targets and/or (b) female perceivers may judge the costs of behavioral self-handicapping to be greater than do male perceivers.

In this article, we first briefly discuss the relevant literature on these two questions and then present a series of three experiments designed to address these issues. We begin with a discussion of the research on the effectiveness of self-handicapping as an impression management strategy.

How Effective Is Behavioral Self-Handicapping as an Impression Management Tool?

A few studies have addressed the attributions that audiences make about individuals who do or do not engage in self-handicapping. These studies provide evidence that self-handicapping can have benefits in terms of attributions to ability but negative consequences on interpersonal dimensions. Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) presented participants with a scenario in which a male target was faced with an important exam on the following day. The target decided either to go to a movie and forego studying in response to a friend's invitation (self-handicapping condition) or to decline his friend's invitation to stay home and study (nonself-handicapping condition). This study manipulated the grade that the target received (F, C, or A). Participants rated the target's intelligence and knowledge and predicted how well the target would perform on the next exam if he stayed home and studied. Participants also rated the target on motivation, confidence, liking, their own desire to have the target as a study partner, and concern about performance.

In all cases, future predicted test scores were significantly higher for the self-handicapping target than for the nonself-handicapping target who received the same grade. In addition, targets who self-handicapped were seen as more knowledgeable and intelligent than were targets who did not self-handicap. Thus, Luginbuhl and Palmer's (1991) study found evidence that self-handicapping leads perceivers to augment ability as a causal factor for success and to discount ability as a causal factor for failure.

Although no differences were found on a measure of overall liking, some motivational and characterological measures were negatively affected by self-handicapping. The target who self-handicapped was perceived as less concerned about performance and less motivated. People also expressed less desire to have the self-handicapping target as a study partner. On the basis of these results, Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) concluded that, "coupled with the somewhat negative attributions about personal qualities, self-handicapping may be quite a poor trade-off and may be more self-defeating than previously assumed" (p. 661). Similar interpersonal costs have been demonstrated by Rhodewalt, Sanbonmatsu, Tschanz, Feick, and Waller

(1995) for three different types of self-reported handicaps (intended low effort, anxiety, and drug impairment), suggesting that these findings hold for both behavioral and self-reported handicaps.

Sex Differences in Audience Reactions to Self-Handicapping

Some researchers have argued that differences in the attributions individuals make regarding the performances of men and women belie sex differences in behavioral self-handicapping. A sizable literature indicates that women do not receive the same attributions for performance as do men (cf. Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978). For example, Carol Dweck and her colleagues (Dweck, Davidson, Nelson, & Enna, 1978) found that teachers tend to attribute poor performances by girls to lack of ability, whereas they attribute poor performances by boys to lack of effort or motivation. A recent meta-analysis by Swim and Sanna (1996) illustrated a consistent pattern of observer attributions to unstable causes such as lack of effort for the failures of men but attributions to lack of ability for the failures of women, at least on primarily masculine tasks. Given these findings, it may be that women are simply not afforded the same attributional benefits for behavioral self-handicaps as are men.

If this is true, it suggests that women might fail to engage in behavioral self-handicapping because the strategy does not work for them. Men who withdraw effort are given the benefit of the doubt, such that failure by men is attributed to lack of effort rather than lack of ability, thereby preserving beliefs in their inherent ability. On the other hand, perceivers of women who withdraw effort and fail instead make attributions to lack of ability rather than lack of effort, thereby eliminating the major benefit of the self-protective strategy (while sustaining the same costs). Thus, from a cost-benefit perspective, it makes intuitive sense that men should embrace the strategy of behavioral self-handicapping, whereas women should avoid it.

To date, this potential explanation has not received an empirical test. No studies of observer reactions to self-handicappers have systematically varied the sex of the target to examine whether female self-handicapping targets receive fewer attributional benefits than do male targets. In most previous studies, the targets were male (cf. Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Rhodewalt et al., 1995) or the sex of the target was unspecified. However, if this perspective is correct, we would expect that participants should form more favorable impressions of male than of female targets who behaviorally self-handicap.

A second explanation for the sex difference in behavioral self-handicapping focuses on differences in the *perception* of the trade-offs inherent in self-handicapping. That is, the actual costs and benefits of behavioral self-handicapping may be the same for both male and female targets, but men and women may simply perceive the value of these same costs and benefits differently. It could be that men consider the attributional benefits gained by self-handicapping as more important than do women, leading them to perceive the trade-offs associated with behavioral self-handicapping as more worthwhile. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that men value competence and ability to a greater extent than do women and that women value effort and

motivation more than do men (e.g., Cooper, Burger, & Good, 1981; Gaeddert, 1985; Sutherland & Veroff, 1985; Travis, McKenzie, Wiley, & Kahn, 1988). In addition, a recent study that assessed the relative value given to effort versus competence supports these claims (McCrea, Hirt, Steele, Koch, & West, 2000). The authors developed several scales to measure the perceived importance of effort. The scales asked participants to weigh the value of being seen as a hard worker relative to being seen as intelligent and competent (e.g., "It is better to be seen as someone with potential than as someone who tried and failed") and to indicate to what extent effort was normative (e.g., "I admire people who work hard"), whether their friends valued effort (e.g., "My friends put a lot of effort into their schoolwork"), and to what extent they themselves tended to put forth effort in academics (e.g., "My grades are the result of effort and hard work"). In all cases, the authors obtained strong and consistent main effects of sex (all $F_s > 5.00$, $ps < .001$), indicating that, compared with men, women felt that (a) effort was more normatively important, (b) being a hard worker was more important than being seen as competent, and (c) effort was something rewarded and respected by their friends as well as themselves. Thus, it may be that women believe that withdrawal of effort is unacceptable and that they are therefore unwilling to go to such extreme measures to maintain perceptions of competence. Therefore, differences in beliefs about the importance of effort may result in these sex differences in more active forms of self-sabotage (i.e., behavioral self-handicapping).

Consequently, one might predict that these different values placed on effort versus competence would also be seen in observer reactions to behavioral self-handicappers. One would expect female observers to be more negative in their evaluations of a self-handicapper who withdraws effort. If women see expending effort as more normative than do men, they may be more likely to view any intentional lack of effort as inexcusable and may make more negative dispositional attributions about the norm-violating behavioral self-handicapper. As a result, women may be more critical of the behavioral self-handicapper overall, which would result in fewer attributional benefits and greater interpersonal costs for the target.

Is there any precedent in the literature for these differences in perceptions of self-handicappers as a function of sex of perceiver? Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) collected data from male and female participants and, in fact, obtained several significant interactions involving participant sex. Indeed, their findings indicated that men were more apt than women to discount ability attributions in the presence of a (behavioral) handicap. However, Luginbuhl and Palmer concluded that "there were no systematic sex of subject effects, and any interpretation of the effects that were found is problematic" (p. 661). Rhodewalt et al.'s (1995) study used only male participants. Indeed, in a footnote, Rhodewalt et al. reported that they did this because past research indicates that men are most likely to self-handicap and stated that, "in all likelihood, the findings of the present study would not generalize to women" (p. 1049). We believe that men will be more lenient in their reactions to behavioral self-handicapping than will women.

Thus, the present study examines the effects of participant sex as well as target sex on perceptions of self-handicapping. Consistent sex differences of either type would provide direction for future

research attempting to uncover the nature of sex differences in actual behavioral self-handicapping.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to explore differences in the reactions of male and female participants to behavioral self-handicapping by either male or female targets. As in Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), participants read a scenario about a student preparing for an exam, with the student's grade varied. The target in the scenario either behaviorally handicapped by going out the night before the test (handicapping condition) or stayed home and studied (control condition). Participants rated the target both on ability measures and on a number of liking measures. Consistent with the results of Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), we predicted that behavioral self-handicapping targets would receive attributional benefits on the ability measures but suffer interpersonal costs on the liking measures. However, we wanted to examine whether these self-handicapping effects interacted with sex of target (such that female targets would accrue fewer attributional benefits than would male targets), sex of perceiver (such that female perceivers would rate self-handicapping targets more negatively on both ability and liking dimensions than would male perceivers), or both variables.

Method

Participants

Participants were 241 introductory psychology students (104 men, 137 women) at Indiana University–Bloomington. They participated in this study in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Group size ranged from 1 to 50.

Materials

In all passages, the target, either a man or a woman named Chris, was given a practice exam the day before the exam and told by his or her professor that the actual exam would closely resemble the practice exam (cf. Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991). Sex of target (male or female), self-handicapping (behavioral or control), and grade on the exam (A or D) were orthogonally manipulated in the text of the passage.

Control (no self-handicapping) passages. There were four control passages in which no self-handicapping occurred. Target sex and grade were varied in these conditions. In these passages, Chris's roommate complained about his or her major and asked Chris's opinion about changing majors. Limited information was provided about Chris's exam preparation: The passage specified that Chris spent the evening in the apartment so that he or she could study. In addition, Chris remarked to his or her roommate about the exam, "Well, I did what I could and now I just want to get it over with."

