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# Verbal and Nonverbal Impression Management Tactics in Behavior Description and Situational Interviews

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This study investigated how structured interview formats, instructions to convey favorable impressions, and applicants' individual differences influenced the use and effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal impression management (IM). Results from 190 people who were screened for a training program demonstrated that interview format affected the kind of tactics used, which in turn positively influenced interviewer evaluations. Behavior description interviews triggered self-focused (and defensive) tactics, whereas situational interviews triggered other-focused tactics. Instructions to convey a desirable impression also enhanced the use of specific tactics (self-focused and other-focused verbal IM tactics) and moderated the effects of individual differences on IM use. IM instructions did not affect nonverbal IM tactics, indicating that nonverbal behavior might be less intentionally controllable in selection situations.

In personnel selection, the social interaction inherent in the interview creates an ideal situation for applicants to put their best foot forward and to use impression management (IM) tactics. Hence, the use of IM in employment interviews has been increasingly studied (e.g., Baron, 1983; Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Fletcher, 1990; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Howard & Ferris, 1996; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Kacmar, Delery, & Ferris, 1992; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; Silvester, Anderson-Gough, Anderson, & Mohamed, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). In fact, in their review, Posthuma, Morgeson, and Campion (2002) noted that IM was one of the most emergent research topics in interview studies in the last 10 years.

It has been argued that structured interviews might be less prone to IM as compared with unstructured interviews. Clearly, there exist various ways of structuring an employment interview (e.g., Campion, Palmer, & Campion, 1997; Huffcutt & Arthur, 1994; Salgado & Moscoso, 2002). Campion *et al.* (1997) delineated 15 ways of structuring an employment interview and defined structure very broadly as "any enhancement of the interview that is intended to increase psychometric properties by increasing standardi-

zation or otherwise assisting the interviewer in determining what questions to ask or how to evaluate responses" (p. 656). In the context of IM, it has been argued that increasing *the level of question and response scoring standardization* might give applicants less opportunity to use specific IM tactics because all applicants are asked the same set of questions and because applicants are provided with less opportunity to take control of the interview (Campion *et al.*, 1997; Dipboye & Gaugler, 1993; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). In addition, *the content* of structured interviews might impact on the kind of IM shown. Along these lines, a distinction is often made between situational interviews (SIs) and behavior description interviews (BDIs). In BDIs (Janz, 1982; Taylor & Small, 2002), past-oriented questions are used. These questions deal with previous job or life experiences that are related to the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for the job. Conversely, SIs (Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980; Taylor & Small, 2002) contain questions that are future-oriented, placing applicants in a hypothetical job-relevant situation and ask how they would respond. In this study, we focus on these two popular types of structured interviews, although we acknowledge that there exist other structured interview content areas (e.g., Campion *et al.*, 1997; Fear, 1984; McDaniel, Whetzel, Schmidt, & Maurer, 1994; Schmidt & Rader, 1999; Schuler, 1989).

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To date, research on IM in BDIs or SIs is still relatively scarce (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Stevens and Kristof (1995) found some evidence in an actual field setting that interviews using an experience-based question format (BDIs) resulted in less verbal IM as compared with unstructured interviews. Whereas Stevens and Kristof (1995) did not make an explicit distinction between BDIs and SIs, Ellis *et al.* (2002) showed that the type of tactics used were a function of interview format (BDI vs. SI). In SIs, ingratiation (i.e., other-focused) tactics were used significantly more (cf. McFarland, Yun, Harold, Viera, & Moore, 2003), whereas self-promotion (i.e., self-focused) tactics were used significantly more in BDIs.

Although these studies have advanced our understanding of the use and effectiveness of IM in BDIs and SIs, there are still various substantive and methodological issues that need to be addressed. From a substantive point of view, IM tactics can be considered as behavioral manifestations of underlying traits (Ferris & Judge, 1991). This means that IM should be studied with a careful attention to the underlying individual differences such as self-monitoring, self-esteem, locus of control or agreeableness (e.g., Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002). However, the use of IM in *structured* interviews has been researched without considering underlying individual differences. Hence, the issue as to which individual differences might promote or impede specific IM tactics in BDIs and SIs has been largely ignored. Another substantive issue is that IM consists of both verbal and nonverbal IM tactics. Yet, in BDIs and SIs, only the use of verbal IM tactics has been scrutinized.

From a methodological point of view, previous studies investigated naturally occurring IM tactics (Ellis *et al.*, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Although this focus on spontane-

ously occurring IM tactics maximized external validity, a key problem of these field studies concerned the determination of what is an IM tactic and what is not an IM tactic. For example, if a candidate claimed credit for a positive event, this could be regarded as an entitlement, but it might also be an accurate portrayal of a positive event. Thus, verbal IM could not be differentiated from objectively, nonmanipulated information. Similarly, nonverbal IM in field studies could not be differentiated from personality-driven nonverbal behavior. For instance, when a candidate smiled a lot, this was typically coded as nonverbal IM. However, this might also simply have been an expression of someone's friendly personality.

Given that prior studies on IM in BDIs and SIs were field studies that did not enable to disentangle these rival explanations, we conducted a lab experiment, enabling us to manipulate candidates' IM use and to determine when candidates deliberately use IM tactics to convey a favorable impression. However, the experiment was conducted in an actual setting (in this case screening for a training program), which should ensure the external validity of the results obtained. Our central research objective consisted of examining the influence of IM instructions *and* individual difference variables on the use and effectiveness of verbal *and* nonverbal IM tactics in BDIs and SIs.

### Theoretical Background and Development of Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents a model of IM use in interviews that will serve as a conceptual basis of our study. This conceptual model incorporates elements of the models of Leary and Kowalski (1990) and Ferris and Judge (1991). Similar to Leary and Kowalski (1990), our model makes a distinction between IM motivation and IM construction. The first

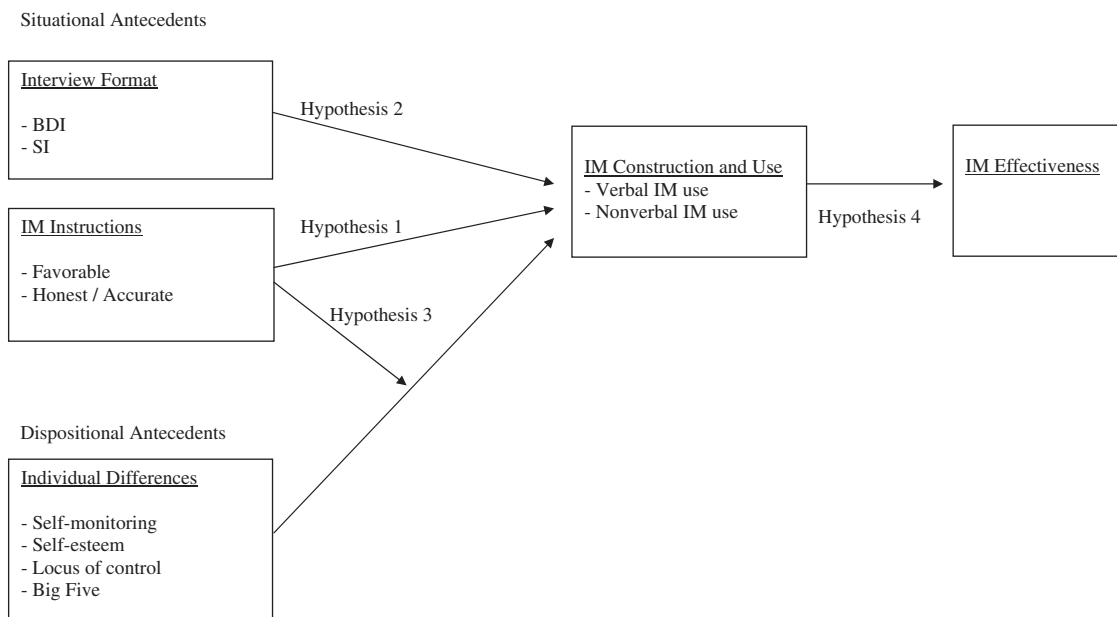


Figure 1. Conceptual model underlying study.

process, *impression motivation*, refers to a desire to create particular impressions in other people's minds. However, this motivation or desire may or may not manifest itself in overt impression-relevant actions or IM use. Specifically, applicants may be highly motivated to manage their impression but refrain from doing so. The second process, *impression construction*, involves choosing the kind of impressions to create, deciding how one will do so, and thus choosing the appropriate tactics.

