

## Self-Handicapping, Expected Evaluation, and Performance: Accentuating the Positive and Attenuating the Negative

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Three studies investigated the influence of social- and self-evaluative motives on self-handicapping and performance. In each study, efficacy expectancies were manipulated by varying the difficulty of a preliminary task, and social- and self-evaluation were manipulated orthogonally. In Study 1, participants who self-handicapped performed better than those who did not when a positive or negative evaluation was expected, in some conditions. In Study 2, we used a situationally imposed handicap and found that both social- and self-evaluation participants showed improved performance in the presence of the handicap. In Study 3, when a positive or negative evaluation was expected, high self-handicappers performed better after choosing to self-handicap, for both social- and self-evaluative motives. Little evidence of self-handicapping or effects on subsequent performance was found for low self-handicappers. No evidence was found for self-handicapping among participants who could not be evaluated. Discussion centers around motives to self-handicap and implications for subsequent performance. © 1995 Academic Press, Inc.

Self-handicaps are preemptively acquired or claimed impediments to successful performance that are designed to manipulate the attributional ambiguity of an

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evaluation. According to Berglas and Jones (1978), the self-handicapper is simultaneously taking advantage of the discounting and augmenting principles of attribution (Kelley, 1972). In the case of failure, it becomes difficult to question the person's ability because of the presence of an equally plausible performance-inhibiting cause, the handicap. In the case of success, attributions to the person's ability become augmented because the successful performance is perceived to have occurred despite the presence of the handicap. Self-handicapping strategies are therefore designed to reduce the responsibility for a potential failure and to enhance the responsibility for a potential success.

Support for the notion that people actively engage in self-handicapping has been obtained in several studies that have focused on the various strategies that may serve a self-handicapping function. For example, as self-handicapping strategies, participants have been shown to ingest purportedly performance-inhibiting drugs or alcohol (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Gibbons & Gaeddert, 1984; Tucker, Vuchinich, & Sobell, 1981), to decrease effort on or before performance (Hirt, Deppe, & Gordon, 1991; Rhodewalt, Saltzman, & Wittmer, 1984; Snyder, Smoller, Strenta, & Frankel, 1981; Tice & Baumeister, 1990), to report the presence of physical or psychological symptoms before performance (Mayerson & Rhodewalt, 1988; Smith, Snyder, & Perkins, 1983), and to perform under debilitating conditions, such as with distracting music (Rhodewalt & Davison, 1986; Rhodewalt, Morf, Hazlett, & Fairfield, 1991; Shepperd & Arkin, 1989; Tice, 1991).

### SELF-HANDICAPPING AND PERFORMANCE: SOCIAL- VERSUS SELF-EVALUATION?

Although much is known about the various strategies that may be used to self-handicap, much less is