Behavioral self-handicapping passages. In the behavioral self-handicapping passages, the target decided to go to a movie instead of studying for the exam. In contrast to Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), the target in Study 1 initiated the self-handicap by calling up and inviting his or her best friend to a movie. The passage was written in this manner to ensure that Chris's behavior was unambiguously interpreted as self-handicapping rather than potentially being interpreted as succumbing to peer pressure. Chris spent only 45 min working unproductively on the practice exam before leaving for the movie and did not return until 1 AM, at which time he or she went to bed without any further exam preparation.

Grade manipulation. In all conditions, the scenario ends with Chris taking his or her exam and later learning his or her grade was either an A or a D.

Dependent Measures

Passage information manipulation check. Eight factual questions were included immediately after the passage to ensure that participants read the passage carefully and attended to the experimental manipulations.

Evaluative and interpersonal reactions. Participants' general evaluative reactions to Chris were assessed through a number of questions. Participants were asked how much they liked Chris, how sympathetic they felt toward Chris, how well they could relate to Chris, how similar they felt to Chris, and, finally, how much they would like to have Chris as a friend, a partner on a class project, and a roommate. Participants responded to these items using a 7-point scale (0 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*).

Attributions about exam performance and ability. As in Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), participants were asked to predict how well Chris would do if he or she stayed home and studied the night before the next exam using a 7-point scale (0 = *very poorly*, 6 = *very well*). In addition to this assessment of future potential, participants rated how much ability affected the grade Chris received.

Procedure

Participants were told that a professor at the university was writing a book and was interested in people's perceptions of and reactions to the book's characters. The intended audience of the book was college students. Participants were informed that their reactions might influence character portrayal and were strongly encouraged to give their honest reactions.

Participants were then given a booklet containing all of the experimental tasks. The first page contained the passage about Chris. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions and passages. The second page contained the manipulation checks. The remaining pages of the booklet contained the questions about their evaluations of Chris. Participants were permitted to refer back to the passage if necessary. Following debriefing, participants were thanked for their participation and dismissed.

Results

Passage Information Manipulation Checks

Performance on the passage information manipulation check questions was uniformly high. The mean number of correct responses was 7.71 (out of 8). Thus, participants attended carefully to the manipulations of interest.

Overview of Analyses

To simplify the results, we combined several measures on the basis of interitem correlations to create a general measure of liking. Analyses keeping the items separate did not change the nature of the results. We created this general interpersonal evaluation measure by combining eight items (liking, sympathy, similarity, relate, and desire for target as a partner, friend, and roommate). The reliability for this measure was acceptable ($\alpha = .86$). A Handicap (2) \times Grade (2) \times Target Sex (2) \times Participant Sex (2) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each of the dependent variables. We first report the results excluding effects of target and participant sex to compare with the findings of Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991).

Ability Measures

Future potential. Consistent with Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), we expected that observers would rate the self-handicapper to have a higher future potential than the control target. In addition, we expected the effect of grade to be weaker for the self-handicapper, indicating that judgments of future potential were protected by the handicap. As expected, main effects of both grade, $F(1, 225) = 72.95, p < .001$, and handicap, $F(1, 225) = 52.44, p < .001$, were found on this measure, indicating that participants rated the target as having greater potential if he or she received an A and if he or she engaged in behavioral self-handicapping. These effects were qualified by an interaction of grade and handicap, $F(1, 225) = 31.46, p < .001$. For the control target, grade strongly affected perceptions of future potential: The control target who got an A ($M = 4.70$) was seen as having far more potential than the control target who got a D ($M = 2.52$), $F(1, 119) = 83.17, p < .001$. However, for the self-handicapping target, grade did not affect perceptions of future potential: To our surprise, the potential of the target who got an A ($M = 5.00$) and the target who got a D ($M = 4.53$) did not differ, $F(1, 118) = 1.88, ns$.

Attributions to ability. On the attribution to ability measure, we expected that self-handicapping would augment (raise) attributions to ability following success relative to the control target and discount (lower) attributions to ability following a poor performance relative to the control target. Main effects of both grade, $F(1, 225) = 114.28, p < .001$, and handicap, $F(1, 225) = 14.06, p < .001$, were found, but these effects were again qualified by an interaction of grade and handicap, $F(1, 225) = 7.58, p < .01$. If the target received an A, there were no differences in ability attributions between the control ($M = 4.53$) and the handicapping target ($M = 4.31$), $F < 1.00, ns$. If the target received a D, the self-handicapper ($M = 1.95$) received lower attributions to ability than the control target ($M = 3.13$), $F(1, 119) = 20.71, p < .001$. Thus, the handicap resulted in discounted attributions to ability following failure but not augmented attributions to ability following success.

General Evaluative Measure

Again on the basis of past research (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Rhodewalt et al., 1995), we expected that self-handicapping would have negative effects on liking and general evaluations. Main effects of grade, $F(1, 224) = 22.83, p < .001$, and handicap, $F(1, 224) = 80.49, p < .001$, were found on the general evaluation measure. Individuals evaluated targets who received an A ($M_s = 21.49$ vs. 17.96) and those who did not handicap ($M_s = 25.43$ vs. 16.88) more positively. As predicted, behavioral self-handicapping had negative effects on interpersonal dimensions.

Effects of Target Sex and Participant Sex

We next examined the effects of target sex and participant sex on the key dependent measures. We predicted that the benefits of self-handicapping might be limited to the male targets. To our surprise, no significant main effects or interactions with target sex

were obtained on any of the dependent measures.² Thus, we found no evidence that male and female targets were evaluated differently. However, we did obtain a number of significant effects of participant sex. On the ability attribution measure, the Handicap \times Participant Sex interaction was significant, $F(1, 225) = 3.68, p = .05$. Although men attributed the performance of the handicapper ($M = 3.32$) and the control target ($M = 3.61$) to ability equally, $F < 1.00, ns$, women attributed the performance of the handicapper ($M = 2.99$) to ability significantly less than for the control target ($M = 4.02$), $F(1, 135) = 12.23, p < .001$.

In addition, the participant sex main effect was significant on the general evaluative measure, $F(1, 224) = 5.71, p < .05$. Overall, men evaluated the targets more positively. These effects were qualified by an interaction of handicap and participant sex, $F(1, 224) = 7.83, p < .01$. Men and women did not differ in their ratings of the control target ($M_s = 25.05$ and 25.76 , respectively), $F < 1.00, ns$; however, men rated the handicapper significantly more positively ($M = 19.62$) than did women ($M = 15.00$), $F(1, 158) = 17.97, p < .001$.

Discussion

Although behavioral self-handicapping protected ability attributions and assessments of future potential after failure, participants reacted quite negatively to the self-handicapper on the general evaluation measure. Consistent with Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991), these results indicate that behavioral handicapping has negative consequences for impression management.

In addition, the results of Study 1 uncover some interesting sex differences in audience reactions to self-handicapping. We were surprised to find that target sex did not impact attributions and impressions of the target. However, we did find several effects of participant sex. As predicted, women were harsher in their judgment of the behavioral handicapper. Women more negatively evaluated the self-handicapping target and gave the control target more credit for his or her performance. These data suggest that the locus for sex differences in reaction to self-handicapping resides in the mind of the perceiver, not in the sex of the target. Although we cannot definitively conclude from this study that target sex has no impact on audience reactions, our data suggest that participant sex may be a more important factor. Given that women tend to view effort as more normative in performance situations than do men (McCrea et al., 2000), it appears that a behavioral self-handicapper is unlikely to garner much sympathy from a female observer. To further investigate the moderating influence of perceiver sex, we conducted two additional studies.

Study 2

Study 2 was conducted to further examine the nature as well as the source of this interesting sex difference. In Study 1, we found that women clearly had a more negative reaction to the self-handicapper; however, the scenario we used in Study 1 was constructed to be a clear and unambiguous situation in which the motive of self-handicapping was apparent. The target had not done any previous preparation for the upcoming test and invited a friend to go to a movie. However, it remains to be seen whether these sex differences will still be obtained in situations in which the behavior

is more ambiguous and there are alternative explanations for effort withdrawal. In these more ambiguous circumstances, underlying beliefs about the importance of effort may be more clearly revealed, as these situations leave more room for subjective interpretation.

For example, if the target already felt prepared or was pressured to go out by a friend, we presume that effort withdrawal would appear to be less intentional and therefore not as negative as in the Study 1 scenario. Indeed, the study conducted by Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) differed from Study 1 on both of these variables (peer pressure and prior preparation). In Luginbuhl and Palmer's research, the target was described as having already done some studying but as feeling that additional studying would be "helpful" (p. 656). Effort withdrawal in this context may be interpreted as an indication that the target felt sufficiently prepared for the test rather than as self-handicapping. In addition, the self-handicap in Luginbuhl and Palmer's study (going out to a movie) was initiated by a friend, which could potentially be construed as a response to peer pressure rather than self-handicapping. Baumgardner and Levy (1988) made a similar distinction between intentional and unintentional effort withdrawal and found that perceivers viewed targets who unintentionally withdrew study effort more favorably than targets who intentionally withdrew effort. Similarly, Weiner (1995) proposed that lack of effort due to clearly controllable causes is more likely to result in anger and punishment by observers. Thus, in Study 2, we systematically manipulated both of these variables—the initiation of the self-handicap and the amount of prior preparation—to examine their effects on men's and women's reactions to the self-handicapper. To the extent that a perceiver believes that engaging in some prior preparation or succumbing to peer pressure are valid excuses for withdrawing effort, that perceiver should be more accepting of the self-handicap and therefore less critical of the target. However, to the extent that the perceiver believes that any withdrawal of effort is to be frowned on, he or she may see these excuses as rather weak, which would result in reluctance to accept the handicap and a more negative evaluation of the target.