In our study, we decided to use IM instructions – and thereby promising an incentive for the “best candidate” – as an impression use motivator. Furthermore, IM construction and use was operationalized on the basis of a taxonomy that has often been used in studies on IM in employment interviews (Ellis *et al.*, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), even though we acknowledge that several other similar taxonomies of IM behaviors have been proposed over the years (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). This taxonomy distinguishes between verbal and nonverbal IM tactics. Among verbal tactics, a further distinction is made between assertive and defensive verbal tactics. Assertive verbal tactics are attempts to actively construct a favorable image and consist of both other-focused and self-focused tactics. Other-focused tactics (i.e., other-enhancements and opinion conformities) are designed to evoke interpersonal attraction or liking. Other-enhancements refer to IM tactics wherein applicants try to flatter, praise, or compliment the interviewer, whereas opinion conformities deal with tactics wherein applicants are expressing beliefs, values, or attitudes that can be reasonably assumed to be held by the interviewer. Self-focused tactics (i.e., self-promoting utterances, entitlements, enhancements, and overcoming obstacles) are attempts to show that one possesses desirable qualities for the job (Kacmar *et al.*, 1992). Defensive verbal IM tactics are used to protect or repair one's image (i.e., excuses, justifications, and apologies). IM may also occur in the form of (positive) nonverbal or expressive behaviors, such as smiling at the target, making eye contact, using hand gestures, and nodding affirmatively.

Similar to Ferris and Judge (1991), our model posits that both situational and dispositional antecedents might impact on IM construction and use. Situational variables are, for example, the ambiguity, or clarity of the task, the perceived instrumentality of IM, accountability, or the need to provide justifications for one's decisions (Eder & Buckley, 1988; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Stevens, 1997). In this study, IM instructions and interview format are examined as the primary situational antecedents, whereas the dispositional antecedents studied are applicants' self-monitoring, self-esteem, locus of control, and the Big Five. The remainder develops hypotheses on the basis of our conceptual model.

### *IM Instructions and IM Tactic Use*

A number of studies have demonstrated that people's verbal and nonverbal behaviors are influenced by their

self-presentational motivation (or the motivation to present themselves favorably) (e.g., Aloise-Young, 1993; Levine & Feldman, 1997; Pellegrini, Hicks, & Gordon, 1970; Reiss & Rosenfeld, 1980). In a selection situation, there are often high stakes involved so that applicants are motivated to present themselves favorably. Hence, they tend to use more proactive verbal behaviors such as trying to impress the interviewer with their accomplishments (cf. self-focused tactics, like an entitlement). In addition, they display more verbal ingratiation (i.e., other-focused) tactics and more friendly nonverbal behaviors (e.g., creating eye contact, nodding, smiling, and gesturing) (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Rosenfeld, 1966a, b). People show these behaviors in an attempt to achieve specific personal or interpersonal goals (Levine & Feldman, 1997). As instructions to convey a favorable impression should serve as an impression motivator (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Applicants will use more verbal IM tactics when they are instructed to convey a favorable impression than when they are not instructed to present themselves favorably.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Applicants will use more nonverbal IM tactics when they are instructed to convey a favorable impression than when they are not instructed to present themselves favorably.

### *Interview Format, IM Construction, and Use*

Despite its practical importance, few studies have focused on interview format as a possible determinant of the type of IM tactics used. To our knowledge, only one study (Ellis *et al.*, 2002) examined whether verbal IM tactics differed as a function of interview type. Results revealed that ingratiation (i.e., other-focused) tactics were used significantly more when applicants answered SI questions, whereas self-promotion (i.e., self-focused) tactics were used significantly more when applicants answered experience-based questions.

These results can be explained in light of an expectancy-value framework that posits that “applicants attempt to construct images that conform to the cues received in order to maximize any potential IM value” (Ellis *et al.*, 2002, p. 1202; Schenkler, 1980). These image-building processes can be compared with the aforementioned impression construction processes outlined by Leary and Kowalski (1990). Past-oriented (experience-based) questions give applicants cues to boast about their past competence and accomplishments. Hence, it can be expected that applicants will use more self-focused IM tactics in BDIs. Conversely, these cues are not provided in SI questions. So, in SIs, we expect that applicants will try to flatter the interviewer or try to conform to the attitudes, values or opinions of the interviewer. In turn, this might lead to the use of more other-focused IM

tactics. Taken together, our general hypothesis that different interview formats result in the use of different IM tactics leads to the following specific predictions:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Applicants will use more other-focused verbal IM tactics in SIs than in BDIs.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Applicants will use more self-focused verbal IM tactics in BDIs than in SIs.

Apart from the differential use of other-focused and self-focused IM tactics, we also make predictions concerning the differential use of defensive IM tactics in BDIs vs. SIs. Given that behavioral questions deal with previous experiences that have actually happened, we expect that applicants might become defensive in trying to explain their behaviors. To this end, defensive verbal IM tactics that are typically used to protect or repair one's image might be used. If the outcome was negative, this will almost certainly happen. Conversely, it will be unlikely that applicants will use defensive tactics in SIs because SI questions deal with a hypothetical situation. Hence, there is no need to repair one's image or defend one's behavioral choices. Thus, we posit the following prediction:

*Hypothesis 2c:* Applicants will use more defensive verbal IM tactics in BDIs than in SIs.

Finally, there are no reasons to suspect that the use of nonverbal IM tactics will be different in BDIs than in SIs. Hence, we formulate no predictions for nonverbal IM tactics and examine this issue for exploratory purposes.

### *Individual Differences, IM Construction, and Use*

In the past, many individual difference variables have been associated with IM use. Examples include self-monitoring, self-esteem, locus of control, Machiavellism, gender, age, experience, Big-Five dimensions such as Agreeableness or Extraversion (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Fletcher, 1989; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Kacmar *et al.*, 1992; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002; Liden, Martin, & Parsons, 1993; Silvester *et al.*, 2002). The following discusses each of the individual differences variables investigated in the present study.

*Self-Monitoring.* Self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) or the ability to monitor one's behavior based on cues received from one's social setting has often been associated with IM tactics in everyday interaction (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Ickes, Reidhead, & Patterson, 1986; Levine & Feldman, 1997). High self-monitors should be more likely to present themselves as favorably as possible and use IM tactics because they monitor their behavior and they are adept at changing their behavior to maximize performance in a given situation. However, empirical results are mixed. Higgins and Judge (2004) found that self-monitoring

correlated positively with ingratiation and with self-promotion. Bolino and Turnley (2003) concluded that high self-monitors favor positive IM strategies. And likewise, Mueller-Hanson, Heggstad, and Thornton (2003) stated that self-monitoring leads to higher intentions to fake and to higher faking behavior. In contrast, other studies have failed to find support for a relationship between applicant self-monitoring and IM tactic use (Anderson, Silvester, Cunningham-Snell, & Haddleton, 1999; Delery & Kacmar, 1998).