The important question addressed in this study is whether male or female perceivers are more influenced by these manipulations when evaluating the target. On the one hand, an argument could be made that women might be more sensitive to these manipulations than are men, given that women tend to be more attentive to social cues (Eagly, 1987) and show greater attributional complexity (Marsh & Weary, 1989). On the other hand, given that women do not engage in behavioral self-handicapping (Hirt et al., 1991, 2000) and tend to value effort more (McCrea et al., 2000), it may be the case that women view any form of effort withdrawal—whether intentional or unintentional—as unacceptable and thus would be less affected by these manipulations than would men.

On the basis of the notion that women view effort as a normative preperformance behavior, one would anticipate that women would

² There was one theoretically uninteresting interaction of Grade \times Target Sex \times Participant Sex on ratings of future potential, $F(1, 225) = 4.40, p < .05$. Simple effects tests revealed that higher ratings of future potential were given to opposite sex targets in the failure condition. There were no effects in the success condition.

expect (or even demand) effort from others. Therefore, we predicted that women would view inadequate effort as at least suspicious, if not inexcusable, regardless of extenuating circumstances. Thus, even if the target does not initiate the behavior or has already engaged in some prior preparation, we expected that women would still withhold attributional benefits and dislike the target. Men, on the other hand, appear to place less emphasis on effort and therefore should be less demanding of effort in others. Therefore, they should be more willing to rate more favorably targets who were induced to self-handicap by a friend and those who had done some prior preparation, compared with self-initiated self-handicappers and those who had done no prior preparation. Thus, we expected the sex differences found in Study 1 to be exacerbated in situations in which there are plausible alternative explanations for effort withdrawal. However, men and women were both expected to be critical of the self-initiated, no-preparation target because there are no extenuating circumstances that provide plausible justification for the lack of effort. In this case, both men and women should view the target as clearly intending to prepare inadequately. Therefore, Study 2 was designed to examine whether the effect of perceiver sex would be eliminated or enhanced when the self-handicap was made more ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations.

Method

Participants

Participants were 360 introductory psychology students (182 men, 178 women) at Indiana University–Bloomington. They participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Participants were run in groups ranging in size from 2 to 20 members.

Materials

The passage was similar to that used in Study 1. The amount of preparation that Chris had done (some or none), his exam grade (A or D), and initiation of the self-handicap (by Chris himself, by Chris's friend Bob, or no self-handicapping/control) were varied. Because Study 1 found no effects of target sex, Chris was always described as male in Study 2.

We manipulated prior preparation by stating in the first paragraph that Chris "has not done any preparation for tomorrow's exam yet" (no prior preparation condition) or that Chris "has already done some preparation but feels that additional preparation will be helpful" (some prior preparation condition). The no prior preparation condition was used in Study 1, whereas the some prior preparation condition was identical to Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991).

Initiation of the self-handicap was also varied. In the self-initiated passages, Chris initiated the self-handicap by calling his friend Bob and convincing him to go to the movie (as in Study 1). In the other-initiated passages, Bob stopped by and convinced Chris to go see a movie. Chris initially resisted because he "needs to study" (as in Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991). The control condition was identical to that used in Study 1.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of the 12 conditions and passages. The same Study 1 procedure and dependent measures were used in Study 2. In addition, participants were asked to rate Chris on 20 traits

concerning his intelligence and motivation. These trait ratings were made on a 7-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 6 = *extremely*).

Results

Manipulation Check

Performance on the passage information manipulation check was uniformly high (mean number correct = 7.91 out of a possible 8). Thus, participants attended carefully to the passage.

Overview

We combined several dependent measures to create five critical dependent measures. A combined measure of general evaluation was created, as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .77$). In addition, trait ratings concerning motivation ($\alpha = .90$) were combined. Finally, the intelligence-related traits and a measure of Chris's general ability were combined to form a measure of Chris's overall ability ($\alpha = .93$). These data, along with the ability attribution item and the future potential item, were submitted to a 3 (initiation: self/other/control) \times 2 (preparation: some/none) \times 2 (grade: A/D) \times 2 (participant sex: male/female) ANOVA.³

As in Study 1, we present effects including participant sex in a separate section.

Ability Measures

Future potential. As in Study 1, we expected that self-handicapping would result in higher judgments of future potential. In addition, we believed that individuals would see more future potential in other-initiated handicappers and in targets who had some prior preparation, as these individuals would have a plausible alternative explanation for effort withdrawal (i.e., peer pressure and feeling prepared, respectively).

In addition to the predicted main effects of grade, initiation, and preparation (see Table 1), Initiation \times Preparation, $F(2, 336) = 4.65$, $p = .01$, and Initiation \times Grade, $F(2, 336) = 14.07$, $p < .001$, interactions were obtained on the future potential measure. In the success condition, the control target ($M = 4.38$) was predicted to receive a lower score on a future exam than were the other-initiated ($M = 4.98$) and the self-initiated self-handicappers ($M = 5.28$), $F(2, 176) = 8.32$, $p < .001$. This effect was stronger in the failure condition, with the control target ($M = 2.53$) rated much lower than the other-initiated ($M = 4.53$) and the self-initiated ($M = 4.69$) targets, $F(2, 178) = 74.23$, $p < .001$. Thus, both types of self-handicaps were effective in raising judgments of future potential relative to the control target, particularly after failure. Put another way, whereas the control target was rated much lower after a failure than after a success, $t(113) = 7.40$, $p <$

³ In addition to these data, questions concerning Chris's effort and attributions to effort were also included. Analyses of these items confirmed the effectiveness of the primary manipulations. Individuals who had prepared and the control targets were seen as having put forth more effort than those who had not prepared and those who self-handicapped. In addition, results revealed that the success of control targets and the failure of self-handicappers were attributed more to effort, consistent with the ability attribution data.

Table 1
Study 2: Main Effects of Grade, Preparation, and Initiation on Dependent Measures

Measure	Grade		Preparation		Initiation		
	A	D	None	Some	Control	Other	Self
Ability rating	35.60	24.56***	27.86	32.21***	31.37 ^a	30.16 ^a	28.70 ^a
Ability attribution	3.94	2.76***	3.31	3.39	3.60 ^a	3.25 ^a	3.21 ^a
Future potential	4.89	3.96***	4.17	4.67***	3.46 ^a	4.75 ^b	4.98 ^b
Motivation	17.02	14.11***	12.19	18.89***	21.69 ^a	13.47 ^b	11.86 ^c
General evaluation	21.53	18.73***	17.89	22.32***	22.55 ^a	19.45 ^b	18.54 ^b

Note. Means across rows with different superscripts are significantly different at the .05 level, according to Ryan's (1960) post hoc tests.

*** $p < .001$.

.001, this effect was weaker for the self-handicapping targets: for other-initiated self-handicapping, $t(120) = 2.10$, $p < .05$; for self-initiated self-handicapping, $t(121) = 3.65$, $p < .05$.

When the target had done some prior preparation, the control target ($M = 3.95$) was again judged to have lower future potential than were the other-initiated ($M = 4.98$) and self-initiated self-handicappers ($M = 5.03$), $F(2, 178) = 16.19$, $p < .001$. This effect was stronger in the no preparation condition, with the control target ($M = 2.96$) rated much lower than the other-initiated ($M = 4.51$) and the self-initiated ($M = 4.94$) targets, $F(2, 176) = 36.58$, $p < .001$.

It is surprising that both types of handicaps were effective in raising judgments of future potential, even in the case that the target had not done any prior preparation. Participants seemed to believe that self-handicappers could do well if they did put forth more effort.

Ability. As with future potential, we expected that self-handicapping would result in protected judgments of ability, meaning that self-handicappers should be rated more positively following a failure. We expected that these effects would obtain particularly for other-initiated handicappers and targets with some prior preparation. There were main effects of grade, initiation, and preparation (see Table 1); however, self-handicapping was not as effective on this measure as on the future potential measure. The other-initiated self-handicapper tended to be rated higher in ability than the self-initiated handicapper, but both tended to be rated lower than the control target. As predicted, targets who had done some prior preparation were rated higher than were no prior preparation targets.

Ability attribution. As in Study 1, we expected that self-handicapping would result in discounted ability attributions following a poor performance, relative to controls. However, we expected this pattern to be stronger for the other-initiated handicap relative to the self-initiated handicap. In addition, we expected this pattern to be stronger for those who had done some prior preparation.

There was a significant interaction of preparation and grade, $F(1, 336) = 16.19$, $p < .001$. Success was attributed more to ability for targets who had done some prior preparation ($M = 4.26$) than for targets who had not ($M = 3.63$), $t(177) = 3.61$, $p < .001$. Failure was attributed less to ability for targets who had done some

preparation ($M = 2.54$) than for targets who had not prepared ($M = 2.99$), $t(177) = 2.27$, $p < .05$. Thus, the predicted effects of preparation held.

There was a main effect of initiation (see Table 1), indicating that the performance of the self-handicappers tended to be attributed to ability less than for the control target. The predicted Initiation \times Grade interaction did not obtain.

Motivation

Although we believed the self-handicaps would benefit ability-related dimensions, we predicted that behavioral self-handicapping would be detrimental to judgments of motivation. Thus, we expected that the self-handicapping targets, particularly the self-initiated self-handicapper, would be rated lower than the control target on the motivation measure. Similarly, we believed that the no preparation target would be rated less favorably on this measure than would the target with some prior preparation.

Consistent with these predictions, main effects of grade, initiation, and preparation were obtained (see Table 1). The self-initiated self-handicapper was rated as less motivated than were both the other-initiated self-handicapper and the control target. The other-initiated target was also rated lower than was the control. In addition, targets with no prior preparation were rated lower in motivation than were those with some prior preparation.

Preparation \times Grade, Initiation \times Preparation (both $F_s > 4.00$, $p_s < .01$), and Initiation \times Preparation \times Grade interactions were also obtained, $F(2, 332) = 3.74$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2). The Initiation \times Preparation interaction was significant in the failure condition, $F(2, 173) = 11.21$, $p < .001$, but not in the success condition ($F < 1.00$, *ns*). In the failure, no preparation condition, the control target was seen as slightly more motivated than were both the self-initiated and the other-initiated self-handicappers, $F(2, 85) = 13.37$, $p < .001$. These differences were accentuated when the failing target did some preparation, with the control target again viewed as far more motivated than both the self-initiated self-handicapper and the other-initiated self-handicapper, $F(2, 88) = 49.99$, $p < .001$. There were no differences between the self-handicapping targets. Thus, in the failure condition, the con-

Table 2
 Study 2: Initiation \times Preparation \times Grade
 Interaction on Motivation

Grade	Control		Other-initiated		Self-initiated	
	Some	None	Some	None	Some	None
A						
<i>M</i>	27.86	18.89	18.07	11.41	17.03	9.63
<i>SD</i>	4.78	6.87	3.14	3.82	5.48	4.18
D						
<i>M</i>	25.17	14.50	13.84	10.47	12.13	8.97
<i>SD</i>	5.72	4.77	5.63	3.88	4.95	3.92

control target (particularly when he had some prior preparation) was seen as more motivated than were both self-handicapping targets.⁴

General Evaluative Measure

As on the motivation measure, we predicted that self-handicapping targets, particularly the self-initiated self-handicapper and those without prior preparation, would be rated more negatively than would controls and those with some prior preparation. Consistent with these predictions, main effects of grade, preparation, and initiation were found on the general evaluation measure (see Table 1). Targets without prior preparation were evaluated less positively than were those with some prior preparation. The self-handicapping targets were both rated less favorably than was the control, although the self-initiated handicapper tended to be rated the lowest.

Perceiver Sex Differences

As discussed earlier and consistent with Study 1, we believed that women would be more critical of self-handicapping targets. We predicted that men would be more lenient toward the self-handicappers, particularly when there was a plausible alternative explanation for the withdrawal of effort (i.e., some prior preparation or other-initiated handicap). We believed that women, placing a higher value on effort, would regard any type of effort withdrawal as questionable and would therefore be less forgiving, even in these circumstances. Therefore, we predicted that the benefits of self-handicapping for ability judgments would be weakened among female observers and that the negative consequences of self-handicapping for motivation and liking would be stronger among female observers.

Future potential. There were no sex differences on the measure of future potential, indicating that women as well as men were willing to admit that the self-handicapping targets could perform well in the future.

Ability rating. There was an interaction of sex and initiation on the ability rating, $F(2, 334) = 4.57, p < .05$. Women tended to rate the control target higher in ability than did men (men, $M = 30.28$; women, $M = 32.52$), $F(1, 112) = 1.92, p = .17$. However, men tended to rate both the other-initiated (men, $M = 31.10$; women, $M = 29.18$), $F(1, 120) = 1.74, p = .19$, and the self-initiated (men, $M = 29.49$; women, $M = 27.90$), $F(1, 120) = 1.02, p = .31$, self-handicappers as having higher ability than did women. Put

another way, whereas men rated all three targets equivalently ($F < 1.00, ns$), women rated the control target as having more ability than both self-handicapping targets, $F(2, 174) = 4.74, p < .05$. The two self-handicappers did not differ in ability ratings by women. Thus, women evaluated the two self-handicapping targets more negatively than the control target. Conversely, men rated both self-handicapping targets as equivalent in ability to the control target.

Ability attribution. On the measure of attributions to ability, Grade \times Sex, $F(1, 336) = 9.39, p < .01$, and Initiation \times Grade \times Sex interactions, $F(2, 336) = 5.82, p < .01$, were obtained. To interpret this interaction (see Table 3), we examined the success and failure conditions separately to see whether men and women differentially augmented or discounted ability attributions for the handicappers. We predicted that men would be more lenient in their attributions of ability, particularly when evaluating an other-initiated self-handicapper. The predicted Initiation \times Sex interaction held for success, $F(2, 173) = 4.82, p < .01$, but not for failure, $F(2, 175) = 1.96, ns$.

For men, attributions of ability following a success were augmented above the control target for the other-initiated handicapper but not for the self-initiated handicapper, $F(2, 87) = 4.79, p < .05$. Women, on the other hand, tended to attribute the success of both the self-initiated and the other-initiated targets to ability less than for the control, $F(2, 86) = 2.79, p < .06$.

In the case of failure, the main effects of sex, $F(1, 175) = 3.99, p < .05$, and initiation, $F(2, 175) = 3.25, p < .05$, were significant, indicating that men attributed failure less to ability, and perceivers did, overall, discount ability attributions for the other-initiated (but not self-initiated) self-handicapping targets. As can be seen in Table 3, these effects seemed to be mostly driven by the discounting of ability attributions for the other-initiated target by male perceivers.

Thus, other-initiated self-handicaps but not self-initiated self-handicaps effectively discounted failure and augmented success with male perceivers. Neither self-handicap was effective at preserving or enhancing ability attributions with female perceivers following success. In fact, women actually discounted success for the self-handicappers. Furthermore, female observers did not discount failure for either self-handicapping target.

Motivation

We predicted that men would view the self-handicapping targets as more motivated than would women, particularly when the handicap was other initiated and when the target had done some

⁴ In addition to the motivation measure, we also assessed perceived laziness. On this measure, the Initiation \times Preparation interaction was significant, $F(2, 331) = 5.41, p < .01$. In the no prior preparation condition, the self-initiated ($M = 24.78$) and other-initiated ($M = 25.05$) self-handicappers were both seen as significantly more lazy than the control target ($M = 19.58$), $F(2, 175) = 13.27, p < .001$, although this difference was more pronounced when the target had done prior preparation (self-initiated, $M = 20.18$; other-initiated, $M = 19.92$; control, $M = 10.38$), $F(2, 175) = 49.33, p < .001$. These results mirror the results obtained on the motivation measure, illustrating an overall preference for the control target, particularly when he did some prior preparation.

Table 3
Study 2: Initiation × Grade × Sex Interaction
on Ability Attributions

Sex	Control		Other-initiated		Self-initiated	
	A	D	A	D	A	D
Men						
<i>M</i>	3.80	2.55	4.63	2.06	4.03	3.14
<i>SD</i>	1.35	1.21	0.96	1.16	0.85	1.33
Women						
<i>M</i>	3.55	2.97	3.50	2.90	4.18	3.04
<i>SD</i>	1.31	1.40	1.11	1.52	1.22	1.10

prior preparation. Consistent with these predictions, men ($M = 16.18$) believed that Chris was more motivated than did women ($M = 14.93$), $F(1, 332) = 4.24, p < .05$. There was also a significant Initiation × Preparation × Sex interaction, $F(2, 332) = 3.05, p < .05$ (see Table 4). When the target had done some prior preparation, there was a marginal Initiation × Sex interaction, $F(2, 173) = 2.80, p = .06$. Whereas women tended to rate the control target as more motivated than did men, $t(56) = -1.73, p < .09$, men tended to rate the other-initiated self-handicapping target more positively than did women, $t(60) = 1.36, p = .18$. There was no difference in ratings of the self-initiated target ($t = 1.00, ns$). Put another way, both men, $F(2, 90) = 34.15, p < .001$, and women, $F(2, 83) = 54.56, p < .001$, rated the control target as more motivated than the handicappers, but this difference was much stronger for women than for men.

When the target had not done any prior preparation, the Initiation × Sex interaction was not significant, $F(2, 171) = 1.56, ns$, although there was a reliable sex main effect such that men rated the targets as more motivated than did women, $F(1, 171) = 6.15, p < .05$.

In summary, men were more lenient in rating the motivation of the self-handicapping targets, consistent with our predictions. Men rated the other-initiated target as more motivated than did women. Men also rated targets who had done no prior preparation more positively than did women. Thus, it was actually women who showed more sensitivity to the preparation variable on this measure, rating the no prior preparation targets as particularly unmotivated.

General Evaluative Measure

We predicted that, as in Study 1, men would rate the self-handicapping targets more favorably. We believed that this effect would be stronger for the other-initiated self-handicapper and the targets who had some prior preparation.