*Self-Esteem.* Self-esteem seems to influence interview outcomes (Cook, Vance, & Spector, 2000) and applicants with high self-esteem engage in higher quality verbal and nonverbal behaviors than low self-esteem applicants (Liden *et al.*, 1993). With respect to IM, there is little agreement. Some argue that people high in self-esteem are more likely to believe that they have significant past accomplishments about which to speak and thus should be more likely to engage in self-focused IM tactics or in "self-enhancing presentational styles" (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989). However, others (Crocker & Schwartz, 1985; Delery & Kacmar, 1998; Dinner, Lewkowicz, & Cooper, 1972) have argued that high self-esteem applicants will be more focused on protecting their image, whereas those with low self-esteem will be more highly motivated to engage in enhancements to improve their self-perception or increase their self-worth through the use of self-focused IM tactics.

*Locus of Control.* Locus of control deals with whether individuals believe they have control over events and outcomes, or believe that control is external to them. Previous research has found relationships with applicant behavior (Fletcher, 1990) and with interview outcomes (Cook *et al.*, 2000). Only few studies have investigated locus of control in relation to applicant IM tactics. Delery and Kacmar (1998) found that applicants with an internal locus of control were more likely to use self-focused tactics than applicants with an external locus of control. Silvester *et al.* (2002) concluded in their study that internal-controllable attributions were used more frequently to create a favorable impression and were evaluated more positively. Because people with an external locus of control believe that the control over events and outcomes is external to them, it can also be argued that these people will use more defensive verbal tactics (like excuses and justifications), which are used to convince or show an interviewer that one is not really responsible for some negative outcomes.

*The Big Five.* The Big-Five personality dimensions extraversion and agreeableness deal specifically with one's preferences for interacting with others in social situations. Extraverts are described as assertive, active, talkative, upbeat, energetic, and optimistic (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Extraverted people feel comfortable with social interaction and have a desire to compete for and obtain rewards (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000). Hence, extraversion might be most strongly related to the use of assertive verbal statements about one's qualifications

(i.e., self-focused tactics) (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002). Conversely, applicants high on agreeableness might use more other-focused verbal tactics and more friendly nonverbal cues than those with low levels on this trait, since agreeableness is characterized by being cooperative, good-natured, and likeable (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997). Agreeable people try to accommodate the people they interact, try to feel comfortable and thus try to evoke interpersonal attraction and liking (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002). Finally, neuroticism is characterized by feelings of anxiety and fearfulness, and by a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem (McCrae & Costa, 1983). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that neurotic people will not use assertive tactics (which are used to show self-confidence), but will rather use defensive tactics to repair the negative images, which they think they have built about themselves. Interestingly, the fact that neuroticism would lead to a greater use of defensive tactics has already been found in clinical and psychiatric studies (e.g., Avia, Sanchez-Bernardos, Sanz, Carrillo, & Rojo, 1998; Spinhoven, Vangaalen, & Abraham, 1995).

Generally, this brief overview of the relationship between individual difference variables and IM shows that the results obtained were often mixed. These equivocal findings concerning the influences of individual difference variables on IM use might be due to the fact that (1) these studies did not investigate IM in *BDIs and SIs*, (2) varying *interview durations* may have served as a confound, and (3) the motivation of the applicants to use IM was neither controlled nor manipulated through *IM instructions*.

This study is the first that we are aware of that investigates the influence of applicants' individual traits on verbal and nonverbal IM use in *BDIs/SIs*. Furthermore, we believe that previous study results are not comparable because of varying interview durations. Longer interviews give applicants more opportunity to use IM. Thus, the influences of individual differences on IM use may be a byproduct of interview duration. For example, agreeable applicants might use more IM tactics simply because they like interacting with the interviewer, thereby extending the interview duration. Therefore, we used relative IM frequencies in the present study (i.e., absolute IM frequencies divided by interview duration). Finally, a central premise of our model is that the effects of individual differences on IM construction and use will be moderated by the instructions (either to be honest or to give a favorable impression) (see Figure 1).

Essentially, there are two ways in which IM instructions might moderate the effects of individual differences on the use of IM tactics. One proposition is that IM instructions are strong situations that might reduce the emergence of individual differences. This proposition builds on research in personality differences, more specifically on trait activation theory and the role of *situation strength* (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), according to which relatively uniform expectations result in few differences in how individuals respond to the situation, obscuring individual differences on underlying personality traits

(Mischel, 1973). This should imply that the personality-IM use relationship will be weaker in the IM-instruction condition (a strong situation) than in the honest-instruction condition (a weak situation).

Another proposition is that the effects of individual differences on the use of specific IM tactics will be stronger for applicants who are instructed to convey a favorable impression as compared with those who want to convey an honest impression. One reason is that, according to trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000), strong situations should involve unambiguous behavioral demands where outcomes of behavior are clearly understood and widely shared (Mischel, 1973). In our study, however, the instructions that were given to convey a favorable impression did not include details about the specific way they should convey this impression. Hence, the behavioral demands were rather ambiguous. As a consequence, when instructed to give a favorable impression, applicants will choose the specific IM tactics that match with their own personality traits. In addition, "the principle of trait activation formalizes the trait-situation relationship by holding that the behavioral expression of a trait requires arousal of that trait by *trait-relevant situational cues*" (Tett & Guterman, 2000, p. 398). In other words, a situation is considered relevant to a trait if it provides cues for the expression of trait-relevant behavior. As the relevant behavior in the trait-behavior relationship is IM use and as the honest-instruction condition is not a relevant situation to IM use because it offers no cues for its expression, there should be less IM variability in the honest condition.

Given that both of these propositions seem conceptually valuable, we do not posit specific predictions about the direction of the moderating effect. Our general hypothesis that the relationship between individual difference variables and IM use will be moderated by IM instructions can be translated to the following predictions:

*Hypothesis 3a:* The positive relationship between self-monitoring and the use of verbal and nonverbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3b:* The positive relationship between self-esteem and the use of self-focused verbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3c:* The positive relationship between an internal locus of control and the use of self-focused verbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3d:* The positive relationship between an external locus of control and the use of defensive verbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3e:* The positive relationship between extraversion and the use of self-focused verbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3f:* The positive relationship between agreeableness and the use of other-focused verbal and nonverbal IM tactics will be moderated by IM instructions.

*Hypothesis 3g:* There will be a positive relationship between neuroticism and the use of defensive verbal IM tactics and this relationship will be moderated by IM instructions.

### *The Relationship Between IM Use and IM Effectiveness*

Both laboratory and field studies consistently found that there is a positive relationship between applicants' IM use and interviewers' overall evaluations of applicants (Ellis *et al.*, 2002; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Higgins & Judge, 2004; Kacmar & Carlson, 1999; Kacmar *et al.*, 1992; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Furthermore, research has consistently shown that friendly nonverbal behaviors, especially eye contact, smiling, hand gesturing, and head nodding, are associated with higher interview evaluations (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Anderson & Shackleton, 1990; Burnett & Motowidlo, 1998; Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; DeGroot & Motowidlo, 1999; Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985; Hollandsworth, Kazelskis, Stevens, & Dressel, 1979; Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern, Jones, Warwick, & Jackson, 1981; Motowidlo & Burnett, 1995; Parsons & Liden, 1984; Rasmussen, 1984). This leads to the following hypothesis, which basically attempts to replicate prior findings of a relationship between IM use (both verbal and nonverbal) and interview ratings.