As in Study 1, men ($M = 21.02$) liked Chris more than did women ($M = 19.20$), $F(1, 335) = 6.63, p < .05$. A significant Initiation × Sex interaction was also obtained on the evaluation measure, $F(2, 335) = 5.24, p < .01$. There were no differences in liking for the control target (men, $M = 21.92$; women, $M = 23.24$), $F(1, 112) = 1.01, ns$. Men ($M = 19.79$) more positively evaluated the self-initiated target than did women ($M = 17.32$), $F(1, 121) = 3.93, p = .05$. This pattern was stronger for the other-initiated self-handicapper (men, $M = 21.39$; women, $M = 17.45$),

$F(1, 120) = 12.74, p = .001$. Put another way, men rated the three targets equivalently in liking, $F(2, 179) = 1.65, p > .19$, whereas women rated the control target more positively than both self-handicappers, $F(2, 174) = 14.68, p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 2 investigated whether men and women differ in their reactions to a self-handicapping target when the amount of prior preparation and initiation of the self-handicap are varied. The prior preparation variable consistently resulted in main effects (and few interactions with sex), indicating that both men and women were sensitive to how much effort the target put forth. However, the results indicate that men but not women were sensitive to the initiation of the self-handicap. Men showed greater leniency in their evaluation of the other-initiated self-handicapper, displaying both augmenting and discounting in their ability attributions of these targets. Women, on the other hand, were unaffected by the initiation variable, consistently rating both handicappers negatively and showing no evidence of augmenting or discounting in their ability ratings or attributions. Although both men and women acknowledged that the self-handicappers had the potential to do well in the future, it seems from the ratings of ability and motivation that women did not expect this future potential to be realized.

The results of Study 2 have several important implications. First, these results attest to the robustness of these sex differences in perceptions of self-handicapping. We predicted that making the self-handicap open to alternative explanations would allow male perceivers to view the handicap as more acceptable, whereas women would not change their view that any type of effort withdrawal is unacceptable. Consistent with these predictions, we found that variations in the initiation of the handicap exacerbated differences in the reactions of men and women rather than eliminating these differences. As in Study 1, men perceived the self-initiated handicapper more favorably than did women. However, men were even more favorable in their evaluations of the other-initiated self-handicapper, presumably acknowledging that other-initiated handicaps are less intentional and are therefore open to a

Table 4
Study 2: Mean Level of Motivation Ascribed to the Target as a Function of Initiation, Preparation, and Sex

Condition	Control	Self	Other
Men			
No preparation			
<i>M</i>	17.86	9.32	12.38
<i>SD</i>	6.51	4.04	3.53
Some preparation			
<i>M</i>	25.31	15.26	16.70
<i>SD</i>	5.70	5.09	4.46
Women			
No preparation			
<i>M</i>	15.44	9.29	9.53
<i>SD</i>	5.85	4.09	3.66
Some preparation			
<i>M</i>	27.72	13.75	14.97
<i>SD</i>	4.88	6.36	5.55

broader range of other interpretations, such as peer pressure, than are self-initiated handicaps (see also Baumgardner & Levy, 1988; Weiner, 1995). Men appear more willing to give the self-handicapper the benefit of the doubt when another explanation for the target's behavior is possible. Women, on the other hand, consistently showed a strong preference for the control target and were more critical of both self-handicappers. Women as well as men evaluated targets who put forth some prior preparation more favorably than targets who did not do any prior preparation, further attesting to the importance they place on the expenditure of effort in performance situations. It appears that women conclude that anyone who does not put forth adequate effort is unmotivated and irresponsible, regardless of whether the self-handicap is initiated by the actor or by another person. These findings imply that the success of self-handicapping as an impression management tool differs as a function of perceiver sex.

To what can we then attribute these consistent sex differences? We have argued that women appear to value hard work and effort to a greater extent than do men. Men, on the other hand, appear to value perceptions of competence and ability far more than do women (cf. McCrea et al., 2000). These differences in beliefs about effort may explain why only men self-handicap behaviorally. The present results suggest that these different value systems might not only affect men's and women's own reactions and behavior but also extend to their evaluations of others. We believe that the differential importance placed on effort leads men and women to infer different motives for self-handicapping targets. The greater sensitivity of men to the initiation variable in Study 2 suggests that men may be more likely to infer situational motives about the target than are women, particularly when there are mitigating circumstances (e.g., prior preparation or other initiation), leading them to evaluate the target more favorably. Women, on the other hand, do not appear to discriminate between the self-initiated and other-initiated target, suggesting that they may simply make negative dispositional attributions to any target who withdraws effort. Thus, we propose that differences in judgments may be mediated by underlying differences in the motives drawn for the target's actions.

To this point, we have only indirectly assessed the motives participants infer about the target by examining their judgments and evaluations. However, it is important to look directly at the motives that perceivers infer about targets who self-handicap. Given that effort withdrawal violates women's normative expectations in performance situations, we can derive several predictions. First, we expect that women will be more likely to draw correspondent negative dispositional inferences about the target, consistent with the work in attribution theory on expectancy violation (cf. Hastie, 1984). Women may also be more suspicious about the target's effort withdrawal and may actually entertain the possibility that the target is strategically withdrawing effort. Because men do not have the same normative expectations regarding effort, they should be less surprised by effort withdrawal and more willing to consider situational attributions for such behavior. From this perspective, we might also expect that men will be less suspicious of ulterior motives for effort withdrawal. This is a particularly intriguing prediction, given that men are more likely to engage in behavioral self-handicapping. To date, the self-handicapping literature has not assessed individuals' awareness of the motive of

self-handicapping in the behavior of self or others, nor what the consequences for judgment might be in the case in which the perceiver correctly ascertains this motive. Therefore, we conducted a third study to directly assess the motives men and women infer about targets who behaviorally self-handicap. Our primary goal in Study 3 was to examine whether differences in inferred motives mediate the sex differences observed in the evaluation of self-handicapping targets.

Study 3

Method

Participants

Participants were 287 (124 men, 163 women) introductory psychology students at Indiana University–Bloomington. They were given credit toward a research requirement in return for participation.

Procedure

Study 3 used the same descriptions used in Study 2, with the exception that the control/no self-handicapping condition was excluded. This condition was omitted because the focus of the present study was on the motives inferred by perceivers of a self-handicapper.

Following the ratings, participants were asked to take a few moments to think about and write down the reasons or motives that might have led Chris to go to the movie. After completing this open-ended measure, participants were given a list of possible motives and were asked to indicate, on a 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) scale, the extent to which they believed each motive was important in Chris's decision. These seven motives were derived from a pretest ($N = 67$) in which we presented a set of individuals with one of the experimental passages from Study 2 and asked them to write down the reasons or motives for Chris's behavior. From this list, we distilled a set of five motives that commonly appeared. Two motives were related to personality characteristics of Chris: "He lacks discipline and self-control and just wanted to see the movie instead of study," and "He is unmotivated and just doesn't care about his grade in the class." Three motives were more situationally determined causes for his behavior: "He was getting too stressed out/anxious about the test and needed a study break," "He felt that he was already prepared enough," and "He felt peer pressure to go out." Although it did not appear as often, some pretest participants did generate responses directly related to the self-handicapping motives. In the present study, we decided to separate self-handicapping into two different motives: "He wanted to use going out as an excuse in case he might not do well on the test" (i.e., discounting) and "He wanted to show that he could do well without studying/show off how smart he is" (i.e., augmenting).

Results and Discussion

Overview

We first report the findings on the primary dependent measures, emphasizing the perceiver sex differences obtained on these measures. We next turn to an analysis of the motives that perceivers infer. Finally, we report the results of Baron and Kenny (1986) mediational analyses testing the degree to which differences in inferred motives mediate the perceiver sex differences in evaluation of self-handicappers. Given that this final set of analyses reports the extent to which the motive variables mediate the prediction of the primary dependent measures, we report all sig-

nificant effects for the primary dependent measures in terms of regression coefficients to facilitate later comparisons with the mediational analyses.

Future Potential

On the future potential measure, we also obtained main effects of initiation ($\beta = .47$), $t(275) = 2.30$, $p < .05$, and grade ($\beta = .73$), $t(275) = 6.88$, $p < .001$. Again, other-initiated targets and targets who succeeded were seen as likely to do better in the future than self-initiated targets and targets who failed. No main effects or interactions with sex were obtained on this measure. Thus, as in Study 2, despite the fact that women failed to give the same attributional benefits to the handicapper that men did, women as well as men acknowledged the target's future potential.

Ability Ratings

For ability ratings, main effects of initiation ($\beta = .92$), $t(275) = 3.90$, $p < .001$, preparation ($\beta = .60$), $t(275) = 2.34$, $p < .05$, grade ($\beta = .98$), $t(275) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, and sex ($\beta = .81$), $t(275) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, were obtained. Participants rated the other-initiated target, the target who did some preparation, and the target who received an A as having greater ability. Overall, men gave the target higher ability ratings than did women. However, this main effect was qualified by an Initiation \times Sex interaction ($\beta = .59$), $t(275) = 2.00$, $p < .05$. The difference in men's and women's ability ratings was greater in the other-initiated ($t > 3.00$, $p < .05$) than in the self-initiated condition ($t < 1.00$, *ns*).

Attributions to Ability

For attributions to ability, we obtained main effects of initiation ($\beta = .64$), $t(275) = 2.20$, $p = .035$, and grade ($\beta = 1.19$), $t(275) = 9.48$, $p < .001$. However, these main effects were qualified by Initiation \times Grade ($\beta = .90$), $t(275) = 2.63$, $p = .01$, and Initiation \times Grade \times Sex interactions ($\beta = .82$), $t(275) = 2.43$, $p = .02$. Participants, overall, attributed greater ability to the other-initiated target who succeeded than to the self-initiated target who succeeded; conversely, participants made fewer attributions of ability to the other-initiated target who failed than to the self-initiated target who failed. This pattern held true only for men, whereas women made similar attributions to both the self-initiated and the other-initiated targets. Thus, paralleling Study 2, men

made more favorable ability ratings and attributions to ability than did women, particularly for the other-initiated handicapper.

General Evaluative Measure

On the general evaluation measure, we observed main effects of preparation ($\beta = .64$), $t(275) = 2.13$, $p < .05$, grade ($\beta = .70$), $t(275) = 2.33$, $p = .02$, and sex ($\beta = 1.12$), $t(275) = 3.27$, $p < .001$. Participants liked the target who did some preparation or succeeded much more than targets who did no preparation or failed. Overall, men liked the target more than did women. In addition, there was a significant Initiation \times Grade interaction ($\beta = .75$), $t(275) = 2.20$, $p < .05$. When the target failed, participants rated the self-initiated target significantly more negatively than the other-initiated target ($t > 2.50$, $p < .01$); for success, liking for self-initiated and other-initiated targets did not differ ($t < 1.00$, *ns*). Thus, paralleling the results on the ability measures, women showed greater dislike for self-handicappers than did men.

Perceived Motives

We next examined the motives attributed to the target's behavior. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each of the seven motives may have contributed to Chris's behavior. Table 5 presents the intercorrelations among the various motives. In general, the correlations among the different motives were quite modest (in the .2–.3 range), with the highest correlation between "unmotivated" and "lacks discipline and self-control," $r(287) = .48$, $p < .001$. Were participants, overall, more likely to endorse certain motives over others? As an initial analysis, we treated these seven motives as a repeated measure and examined the variability in endorsement of the different motives. This analysis revealed a main effect of motive, $F(6, 250) = 89.06$, $p < .0001$. Overall, participants endorsed the "lacks discipline and self-control" motive most strongly ($M = 3.51$), followed by the "overstressed/needs a study break" ($M = 3.15$) and "feels prepared enough" ($M = 2.95$) motives, which did not differ from one another. The "peer pressure" and "excuse for poor performance" motives ($M_s = 2.42$) were endorsed moderately, followed by the "unmotivated" motive ($M = 2.13$). The "showoff good performance" motive was endorsed significantly less than any of the other motives ($M = 1.57$). Thus, it is clear that the two self-

Table 5
Study 3: Intercorrelations Among the Seven Different Motives

Motive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Unmotivated	—						
2. Lacks discipline	.48***	—					
3. Peer pressure	-.07	.02	—				
4. Felt prepared	-.31***	-.26***	-.15*	—			
5. Needed break	-.23***	-.15*	-.03	.23***	—		
6. Excuse for failure	.22***	.25***	.02	-.14*	-.10	—	
7. Show off success	.18**	.27***	-.02	.16**	.01	.26**	—

Note. In all cases, $N = 287$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

handicapping motives of discounting (“excuse”) and augmenting (“showoff”) were endorsed less often than the other available motives. Of those two, the discounting motive was the one most frequently endorsed by our participants.

As expected, endorsement of these different motives varied as a function of our independent variables. Significant interactions of our repeated measure (motive) with the initiation condition, $F(6, 250) = 78.68, p < .001$, preparation condition, $F(6, 250) = 16.23, p < .001$, and grade, $F(6, 250) = 13.48, p < .001$, were obtained. For the most part, these effects simply confirm the effectiveness of our manipulations. More important, a significant interaction between motive and sex of participant was obtained, $F(6, 250) = 2.40, p < .05$. Thus, the data reveal that men and women differed in their endorsement of the different motives. These perceiver sex differences in inferred motives are further probed in subsequent univariate analyses.

Dispositional Motives

An ANOVA performed on the “unmotivated” motive revealed main effects of initiation, $F(1, 255) = 4.05, p < .05$, preparation, $F(1, 255) = 19.68, p < .001$, grade, $F(1, 255) = 23.79, p < .001$, and sex, $F(1, 255) = 10.36, p < .001$. Participants attributed the target’s behavior more to lack of motivation in the self-initiated condition ($M_s = 2.29$ vs. 2.01) when the target did no prior preparation ($M_s = 2.47$ vs. 1.83) and when the target failed ($M_s = 2.51$ vs. 1.79). Women in general ($M = 2.40$) believed the target’s actions, overall, reflected a lack of motivation more than did men ($M = 1.90$).

The “lacks discipline and self-control” motive revealed significant main effects of preparation, $F(1, 255) = 10.34, p < .001$, and grade, $F(1, 255) = 22.99, p < .001$, and a marginal effect of sex, $F(1, 255) = 2.90, p = .09$. Participants attributed the behavior of the target more to a lack of discipline and self-control when he did no prior preparation ($M = 3.84$) or failed ($M = 3.96$) than when he did some preparation ($M = 3.23$) or succeeded ($M = 3.11$). Women ($M = 3.68$) tended to attribute the target’s behavior more to a lack of discipline and self-control than did men ($M = 3.39$). In addition, we found significant Initiation \times Grade, $F(1, 255) = 3.86, p < .05$, and Preparation \times Grade \times Sex, $F(1, 255) = 4.63, p < .05$, interactions. The Initiation \times Grade interaction indicated that participants were more likely to attribute this motive to the self-initiated target who failed ($M = 4.17$) than to any other target ($M_s = 2.98, 3.24, 3.57$), all $t_s > 2.00, p_s < .05$. The Preparation \times Grade \times Sex interaction revealed that although both men and women attributed failure by the no preparation target to lack of discipline and self-control ($M_s = 4.26$ and 4.12), women (but not men) also attributed success by the no preparation target ($M_s = 3.93$ vs. 3.07), $t(68) > 2.20, p < .05$, and even failure by the some preparation target ($M_s = 3.99$ vs. 3.46), $t(70) = 1.8, p < .10$, to this motive. Neither women nor men endorsed this motive strongly for success by the target who did some prior preparation ($M_s = 2.78$ and 2.68).

In sum, an examination of the pattern of results on these dispositional motives indicates that for both motives, women were far more likely to ascribe negative dispositional motives to a target who self-handicaps than were men.

Situational Motives

Analyses performed on the three situational motives revealed no sex effects. Thus, men were no more likely to infer the situational motives of the target’s actions than were women. The “peer pressure” motive revealed only a main effect of initiation, $F(1, 255) = 407.10, p < .001$. Participants rated the other-initiated target ($M = 4.11$) as responding more to peer pressure than the self-initiated target ($M = 0.79$). This effect reflects little more than a manipulation check of the initiation manipulation.

Similarly, the “felt prepared enough” motive showed a main effect of preparation, $F(1, 255) = 86.67, p < .001$. However, main effects of initiation, $F(1, 255) = 22.09, p < .001$, and grade, $F(1, 255) = 52.28, p < .001$, were also obtained. Participants attributed the motive of feeling sufficiently prepared more to the self-initiated target ($M_s = 3.33$ vs. 2.58) or the target who succeeded ($M_s = 3.55$ vs. 2.36). Finally, a Preparation \times Grade interaction was found, $F(1, 255) = 4.13, p < .05$. Participants rated the behavior of the target who did no preparation and failed ($M = 1.45$) as less reflective of the “feeling prepared” motive than the behavior of any of the other targets ($M_s = 3.00, 4.10, \text{ and } 3.27$; all $t_s > 2.50, p_s < .05$).

The “needed a study break/stress reduction” motive revealed significant main effects of both preparation, $F(1, 255) = 9.00, p < .01$, and initiation, $F(1, 255) = 4.38, p < .05$. Participants attributed this motive more to the target who had already done some prior preparation ($M_s = 3.48$ vs. 2.87) and tended to attribute the need for a break/stress reduction more to the self-initiated target ($M_s = 3.39$ vs. 2.96).

Self-Handicapping Motives

For the excuse/discounting motive, we obtained main effects of both preparation, $F(1, 255) = 6.29, p < .02$, and sex, $F(1, 255) = 4.63, p < .05$. Participants in the no preparation condition were more likely to attribute the motive of discounting to Chris than were those in the preparation condition ($M_s = 2.64$ vs. 2.16, respectively). In addition, women ($M = 2.62$) were more likely to endorse the discounting motive than were men ($M = 2.19$). This analysis also revealed significant Initiation \times Grade, $F(1, 255) = 4.07, p < .05$, and Initiation \times Preparation \times Sex interactions, $F(1, 255) = 4.56, p < .05$. The Initiation \times Grade interaction indicated that participants attributed this discounting motive more to the self-initiated handicapper who failed ($M = 2.74$) than to any of the other targets ($M_s = 2.10, 2.44, 2.33$; all $t_s > 2.00, p_s < .05$). Simple effects analyses of the three-way interaction showed that women were far more likely to attribute the discounting motive to Chris in the self-initiated/no preparation condition ($M = 3.11$) than were men ($M = 2.11$; $t > 4.00, p < .01$). In all other conditions, attributions of this motive did not differ between men and women (all $t_s < 1.00, ns$). Thus, in the condition that we felt a priori to be most indicative of self-handicapping, women clearly attributed the discounting motive to the target to a greater extent than did men.