*Hypothesis 4:* Applicants' use of verbal and nonverbal IM tactics will be positively related to their overall interview evaluations.

There is more debate about which specific IM tactic leads to positive interviewer evaluations. Self-promotion is the verbal IM tactic most consistently associated with positive interview outcomes, while other-focused tactics seem to be less effective (Kacmar *et al.*, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). However, Higgins and Judge (2004) recently found that ingratiation (i.e., other-focused tactics) had a positive effect on hiring recommendations, whereas the effects of self-promotion were generally weak and nonsignificant. These mixed findings may be due to the fact that these studies did not take interview format into account. Therefore, in this study we extend previous research by conducting exploratory analyses to examine whether the relationship between IM use and IM effectiveness differs per IM tactic and interview format.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

A total of 190 students from a large Belgian university (64% female; mean age = 23, SD = 3.08 years) were screened for a training program in communication skills and group processes. This training program was part of a course. This course consisted of regular reading material and the training program. Each year this course is given to students majoring in engineering or information sciences, psychology, and medicine and health sciences. In our sample, these students were distributed as follows: engineering or information sciences (40%), psychology (38%), and medicine and health sciences (19%). The purpose of this screening was to provide useful feedback to the participants about their personality and training-related skills prior to the actual training program. As the screening was organized for developmental purposes, no selection took place and all participants could follow the training program.

The mean personality scale scores of the screened students did not differ notably from the scores of a normative sample of students (age < 25) in the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (FFI) manual (Hoekstra, Ormel, & De Fruyt, 1996) as the average absolute magnitude of group differences across Big-Five factors was .18 standard deviation units. These findings of relatively small differences show that our sample is representative of a general student population.

As part of the screening, a series of psychological tests was administered assessing self-monitoring, self-esteem, locus of control, and the Big Five, followed by two short training-related questionnaires (assessing teamwork and leadership). The screening ended with a structured interview. Four female research assistants who went through an extensive 4 h interviewer training program conducted the interviews. In these interviews, questions were asked to assess three competencies: interpersonal skills, adaptability, and perseverance. These three competencies were considered important for training success on the basis of scrutinizing the training content. All candidates received the same three questions, but the order was counterbalanced. Similar to previous IM studies (e.g., Ellis *et al.*, 2002), prompting during the interview was minimized. The interviewers were only allowed to repeat the questions and to say once "go on" if the candidate did not answer how he or she handled or would handle the situation. The interviews were videotaped. Afterwards, the participants filled out a post-interview questionnaire regarding their IM use during the interview. The total screening session time was approximately 2.5 h. A week later, the participants received written feedback about their personality and skill profile.

Our final data set consisted of 175 participants because 15 participants were excluded from analyses for various reasons (e.g., no videotapes were made, audio was not recorded).

### Interview Design and Questions

A 2 (interview format)  $\times$  2 (instructions) between-subjects design was used. The first factor had two levels: either an interview with BDI questions or an interview with SI questions. The second factor had also two levels. Half of the candidates were instructed to answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible, as everybody would be given entry into the training program. The other half was instructed to make the best impression. They were told that they should act like the interview was conclusive for admission to the program; "the best candidate" would receive an incentive during the debriefing session. It should be noted that these instructions were *only* for the interview and not for the other tests and questionnaires.

As noted above, the interview dimensions were determined on the basis of the interview content. The three SI questions, measuring interpersonal skills, adaptability and perseverance respectively, were adapted from Oswald, Schmitt, Kim, Ramsay, and Gillespie (2004). For each of these dimensions, we constructed a similar set of BDI questions. To determine the equivalence of the two sets of questions, experienced consultants (10 men and 8 women) were asked to rate each question's appropriateness for measuring the competencies on a seven-point scale. *t*-Tests revealed no differences in perceived appropriateness between BDI and SI questions. For the interpersonal skills questions:  $M = 4.50$  ( $SD = 1.31$ ) and  $M = 4.50$  ( $SD = 1.52$ ), respectively. For the adaptability questions:  $M = 4.75$  ( $SD = .97$ ) and  $M = 3.83$  ( $SD = 1.33$ ), respectively. And finally, for the perseverance questions:  $M = 5.25$  ( $SD = .97$ ) and  $M = 4.33$  ( $SD = 1.37$ ), respectively. Example questions are in Appendix A.

### Measures

**Self-Monitoring.** A Dutch translation of the revised 18-item version of Snyder and Gangestad's (1986) self-monitoring scale was used. Participants rated whether or not the statement accurately described them on a four-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 4 = *strongly agree*). The internal consistency reliability of this scale was .72.

**Self-Esteem.** Rosenberg's (1965) scale was used to measure self-esteem. This scale is composed of 10 items measured on a four-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 4 = *strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. The internal consistency reliability was .85.

**Locus of Control.** This 29-item scale was taken from Rotter (1966). This scale yields one bipolar dimension of locus of control, with higher scores indicating an external locus of control. The internal consistency reliability was .74.

**Big Five.** The Big-Five personality dimensions were measured using the authorized Flemish translation (Hoekstra *et al.*, 1996) of the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI consists of 60 items whereby each personality dimension is measured by 12 Likert-type items

on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). A factor analysis (with principal axes extraction and with varimax rotation) performed on our data resulted in five factors (Eigenvalues from 4.8 to 2.8) which explained 32% of the variance. All scales were found to be internally consistent, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranging from .70 (Agreeableness) to .84 (Neuroticism) (Table 1). Generally, these values are in line with those reported elsewhere (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

### Coding of IM Tactics

Our approach to code IM tactic use was adapted from previous studies (Ellis *et al.*, 2002; McFarland *et al.*, 2003; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Four female I/O psychology graduate students served as coders (mean age = 22 years). They had gone through a 3 h training workshop to recognize verbal and nonverbal IM tactics and to record the frequency with which candidates used each tactic. In particular, they were provided with a clear definition and examples of each of the IM tactics. They also independently coded two practice interview fragments. Afterwards, the frequencies of IM tactics were compared and they received feedback. Coding discrepancies were discussed to ensure that all coders fully understood the category definitions and could discriminate among different tactics.

Next, each of the coders coded approximately 90 interviews and each interview was independently coded by two coders. Verbal tactics were coded while the coders did not see the videotape but only listened to candidates and wrote down what they answered. Nonverbal tactics were coded while they watched the tapes with the sound turned off and counted the number of times candidates used a particular nonverbal behavior. This counting was done for each nonverbal behavior separately: smiling, hand gestures, eye contact, and head nodding. The coders were blind to the instruction conditions of the participants.

Using a presence-absence scheme, interrater agreement on the verbal IM categories, for different pairs of coders, was satisfactory ( $\kappa = .86$  for other-focused,  $\kappa = .86$  for self-focused and  $\kappa = .73$  for defensive tactics). Interrater agreement for the nonverbal IM tactics was also satisfactory (ranging from .86 to .98 for the various nonverbal tactics). In the case of coding differences, a discussion took place among coders and if consensus could not be reached within 10 min, the first author took the final decision.