For the show off/augmenting motive, we obtained main effects of both initiation, $F(1, 255) = 8.03, p < .01$, and sex, $F(1, 255) = 5.26, p < .05$. Participants in the self-initiated condition were more likely to endorse the augmenting motive ($M = 1.76$)

than were participants in the other-initiated condition ($M = 1.34$). As with the discounting motive, women ($M = 1.74$) were more likely to attribute the augmenting motive than were men ($M = 1.36$). There was also a significant Preparation \times Grade interaction, $F(1, 255) = 5.64, p < .05$. Participants attributed the augmenting motivation more when Chris did no preparation and received an A ($M = 1.76$) than in any of the other conditions ($M_s = 1.36, 1.48, 1.40; t_s > 3.00, p_s < .05$).

These data indicate that women, overall, are much more likely to ascribe self-handicapping motives to the target's behavior. Moreover, it appears that women are particularly likely to attribute these motives to the self-initiated target who does no preparation, whereas men are not.

Open-Ended Responses to the Motive Question

One concern the reader might have with the motive results is that participants were prompted to endorse these motives using a scale, which perhaps caused them to consider or place greater emphasis on certain motives over others. To address this concern, we examined participants' responses to the open-ended question given just prior to the endorsement of the motives. Participants were asked why they thought Chris went to the movies before his exam. Two judges who were unaware of the experimental hypotheses coded these responses. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion. The judges were instructed to code responses into the same seven motive categories or into a miscellaneous category if a particular response did not fit the list of motives. Only a small percentage (7%) of responses did not fall into one of the seven motive categories. As one might imagine, some participants listed only a single motive in their responses, whereas other participants listed several different motives. We then analyzed these responses using a multivariate ANOVA. Consistent with our findings on the rating scales, we observed a Motive \times Preparation \times Sex interaction, $F(6, 1614) = 2.12, p < .05$. Simple effects tests revealed sex differences in the mentioning of both the "excuse self-handicapping" and "lacks discipline" motives, particularly in the no prior preparation condition. Subsequent univariate analyses revealed that women were more likely to explain no prior preparation as reflecting Chris's lack of discipline and self-control ($M = 0.59$) than were men ($M = 0.40$) and that women were more likely to mention the possibility that Chris was trying to excuse a poor performance. Although only a handful (8) of respondents explicitly mentioned self-handicapping motives in their explanations, all of them happened to be women. Here is an example of one of these spontaneously generated responses illustrative of a self-handicapping motive: "By going out you can use that as a lame excuse for getting a bad grade, but if you do well you feel great about it." Thus, even in the open-ended responses, we see similar patterns of response by women.

Which Motives Underlie Participants' Attributions and Feelings About the Target?

Finally, we investigated whether the observed sex differences in reactions to self-handicapping targets were mediated by differences in the motives perceived to be underlying the target's actions. To address the mediating role of perceived motives in

participants' ratings of the target, we conducted a series of regression analyses following the procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). These authors have argued that evidence for mediation requires that (a) the independent variable should predict the outcome variable, (b) the independent variable should predict the hypothesized mediator, and (c) the mediator should predict the outcome variable even after the independent variable is controlled for. As we reported earlier, our analyses revealed evidence that our independent variables model (which consisted of 4 dummy coded factors—initiation, preparation, grade, and participant sex—as well as all of their multiplicative interaction terms, for a total of 15 terms) significantly predicted all of the outcome variables (ability ratings, attributions to ability, future potential, and general evaluation ratings) as well as each of the proposed mediators (the seven motives), thereby satisfying Parts a and b of the test for mediation. Finally, we tested the proposed mediational model (Step c) by adding the seven motive variables (entered in three separate blocks representing the two dispositional motives, the three situational motives, and the two self-handicapping motives) to the prediction equation of each of the outcome variables, controlling for the independent variables model. We centered all continuous variables by subtracting their means prior to entering them (Aiken & West, 1991). The results of these regression analyses are presented in Table 6.

The results of these regression analyses reveal a remarkably consistent pattern. Perceptions of the dispositional and self-handicapping motives consistently contributed significantly to the predictions of participants' feelings and attributions about the target, whereas the situational motives contributed very little. Thus, these motive terms significantly predicted participants' ratings of the target, even after we controlled for the independent variables. Moreover, in all cases, the addition of these motive terms reduced the significant terms in the original independent variables model—most important, all of the main effects and interactions involving perceiver sex—to nonsignificance, implying that the perceptions of these motives mediated the observed perceiver sex differences in ratings and judgments of the target. Thus, it appears that women's negative evaluations of self-handicapping targets result from their greater propensity to infer negative dispositional or self-handicapping motives for the target's actions.

General Discussion

Our primary goals in the present set of studies were to examine the effectiveness of behavioral self-handicapping as an impression management strategy as well as to explore possible explanations for the often observed sex differences in behavioral self-handicapping. Our results find that women consistently rated self-handicappers more negatively than did men and illustrate that these differences in evaluation of self-handicapping targets were mediated by differences in perceived motives. We discuss each of these facets in turn, highlighting their implications for understanding the effectiveness of self-handicapping as an impression management strategy as well as for elucidating ideas for future research on self-handicapping.

Table 6
Regression Results Testing the Mediation Role of Motives in Predicting Judgments of Target

Dependent variable	Independent variables model			Mediation model			<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2
	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>				
Ability ratings										
Independent variables model							16.04	15, 270	.001	.45
Initiation	.92	3.90	.001	.18	0.73	<i>ns</i>				
Preparation	.60	2.34	.02	.04	0.21	<i>ns</i>				
Grade	.98	3.85	.001	.91	3.73	.001				
Sex	.81	3.05	.003	.22	0.50	<i>ns</i>				
Initiation \times Sex	.59	2.00	.047	.30	0.52	<i>ns</i>				
Dispositional motives							2.56	2, 268	.079	.01
Unmotivated				.01	0.10	<i>ns</i>				
Lacks discipline				.01	0.27	<i>ns</i>				
Situational motives							0.83	3, 265	<i>ns</i>	.005
Peer pressure				.12	1.72	.086				
Felt prepared				.06	1.06	<i>ns</i>				
Needed study break				.06	1.42	<i>ns</i>				
Self-handicapping motives							20.90	2, 263	.001	.07
Excuse for failure				.07	1.60	.11				
Show off success				.28	5.85	.000				
Attributions to ability										
Independent variables model							7.81	15, 270	.001	.29
Initiation	.64	2.20	.03	.42	0.83	<i>ns</i>				
Preparation	.08	0.33	<i>ns</i>	.02	0.12	<i>ns</i>				
Grade	1.19	9.48	.001	.18	0.63	<i>ns</i>				
Sex	.18	0.68	<i>ns</i>	.13	0.61	<i>ns</i>				
Initiation \times Grade	.90	2.63	.009	.67	1.29	<i>ns</i>				
Initiation \times Grade \times Sex	.82	2.43	.02	.60	1.10	<i>ns</i>				
Dispositional motives							4.19	2, 268	.016	.02
Unmotivated				.01	0.14	<i>ns</i>				
Lacks discipline				.12	1.97	.05				
Situational motives							1.34	3, 265	<i>ns</i>	.009
Peer pressure				.00	0.05	<i>ns</i>				
Felt prepared				.17	2.60	.01				
Needed study break				.03	0.55	<i>ns</i>				
Self-handicapping motives							13.50	2, 263	.001	.06
Excuse for failure				.23	4.34	.000				
Show off success				.21	3.81	.000				
Future potential										
Independent variables model							4.41	15, 270	.001	.19
Initiation	.47	2.30	.022	.40	1.25	<i>ns</i>				
Preparation	.18	1.62	.106	.22	0.91	<i>ns</i>				
Grade	.73	6.88	.001	.16	0.52	<i>ns</i>				
Sex	.20	1.68	.093	.02	0.04	<i>ns</i>				
Dispositional motives							5.97	2, 268	.003	.04
Unmotivated				.16	2.40	.017				
Lacks discipline				.24	3.61	.000				
Situational motives							0.53	3, 265	<i>ns</i>	.004
Peer pressure				.03	0.35	<i>ns</i>				
Felt prepared				.05	0.64	<i>ns</i>				
Needed study break				.07	1.17	<i>ns</i>				
Self-handicapping motives							1.90	2, 263	.147	.01
Excuse for failure				.02	0.29	<i>ns</i>				
Show off success				.12	1.96	.05				

Table 6 (continued)

Dependent variable	Independent variables model			Mediational model			<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	ΔR^2
	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>				
General evaluation										
Independent variables model							6.80	15, 270	.001	.23
Initiation	.03	0.65	<i>ns</i>	.30	1.04	<i>ns</i>				
Preparation	.64	2.13	.034	.20	0.91	<i>ns</i>				
Grade	.70	2.33	.02	.27	0.97	<i>ns</i>				
Sex	1.12	3.27	.001	.69	1.35	<i>ns</i>				
Initiation \times Grade	.75	2.20	.029	.41	1.25	<i>ns</i>				
Dispositional motives							19.81	2, 268	.001	.10
Unmotivated				.14	2.36	.019				
Lacks discipline				.17	2.86	.005				
Situational motives							3.24	3, 265	.023	.02
Peer pressure				.03	0.36	<i>ns</i>				
Felt prepared				.21	3.19	.002				
Needed study break				.03	0.61	<i>ns</i>				
Self-handicapping motives							4.81	2, 263	.009	.023
Excuse for failure				.13	2.42	.017				
Show off success				.07	1.33	<i>ns</i>				

Note. In these regression models, the independent variables model included initiation, preparation, grade, and participant sex and their multiplicative interactions. Only those terms that were significant in this earlier model are presented. The mediational model adds the motive variables to the regression equation predicting each of the dependent variables. The beta weights of each of the mediators as well as the changes in betas for the significant terms from the independent variables model are reported.