After the coding had taken place, we created four IM composites per videotaped participant. We summed the frequencies of other-enhancements and opinion-conformities to compute a composite of other-focused IM tactics. The composite of self-focused IM tactics consisted of the sum of the frequencies of self-promoting utterances, entitlements, enhancements, and overcoming obstacles, whereas the composite of defensive IM tactics was comprised of the frequencies of excuses, justifications, and apologies. Finally, we created a nonverbal IM composite by summing



**Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between all study variables across conditions (N = 175)**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Self-monitoring	7.82	3.41	(.72)												
2. Self-esteem	33.44	4.46	.22**	(.85)											
3. Locus of control	10.90	3.97	-.15	-.23***	(.74)										
4. Neuroticism	31.24	7.27	-.11	-.52***	.34***	(.84)									
5. Extraversion	44.66	6.08	.31**	.29***	-.21**	-.31***	(.79)								
6. Openness	43.30	6.55	.21**	.07	-.04	.02	.13	(.75)							
7. Agreeableness	43.65	5.53	-.18	.07	-.04**	-.18*	.25***	.03	(.70)						
8. Conscientiousness	43.97	6.89	-.15*	.08	-.25**	-.07	.12	-.16*	.16*	(.82)					
9. Other-focused IM	.73	1.11	.17*	.07	-.05	-.06	.01	-.00	-.14	.06	-.03				
10. Self-focused IM	1.18	1.37	-.01	.06	-.08	-.03	.06	.10	.15*	.23**	-.02	-.03			
11. Defensive IM	1.11	1.18	-.08	-.07	.00	.13	-.02	.01	-.00	-.02	-.10	.16*	-.03		
12. Nonverbal IM	92.78	36.73	-.03	-.05	-.12	.06	.14	.08	.06***	.14	.01	.37***	.30***	-.06	
13. Self-reported IM <sup>a</sup>	1.93	.67	.14	.09	-.07	-.06	-.10	-.04	-.27***	-.12	.19*	.13***	.08	.06	-.06
14. Overall evaluation	4.17	1.10	.09	.10	-.20**	-.03	.12	.14	.19*	.22**	.06	.36***	.15	.31***	.11

Notes: Absolute IM frequencies were used. Internal consistency reliabilities of the individual difference variables are given between parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>Only a global measure of self-reported IM use was used.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

the frequencies of smiling, hand gestures, eye contact, and head nodding.

### Interviewer Evaluations

Eighteen Belgian professional interviewers (consultants), including 10 men and 8 women (mean age = 33.50; SD = 5.34) were paid to evaluate the videotaped candidates. On average, these consultants had 8.78 years of experience in conducting employment interviews. All interviewers indicated that they were familiar with BDI and SI questions as part of their interview practices. Each of these consultants evaluated 15–30 videotaped candidates, either in BDIs or SIs.

They used BARS for evaluating the candidates and independently rated each interview question on a seven-point scale immediately after the response. Afterwards, the consultants rated the overall evaluations of each candidate on three items using a seven-point scale (1 = poor, 7 = excellent). The items were: “On the basis of the interview, how do you rate the overall qualifications of the candidate?”, “How do you evaluate this candidate in general?”, and “How was the performance of the candidate during the interview?”. The internal consistency reliability of this scale equaled .91. Given that each candidate was independently rated by two consultants, we were able to compute interrater reliabilities. For the overall evaluation ratings, interreliabilities (i.e., average measure intraclass correlations) were .76 (for BDIs) and .78 (for SIs). For the three competencies (interpersonal skills, adaptability and perseverance), the interreliabilities were .46, .55 and .71 respectively (for BDIs), and .69, .61 and .85 respectively (for SIs), indicating that interrater reliabilities for BDI questions tend to be lower than those for SI questions. It has been suggested that SI questions are more directly comparable – because the situations are the same for all applicants – and thus potentially easier to score reliably by interviewers (e.g., Huffcutt, Weekley, Wiesner, Degroot, & Jones, 2001). We averaged the competency ratings and the overall evaluation ratings across each pair of two consultants. For reliability reasons, we used only the overall evaluation ratings in our analyses.

To examine the construct validity of the ratings made by the consultants, we correlated them with the scores of the participants on the Big Five. The correlational patterns found supported the construct validity of the ratings made by the consultants. For example, participants’ self-reports of Extraversion correlated with the consultants’ ratings on interpersonal skills ( $r = .20, p = .01$ ) and participants’ self-reports of Conscientiousness correlated with the consultants’ ratings on perseverance ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ).

### Check of Internal Validity of Manipulations

As a manipulation check, we asked participants to rate their use of IM in a post-interview questionnaire. The

questionnaire was composed of four items regarding the IM instructions (conscious self-presentation), for example “I made myself look better than in reality.” All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Reliability  $\alpha$  for this four-item scale was .71. Results showed that participants in the IM condition reported significantly more conscious self-presentation ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) than participants in the honest condition ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = .51$ ,  $d = 1.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Check of External Validity

We also checked the realism of the videotaped interview fragments. Therefore, the 18 professional interviewers were asked to rate the realism of the videotaped interviews watched on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *very unrealistic*, 7 = *very realistic*). The mean realism rating was 6.00 ( $SD = .69$ ). This is not surprising as our videotaped candidates were not mock candidates but students participating in a screening session for an actual training program, supporting the external validity of our study.

## Results

### Use of IM Tactics

**Descriptive Statistics.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all study variables across all conditions are presented in Table 1. It is important to note that Table 1 utilized the absolute IM frequencies. However, a problem with using absolute frequencies is that the effects found might also be due to the effects of interview duration. In fact, an ANOVA with instructions and interview format as fixed factors and interview duration as dependent variable showed that there was a main effect of interview format ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.26$ ). Consistent with prior research (Pulakos & Schmitt, 1995), BDIs had a significant longer duration ( $M = 351.18$  seconds,  $SD = 93.65$ ) than SIs ( $M = 224.59$  seconds,  $SD = 58.47$ ). Therefore, we divided the absolute IM frequencies by interview duration to ensure that we investigated the influence of IM antecedents (IM instructions, interview format and individual differences) instead of interview duration. Table 2 presents the “relative” means and standard deviations of the IM frequencies across both interview formats, but broken down by instruction condition (cf. Hypothesis 1) and Table 3 presents the “relative” means and standard deviations of the IM frequencies in the IM condition only, broken down by interview format (cf. Hypothesis 2).

**Influence of IM Instructions and Interview Format.** The first two hypotheses concerned the influence of IM instructions and interview format on the use of candidates’ verbal and nonverbal IM tactics (see Tables 2 and 3). We conducted a MANOVA with instructions and interview format as fixed factors and with other-focused, self-focused, defensive tactics, and nonverbal tactics as a set

**Table 2. Relative means and standard deviations of applicants’ impression management (IM) frequencies across both interview formats, broken down by instruction condition**

IM tactic	Honest ( $n = 87$ )		IM ( $n = 88$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Other-focused verbal tactics	.14	.26	.21	.29
Self-focused verbal tactics	.19	.23	.27	.29
Defensive verbal tactics	.21	.23	.24	.24
Nonverbal tactics	19.63	5.95	19.72	5.14

*Notes:* The unit of measurement is the amount of IM tactics per minute (i.e., absolute IM frequencies divided by interview duration in minutes).