Characteristics of the Self-Handicap

Consistent with past research (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Rhodewalt et al., 1995), the present research illustrates the trade-offs inherent in self-handicapping. The attributional benefits accrued by the self-handicapper are offset by considerable interpersonal costs: Self-handicapping targets are disliked more and are rated more negatively on a broad range of characterological dimensions. The present research adds to this past research by examining the impact of several context variables, in particular whether the self-handicap is initiated by the target or by another person and whether the self-handicapper has done some prior preparation, on the evaluation of self-handicapping targets. These variables were found to have a consistent impact on the reactions of observers. Lack of any prior preparation and initiating the self-handicap appear to undermine the effectiveness of behavioral self-handicaps, because these variables raise the suspiciousness of the target's motives and make negative dispositional inferences more likely. In particular, these situations greatly reduce or eliminate the possibility of attributing effort withdrawal to motives such as that the target buckled under peer-pressure or already felt prepared enough. Without such alternative explanations, observers are more likely to conclude that the self-handicapper is trying to manipulate others' impressions or is simply lazy and irresponsible. In either case, the self-handicapper is more disliked and receives fewer attributional benefits.

One aspect the initiation and preparation variables have in common is the degree of intentionality or control the self-handicapper is assumed to have over his or her actions. The self-initiated, no preparation self-handicapper had a great deal of control over his or her self-defeating actions, making perceivers

suspicious that his or her motivation was indeed self-handicapping. It is clear from the present set of studies that effort withdrawal is a more successful attributional strategy when it is not construed as self-handicapping. Self-handicapping does not seem to be tolerated when its true purposes are exposed. On the other hand, the behavior of somewhat prepared and other-initiated self-handicappers is more open to alternative, situation-specific reasons for their behavior and thus is more likely to yield more positive reactions from observers. Future research should examine whether controllability underlies the effects of these different variables.

Sex Differences in Reactions to Self-Handicapping

Another primary focus of the present work was to examine the role of sex differences in audience reactions to self-handicapping. Our results from Study 1 found no evidence that perceivers make different attributions for male and female targets, even in scenarios in which the target engaged in behavioral self-handicapping. Thus, it does not appear that female targets receive fewer attributional benefits than do male targets; indeed, the interpersonal cost-benefit ratio of self-handicapping was strikingly high for all targets, further attesting to the counterproductive nature of this strategy (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Clearly, before we can draw definitive conclusions, it is important for future research to determine whether our results are generalizable across a wide range of behavioral and self-reported handicaps. That is, would a woman who uses alcohol or drugs as a self-handicap be afforded the same benefits as (or accrue greater costs than) a man? Would a man who claims to be depressed be evaluated the same as a woman who makes the same claim? There may be situations in which male and

female targets do receive different evaluations despite using the same behavior.

However, we did observe a number of consistent effects of perceiver sex. Our results indicate that men were far more lenient in their attributions of self-handicapping targets than were women. Women routinely made more negative evaluations of the self-handicapping targets relative to the control (nonself-handicapping) targets, particularly on interpersonal and characterological dimensions. Women were less willing than men to excuse self-handicapping even when alternative explanations for effort withdrawal (e.g., peer pressure) were viable. This pattern emerged consistently across all three studies, indicating that perceiver sex plays an important role in determining observer reactions to self-handicapping.

To explain these consistent sex differences, we hypothesized that women value effort and expect it from others more than do men. Given that women are more likely to respond to evaluative threat and uncertainty with increased effort (Hirt et al., 2000) and value effort over competence (cf. Cooper et al., 1981; Gaeddert, 1985; McCrea et al., 2000; Sutherland & Veroff, 1985; Travis et al., 1988), they are more likely to consider inadequate effort as a norm violation and thus attribute this behavior to either stable characteristics of the target or ulterior motives. Our results consistently show that the responses of women were sensitive to the amount of prior preparation of the target but were largely unaffected by the initiation variable. Indeed, in Study 3, women were more likely to attribute lack of preparation to dispositional causes such as laziness or lack of self-control or to ulterior self-handicapping motives. It is interesting that women did not appear to be less likely to attribute the behavior to situational causes than were men; thus, it is not the case that women ignore potential situational attributions for the target's actions. Instead, our data indicate that men are simply less likely than are women to attribute inadequate effort to more negative dispositional or self-handicapping motives, at least when there are extenuating circumstances. Men only seemed to acknowledge dispositional causes for effort withdrawal in the most extreme case of the self-initiated/no preparation target. Moreover, on both open-ended and rating scale measures, women alone seem to acknowledge the potential ulterior motive of self-handicapping for effort withdrawal. When these differences in ascribed motives were controlled for statistically, sex differences in patterns of attribution and liking were eliminated. Particularly noteworthy from our perspective is the fact that suspicion of self-handicapping motives played a consistently important mediating role in the observed sex differences in evaluation.⁵

Indeed, we believe that these sex differences in perception of self-handicapping reflect a more fundamental difference between men and women in what they value in performance settings. Elsewhere, Hirt and colleagues (Hirt et al., 1991, 2000) have argued that men may be more willing to incur greater costs to maintain perceptions of competence and ability than are women, which might underlie the greater propensity of men to engage in more extreme forms of self-sabotage, such as behavioral self-handicapping. The present results suggest that men are less likely to ascribe negative motivations to individuals who engage in self-handicapping behavior, whereas women have little respect for individuals who lack motivation and fail to put forth effort in important performance settings. This presents us with an interesting paradox: Those individuals most inclined to engage in behav-

ioral self-handicapping (men) are less likely to attribute that motive to others.

An important next step in our future research is to develop a better understanding of the sources of these sex differences in value orientation (cf. McCrea et al., 2000). For instance, one might wonder how broadly these sex differences run. Do these results reflect relatively specific differences between men and women in their perceptions of effort versus ability and competence in performance settings, or do they reflect a more general difference in the value men and women place on adherence to social norms? Indeed, there is work to suggest that women in general are more cooperative and agreeable, following social norms in situations to a greater extent than do men (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Feingold, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Swim, 1994). Indeed, men in general are more aggressive and competitive and are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, and other forms of nonnormative and self-destructive behaviors than are women (cf. Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Thus, it may be that the sex differences we have observed are simply another manifestation of these broader gender differences in personality. In addition to differences in adherence to norms, there may be important differences in how men and women view performance situations. For example, recent research by Brown and Josephs (1999) has illustrated that men are more responsive to promotion-focus framing of performance situations (which emphasizes demonstration of superior competence relative to others), whereas women are more responsive to prevention-focus framing (which emphasizes demonstrating that one does not lack competence relative to others), at least with regard to performance on a difficult math test. Indeed, we believe these sex differences in preference for task framing represent a promising avenue for understanding sex differences in many aspects of social behavior, including self-handicapping. We are currently investigating these sorts of questions in our lab.

In conclusion, the present research highlights that important sources of variance in audience reaction to self-handicapping reside not only in the target and his or her behavior but also in the

⁵ The astute reader may be wondering about the causal direction of the observed relationships. We have argued that sex differences in attributed motives led to changes in ability attributions and liking for the target. But is it not possible that the motive data could simply reflect the fact that women did not like the target and that these differences in liking mediated their greater propensity to ascribe more negative motives to the target? We tested this possibility in several ways. First, we reran the earlier regressions including participants' liking for the target as a predictor variable prior to entering the motive variables. If this view is correct, then the inclusion of participants' liking rating should eliminate any effects of the motives in predicting ability ratings or attributions to ability. In both of these analyses, the addition of the liking variable did not eliminate the predictive effects of the motive variables. Second, we regressed the effects of liking on each of the motive variables. Liking was a significant predictor of each of these motive variables except the peer pressure motive. We saved the standardized residuals from each of these regressions and examined whether the residuals significantly predicted attributions to ability and ability ratings. These regression analyses revealed that motives still mediated the effects of the independent variables, despite the elimination of the effects of overall liking for the target. Thus, we feel confident that women's propensity to attribute more negative dispositional or self-handicapping motives to the target is not simply a reflection of their general dislike for the target.

mind of the perceiver. It is our hope that the present research will stimulate further efforts to elucidate the nature and implications of these sex differences for a wide range of behaviors related to performance settings.

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