**Table 3. Relative means and standard deviations of applicants’ impression management (IM) frequencies in the IM condition only, broken down by interview format**

IM tactic	Behavior description interview ( $n = 45$ )		Situational interview ( $n = 43$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Other-focused verbal tactics	.07	.13	.36	.33
Self-focused verbal tactics	.34	.26	.20	.30
Defensive verbal tactics	.29	.20	.19	.26
Nonverbal tactics	19.52	6.00	19.63	4.12

*Notes:* The unit of measurement is the amount of IM tactics per minute (i.e., absolute IM frequencies divided by interview duration in minutes).

of four dependent variables. Note that we used the relative amount of IM tactics (per minute) in the analyses.

This MANOVA showed multivariate main effects of IM instructions,  $F(4, 168) = 2.28$ ,  $p = .06$ , Wilks’s  $\lambda = .95$  (partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ) and interview format,  $F(4, 168) = 14.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , Wilks’s  $\lambda = .75$  (partial  $\eta^2 = .25$ ). There was no interaction effect. Follow-up univariate analyses revealed that the main effect of instructions was significant for the self-focused (partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) and the other-focused verbal IM tactics (partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ) but not for defensive tactics (partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ) and nonverbal tactics (partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). Overall, these results generally supported Hypothesis 1a, which stated that candidates use more verbal IM tactics when they are instructed to present themselves favorably. Hypothesis 1b, which stated that candidates would use more nonverbal IM tactics when they are instructed to convey a favorable impression than when they

are not instructed to present themselves favorably, was not supported.

Moreover, follow-up univariate analyses revealed that the main effect of interview format was significant for all dependent variables (other-focused partial  $\eta^2 = .19$ , self-focused partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ , defensive partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ , non-verbal partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ). However, as we can consider the IM-tactics in the IM condition as true IM tactics, we considered only the IM condition to test Hypotheses 2a–2c ( $n = 88$ ) (see Table 3). Independent sample  $t$ -tests revealed that candidates used significantly more other-focused tactics in the SI ( $M = .36$ ) than in the BDI ( $M = .07$ ),  $t(86) = -5.46, p < .001, d = 1.09$ , supporting Hypothesis 2a. Furthermore, candidates in the BDI used significantly more self-focused and defensive verbal tactics ( $M = .34$  and  $.29$ ) than candidates in the SI ( $M = .20$  and  $.19$ ),  $t(86) = 2.38$  and  $t(86) = 2.02, p$ 's  $< .05, d = .68$  and  $d = .51$  respectively, supporting Hypothesis 2b and Hypothesis 2c. Finally, there were no significant effects of interview format on the use of nonverbal IM tactics.

In summary, these results suggest that applicants seem to use other kinds of verbal IM tactics in BDIs vs. SIs. In BDIs, applicants used more self-focused and defensive verbal tactics, whereas they used more other-focused verbal tactics in SIs.

*Influence of Individual Differences.* Another set of predictions (Hypotheses 3a–3g) dealt with the influence of applicants' individual difference variables on the use of various IM tactics. We hypothesized that these effects might be moderated by IM instructions. These moderating-effect hypotheses were examined in two ways. First, we compared the correlations between the individual traits and IM tactic use across both instruction conditions (Hunter & Schmidt, 1978) (see Table 4). However, this subgroup analysis does not include a consideration of prediction of criterion scores across moderator-based subgroups. Therefore, as a formal test for the moderating effect of instructions, we also conducted several moderated regression analyses in which IM tactic use (self-focused, other-focused, defensive or nonverbal) was regressed on the individual traits and the instruction-condition in the first step, followed by the product term (the interaction) in the second step.

Hypothesis 3a stated that the effect of self-monitoring on verbal and nonverbal IM use would be moderated by instructions. The correlational results showed that high self-monitoring led to a greater use of nonverbal IM tactics in the IM condition ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ), whereas this effect was nonsignificant in the honest condition ( $r = .11, ns$ ). However, Hypothesis 3a was not supported by the moderated regression analysis (interaction effect explained only .3% of the additional variance). This might be due to the low power (.21) to detect statistically significant moderators in the small subgroup samples of this study ( $n = 88$  and 87 in the IM and honest condition respectively) (Aguinis, Pierce, & Stone-Romero, 1994). Hypothesis 3b, positing that the effect of self-esteem on self-focused IM use would

**Table 4. Intercorrelations between individual differences and impression management (IM) tactics, broken down by instruction condition**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Individual differences												
1. Self-monitoring	–	.21	–.22*	–.01	.23*	.32**	–.22*	–.15	.13	.02	.02	.11
2. Self-esteem	.20	–	–.39**	–.46**	.24*	.06	.05	.25*	–.06	.22*	.00	.05
3. Locus of control	–.09	–.06	–	.39**	–.27*	–.18	–.07	–.22*	–.11	–.12	–.12	–.19
4. Neuroticism	–.22*	–.58***	.29*	–	–.29**	–.01	–.13	–.20	–.02	–.15	.00	–.08
5. Extraversion	.40***	.34**	–.17	–.34**	–	.08	.21	.28**	–.08	.05	–.05	.12
6. Openness	.12	.07	.09	.05	.16	–	–.16	–.10	–.01	–.14	–.15	.19
7. Agreeableness	–.13	.11	–.01	–.24*	.28**	.18	–	.22*	–.05	.20	–.19	–.17
8. Conscientiousness	–.14	–.07	–.29	.03	.01	–.21	.11	–	.08	.36**	.02	–.03
IM tactics												
9. Other-focused tactics	.19	.15	.04	–.05	.03	–.04	–.22*	–.00	–	–.04	–.08	.09
10. Self-focused tactics	.01	–.06	–.01	.02	.07	.24*	.14	.15	–.10	–	.03	.04
11. Defensive tactics	–.03	–.04	.13	.27*	–.12	.16	–.01	–.13	–.11	–.02	–	–.03
12. Nonverbal tactics	.22*	–.03	–.02	.10	.18	.05	.02	.18	.17	.17	–.05	–

Notes: Intercorrelations in the IM condition ( $n = 88$ ) are reported in the left bottom quadrant (under the diagonal). Intercorrelations in the honest condition ( $n = 87$ ) are reported in the right upper quadrant (above the diagonal).  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

be moderated by instructions, was supported. High self-esteem led to more self-focused tactics only when applicants were instructed to convey an accurate impression ( $r = .22$  in the honest condition vs.  $r = -.06$  in the IM condition). The interaction effect explained an additional 1.6% of the variance. Hypothesis 3c was not supported because both the correlational results and the moderated regression analysis showed that there was no relationship between internal locus of control and the use of self-focused tactics. However, there was evidence for Hypothesis 3d as the relationship between external locus of control and defensive tactic use depended on the instructions given to the applicants ( $r = .13$  in the IM condition vs.  $r = -.12$  in the honest condition), with the interaction term explaining an additional 1.5% of the variance. Hypothesis 3e, which stated that extraversion would lead to a greater use of self-focused tactics and that this effect would depend on instructions, was not supported. Hypothesis 3f, which stated that agreeableness would lead to a greater use of other-focused verbal and nonverbal tactics and that this effect would depend on instructions, was only partially supported for nonverbal tactics. In the IM condition, high agreeableness led to a decreased use of other-focused verbal tactics ( $r = -.22, p < .05$ ), whereas this relation was non-existent in the honest condition ( $r = -.05, ns$ ). The difference between these correlations and the interaction term in the moderated regression was not significant. However, the interaction effect between agreeableness and instructions on the use of nonverbal tactics explained an additional 1.1% of the variance, and the correlations between agreeableness and nonverbal tactic use were .02 and  $-.17$  in the IM condition and the honest condition, respectively. Finally, applicants high on neuroticism seemed to use more defensive verbal IM tactics than applicants low on neuroticism, but only in the IM condition ( $r = .27$  vs.  $r = .00$  in the honest condition;  $p = .07$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3g. The interaction term explained an additional 1.9% of the variance. Additionally, our results show that applicants high in openness used more self-focused tactics than people low in openness, but only in the IM condition ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) and not in the honest condition ( $r = -.14, ns$ ). The differ-

ence between these correlations was significant ( $p = .01$ ) and the interaction term in the moderated regression analysis explained an additional 3.4% of the variance.

### Effectiveness of IM Use

The final hypothesis (Hypothesis 4) concerned the influence of verbal and nonverbal IM tactics use on mean overall evaluations of interviewers. In the following analyses, we used the absolute IM frequencies, as interviewers were confronted with the complete interviews and thus with the absolute amount of IM tactics used. We computed inter-correlations between the absolute IM frequencies and mean overall evaluation ratings. As shown in Table 5, self-focused verbal tactics ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ), defensive verbal tactics ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ), and nonverbal tactics ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ) correlated positively with mean overall evaluations across interview formats. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported, except for other-focused tactics.

However, for exploratory purposes, we also examined whether there was a difference between BDIs and SIs with regard to the effectiveness of IM use. Table 5 shows that a different pattern of relationships emerged. Self-focused IM tactics (IM condition) were positively related with mean overall evaluations, but only in BDIs ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ), whereas other-focused IM tactics and nonverbal IM tactics (both in IM condition) were positively related with mean overall evaluations, but only in SIs ( $r = .31, p < .05$  and  $r = .33, p < .05$ ). Regression analyses with overall evaluation in either BDIs or SIs as dependent variables confirmed these results.

## Discussion

Prior studies investigating IM in employment interviews already examined various antecedents of IM tactics, their effects, and various possible mediating variables. However, most of these studies did not use structured interview formats and/or they only examined verbal IM tactics, which were in addition very difficult to differentiate from true

**Table 5. Correlations between applicants' IM tactics (absolute frequencies) and mean overall interviewer ratings, in the IM condition only**

IM tactic	<i>r</i>		
	Across interview formats ( $n = 86$ )	Behavior description interview ( $n = 44$ )	Situational interview ( $n = 42$ )
Other-focused verbal tactics	$-.02$	.02	.31*
Self-focused verbal tactics	.42***	.44**	.06
Defensive verbal tactics	.25*	.08	.12
Nonverbal tactics	.38***	.14	.33*

Notes: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

verbal statements or accurate portrayals of past events or future intentions. The purpose of the present study was to investigate how instructions to convey a favorable impression, candidates' individual differences, and interview format influenced the use and the impact of verbal and nonverbal IM tactics in BDIs and SIs. This study resulted in several substantive and methodological contributions.

### Substantive Contributions

A first interesting finding was that *IM instructions* influenced the use of verbal IM tactics. More specifically, people who were instructed to convey a favorable impression used more proactive, assertive self-focused and other-focused verbal tactics than people who were instructed to convey an accurate impression. In addition, our finding that people prefer assertive tactics rather than defensive tactics supports previous research (Ellis *et al.*, 2002; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Our result that IM instructions had no influence on the use of nonverbal tactics suggests that nonverbal behavior might be less intentionally controllable in selection contexts. This stems probably from the fact that nonverbal reactions occur very fast and more spontaneously than verbal reactions. It is worth noting that ample research evidence shows that attempts to produce specific nonverbal behaviors often cannot be executed successfully (DePaulo, 1992). Furthermore, our results are in line with previous findings that candidates' motivation is difficult to infer from their nonverbal cues (Gifford *et al.*, 1985) and that in real job interviews candidates do not differ very much in their nonverbal behaviors (Riggio & Throckmorton, 1988).

Second, *interview format* influenced the kind of verbal tactics applicants used when they were instructed to convey a favorable impression. In BDIs, they used more self-focused and defensive verbal tactics. In SIs, they used more other-focused verbal tactics. These results parallel previous findings of Ellis *et al.* (2002) on the use of self-focused and other-focused verbal IM tactics as a function of question type. Furthermore, they lend support to expectancy-value theory, which posits that applicants try to construct images and thus use IM tactics that conform to the cues received from their environment. Past-oriented questions (BDIs) trigger tactics that reflect successful past accomplishments; future-oriented questions (SIs) trigger tactics that reflect promising future attitudes, beliefs or intentions. We also discovered that defensive tactics are used only in BDIs. In these interviews, applicants might mention past situations with a potential negative outcome. However, as our results showed, defensive tactics were not triggered by IM instructions. Apparently, it is unlikely that applicants will spontaneously come up with negative outcomes and with this kind of defensive tactics when they are instructed to put their best foot forward.

The third major finding of our study is that the relationship between *applicants' individual differences* and IM use is moderated by IM instructions. On a general level, the use of specific IM tactics is stronger in the IM condition as compared to the honest condition. This supports the proposition that instructions to convey a favorable impression cannot be considered a "strong" situation. As the instructions to convey a favorable impression did not include details to candidates about the specific way they should convey this impression, candidates appear to choose the specific IM tactics that match their own personality traits. Furthermore, the expression of trait-relevant behavior (in this case IM use) seemed to require relevant situational cues (Tett & Guterman, 2000), namely instructions to use IM. On a more specific level, it is important to be cautious with generalizing the following moderating effects of individual differences because of low statistical power. When applicants were instructed to give a desirable impression, *high self-monitors* and people *high on agreeableness* tended to use more nonverbal IM tactics than low self-monitors and people low on agreeableness, respectively. Apparently, agreeable people try to evoke interpersonal attraction and liking by using friendly nonverbal behaviors instead of by using "sweet-talk." When applicants were instructed to convey a desirable impression, both people with an *external locus of control* and *neurotic people* used more defensive tactics as compared to people with an internal locus of control and emotional stable people respectively. Note also that external locus of control was highly related with neuroticism in the total sample ( $r = .34$ ). People with these traits tend to use a negativistic cognitive style when they give explanations (Watson, 2000). The fact that neuroticism led to a greater use of defensive verbal tactics supports previous findings in clinical and psychiatric studies (e.g., Avia *et al.*, 1998; Spinhoven *et al.*, 1995). Finally, *openness* seemed to lead to greater use of self-focused verbal tactics, but only when people were instructed to put their best foot forward.

In contrast, when people were instructed to convey an accurate or honest impression, a different pattern of relationships emerged. The most important result here is that *self-esteem* correlated positively with the use of self-focused statements. Additionally, the correlations also showed a positive relationship between conscientiousness and self-focused statements in the honest condition. It seems that high self-esteem and high conscientious people express more confidence in possessing the abilities needed for the job. High self-esteem applicants might be more inclined than low self-esteem applicants to *feel* that they are responsible for positive outcomes (Baumeister *et al.*, 1989; Liden *et al.*, 1993), while high conscientious people probably *are* responsible for their positive outcomes.

Finally, the present study also contributed to a greater understanding of the *effectiveness of IM tactics* as this was one of the first studies to investigate the impact of both verbal and nonverbal tactics in BDIs/SIs on IM

effectiveness. Our results showed that self-focused verbal IM tactics influenced interviewer evaluations in BDIs, which can be explained by attribution theory (Weiner, 1985), whereas other-focused verbal tactics led to positive interviewer evaluations in SIs. When we combine these results with the expectancy-value framework mentioned above, applicants seem to choose the IM tactics that might have the greatest impact and maximize their value. In BDIs, applicants choose to use self-focused tactics because they know that boasting about their competences is successful, whereas applicants know that conforming to the opinions of interviewers might be effective in the case of hypothetical questions. Nonverbal IM tactics influenced interviewer evaluations in SIs only. The fact that nonverbal IM tactics were relatively unimportant in predicting interviewer evaluations in BDIs could be explained by the fact that these kind of interviews provided enough verbal information to make applicant judgments. In contrast, in SIs, the answers were often short so that interviewers had to make their judgments on the basis of other information sources such as nonverbal behavior.

### *Methodological Contributions*

On the basis of our results, we believe that researchers should go beyond investigating IM at an aggregate level. It makes little sense to draw conclusions about "IM" in interviews. Instead, one should carefully mention which specific IM tactics (other-focused, self-focused, etc.) are used. The same fine-grained approach should be followed when analyzing IM use. In fact, additional analyses with *total* (relative) verbal IM use as dependent variable did not yield significant effects of interview format and individual differences. This would have led to erroneous conclusions of verbal IM not being affected by interview format and applicant traits.

Our second methodological contribution concerns the use of relative interview durations (i.e., absolute IM frequencies divided by interview duration). This is important because BDIs and SIs differ in terms of interview duration. BDIs take more time because applicants have to explain a situation and provide information about the context of an event prior to describing how they reacted or handled the situation. Conversely, in SIs the situation is already given by the interviewer so that candidates only have to describe what they would do (cf., Huffcutt *et al.*, 2001). In Pulakos and Schmitt (1995), the average SI time was approximately 45 min, whereas a BDI took about 60 min. The same ratio was observed in the present study. Thus, indirectly, BDIs give applicants more opportunity to use IM tactics. This was supported by additional analyses on the absolute IM frequencies, which were not reported here. Thus, when investigating possible antecedents of IM tactic use, interview duration seems an important variable that should be taken into account.

### *Limitations*

A first limitation is related to the potential lack of generalizability of our results to real hiring contexts because the screening for the training program had developmental purposes. In a similar vein, candidates were probably less prepared for the interview as in a real hiring context. However, we tried as best as we could to ensure the external validity and realism of our study by including actual candidates in an operational setting. In addition, these students were representative of a general student population in terms of personality.

Second, although efforts have been made to ensure realism, the fact that interviewers evaluated videotaped candidates and had no face-to-face contact might have affected our results. For example, Van Iddekinge, Raymark, and Roth (2003) showed that ratings of videotaped interviews were more resistant to interviewee response distortion, suggesting caution about generalizing results from videotaped interviews to real-life selection interviews. Especially the influence of nonverbal behaviors might have been underestimated in our study because of the lack of face-to-face contact. However, there is also evidence that general characteristics of decision policies remain constant across real and hypothetical candidates (Graves & Karren, 1992; Harris & Sackett, 1988). And as we already mentioned, professional interviewers considered the videotaped candidate performances to be very realistic.

A final limitation is related to the type of interviews conducted. In this study, we focused on BDIs and SIs. Both interviews had a short interview duration (about 3–6 min long) in our study. In short interviews, interviewers might have limited information so that they have to rely on general (first) impressions. Hence, future research might use longer interview fragments to provide interviewers with more information about the candidates' KSA. It remains unclear whether the use of short interviews leads to an under- or an overestimation of IM effectiveness. On the one hand, there are reasons to believe that IM is most effective in short time fragments, when interviewers have to evaluate candidates on a minimum of information (cf., Gilmore & Ferris, 1989). On the other hand, longer interviews might give applicants more time and opportunity to use IM tactics and to influence interviewer evaluations. Thus, future research should investigate the generalizability of the results to longer interview durations and/or examine the moderating role of interview duration on the use and the effectiveness of IM.

### *Directions for Future Research*

As already mentioned in the introduction, there exist many ways of structuring an interview. Future research should examine how our results replicate across other interview formats and other interview structure levels. Along these lines, it would be particularly interesting to scrutinize

whether the content of interviews (i.e., the constructs measured) and/or procedural factors (e.g., not permitting probes, asking the same questions) is related to IM use by candidates. No study has crossed these two factors to examine their impact on IM use. For example, it might be that interview content is more important than structure level. Additionally, nonverbal IM might be more effective in structured interview formats mainly assessing social skills (e.g., Salgado & Moscoso, 2002). In a similar vein, the generalizability of our findings to unstructured interviews should be investigated.

To illustrate this suggestion for future research, Moscoso and Salgado (2002) and Roth, Van Iddekinge, Huffcutt, Eidson, and Schmit (2005) found little saturation of highly structured interviews by personality factors. However, Roth *et al.* (2005) acknowledge that they only tested one SI and one BDI and that other types of structured interviews may focus more naturally on personality (e.g., psychological interviews).

Another intriguing direction for future research consists of examining the relative importance of verbal and nonverbal IM tactics in selection decisions. We also do not know the relative importance that interviewers place on verbal and nonverbal IM tactics, relative to the importance they attach to predetermined job-relevant criteria. Perhaps, the relative impact of certain IM tactics is negligible as compared to the impact of candidates' relevant competencies.

Furthermore, little is known about how individual difference variables such as interviewer experience and interviewer personality characteristics might moderate the relative importance that interviewers attach to IM tactics. To this end, future research might use policy-capturing designs to examine how interviewers combine, weight, and integrate relevant information about predetermined criteria and IM cues.

Finally, future research on IM should try to disentangle the influence that IM motivation has on the quality of the answers given by the applicant and the impact that IM motivation has on IM tactics that lead to interviewers' subjective biases. More specifically, when people are motivated to present themselves favorably, they usually will do more effort to come up with excellent answers to the interview questions and this will lead to higher interview evaluations. In addition, they might also use some verbal and nonverbal IM tactics. Thus, it would be interesting to investigate whether IM motivation directly influences interview evaluations by improving the quality of the answers, or rather indirectly by inducing some bias. In other words, the influence of IM motivation and IM tactics on interviewer ratings should be controlled for the quality of the answers.

## Conclusion

Although IM has a long research tradition, there are various unresolved issues concerning the antecedents and

effectiveness of IM in the extant literature. This study showed that some important methodological and conceptual variables should be taken into account when investigating IM. Methodologically, it is worth noting that IM is a multifaceted concept and that one should examine IM at the individual tactic level. In addition, interview duration should be considered in IM tactic studies. Conceptually, interview format and IM instructions seem to play a significant role. Interview format influences the kind of tactics used, which in turn influences interviewer evaluations. IM instructions influence assertive verbal IM tactic use and might moderate the influence of applicant traits on IM tactic use.

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## Appendix A

### Example BDI and SI Questions

*BDI Question (Interpersonal Skills)*. Describe a situation in which you had the feeling that someone didn't take his/her responsibilities for some task, duty or assignment, so you had to do more than was normally expected from you. Can you describe this situation and more specifically: (1) when did this happen, (2) what was the task, duty or assignment and (3) how did you handle the situation and what was the outcome?

*SI Question (Interpersonal Skills)*. Your roommate, usually a tidy person, has recently experienced some personal difficulties. As a result, the roommate has become quite distracted and has left much of the household responsibilities to you. You have talked to your roommate, and empathetically requested that the roommate resume his/her share of the responsibilities as soon as possible. A month passes and you are still doing too much of the roommate's work. What would you do?