THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF OVERCONFIDENT LEADERSHIP – AN EXAMINATION OF MOTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND OUTCOMES

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THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF OVERCONFIDENT LEADERSHIP – AN EXAMINATION OF MOTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND OUTCOMES

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Statement of Ph.D. Candidate and Co-Authors Contributions

Throughout the co-authored chapters (i.e., Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5), Samuel Mayoral (Ph.D. candidate) was the main responsible for the processes of methodological design, data collection, analyses and interpretation of the data, and writing of the manuscript. Co-authors (Janneke K. Oostrom and Richard Ronay in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, and Tanja Hentschel in Chapter 4) contributed to the manuscript via team discussions, collective decision-making, provision of active feedback throughout the whole research process, and text edits and refinement. Paul Jansen offered feedback and suggestions in all chapters.

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

Self-confidence, or the belief in one's own abilities to perform and attain desired outcomes (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Chemers et al., 2000; Clark et al., 2008; Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004), brings multiple benefits. For instance, self-confident people tend to experience better mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988), increased motivation and persistence (Pajares, 1996), and have more successful professional careers (Abele & Spurk, 2009). However, despite the advantages of self-confidence, it is also important to be able to recognize one's limitations, as this allows individuals to set feasible goals (Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003), select appropriate behavioral strategies (Neale & Bazerman, 1985), or avoid contests that they are unlikely to win (Camerer & Lovallo, 1999), for example. Remarkably, numerous studies have demonstrated that people often fail to appraise their own capacities accurately – students overestimate their scores on academic exams (Kennedy et al., 2002), physicians overrate the precision of their diagnosis (Bushyhead & Christensen-Szalanski, 1981), most drivers think of themselves as better skilled than the average driver (Williams, 2003), and entrepreneurs overestimate their abilities and chances of success when starting a new business (Koellinger et al., 2007). These self-evaluative biases illustrate what researchers refer to as overconfidence, or the belief that one is better (i.e., more skilled, more competent, more knowledgeable) than one really is based on objective evidence (e.g., Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Meikle et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008). Therefore, overconfidence is not the same as high self-confidence, which may reflect an accurate, positive evaluation of one's knowledge, skills, and capacities. Overconfidence occurs when individuals inaccurately evaluate themselves, harboring and displaying a level of self-confidence that exceeds their real capacities.

Overconfidence can have serious consequences for organizations, especially when manifested in powerful people (see Meikle et al. 2016 for a review). For example,

overconfident leaders are more prone to overestimate returns to their investments and make value-destroying acquisitions (Malmendier & Tate, 2008), tend to underestimate the downsides and risks of projects (Gervais et al., 2011), overlook flaws and deficiencies in their plans (Shipman & Mumford, 2011), and resist acknowledging and adjusting their errors when revealed (Ronay et al., 2016). In spite of these well-known consequences, several studies suggest that overconfident people often find themselves appointed to high-status positions of power and influence (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Barnerjee et al., 2014; Goel & Thakor, 2008; Kennedy et al, 2013; Reuben et al., 2012).

To date, however, evidence for the relationship between overconfidence and the attainment of high-status positions is mostly focused on leadership emergence in informal settings (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Grijalva et al., 2015; Kennedy et al., 2013; Reuben et al., 2012) and little is known about the effects of overconfidence in formal leadership selection contexts. This is an important distinction because leadership emergence and selection reflect different processes. Emergence occurs naturally within groups without the premeditated intention of selecting a leader, whereas selection involves recognizing the need for a leader who is then purposely sought by recruiters and scrutinized by professional selection panels that evaluate leadership candidates in several domains (e.g., technical competence, person-organization fit, or leadership potential). Moreover, even if the individual qualities that facilitate leadership emergence and selection overlap to some extent, and may therefore be generalized from the former to the latter, the precise mechanisms through which overconfident people attain leadership positions have remained largely unexplored (see Anderson et al., 2012 for an exception). Thus, the seminal goal of the investigations presented in this dissertation was to elucidate such mechanisms.

To this end, across four research papers comprising a total of eleven studies, I investigated the role of overconfidence in different leadership processes, including leadership

selection, leadership-attainment strategies, and leadership behavior. In this introductory chapter, I first offer a theoretical contextualization of overconfidence, wherein I present the three main explanations that scholars have proposed for the occurrence of overconfidence. I then proceed to describe the three main methodological approaches through which overconfidence has been operationalized in the literature. Third, I introduce self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) as the overarching theoretical framework serving as the foundation for most of the arguments and predictions presented subsequently. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the four research chapters comprising this dissertation and the core theoretical constructs pertaining to each of them.

Theoretical Explanations for Overconfidence

Overconfidence is common. Indeed, de Bondt and Thaler (1995) argued that "perhaps the most robust finding in the psychology of judgment is that people are overconfident" (p. 389), and some have even referred to overconfidence as "the most pervasive and potent bias to which human judgement is vulnerable" (Mannes & Moore, 2013, p.1, in reference to Kahneman, 2011). Given the practical value of accurately recognizing of one's own strengths and limitations (e.g., Camerer & Lovallo, 1999; Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003; Neale & Bazerman, 1985), researchers have long strived to understand the prevalence of overconfidence, resulting in three main explanations.

The first explanation highlights a series of cognitive processes that tend to produce directional biases. For example, exaggerated self-views may arise because people are more prone to attend to success than failure (Miller & Ross, 1975), because they may lack the competence to realize their own incompetence (an effect usually known as the Dunning-Kruger effect; Dunning, 2011), or because they hold idiosyncratic ideas about competence and success (Santos-Pinto & Sobel. 2005). Therefore, from this perspective, overconfidence emerges as a result of "fairly mundane judgement processes" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 718).

The second explanation focuses on the intrapersonal processes associated with holding positive self-views. Specifically, researchers have argued and demonstrated that positive self-views provide individuals with a number of psychological benefits. For example, people who see themselves in a positive light tend to have higher self-esteem (Alicke, 1985), higher motivation and task persistence (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002), and better mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988) and subjective well-being (Killingsworth & Moore, 2016). Put simply, people might tend towards overconfidence simply because believing in oneself feels good (Moore & Schatz, 2017). However, although correlational evidence supports this notion, prior studies have also proposed that people might develop aggrandized self-views simply because they believe that optimistic self-views increase actual outcomes (Armor et al., 2008). Consistent with this idea, others have suggested that overconfident appraisals of one's competence contribute to optimistic forecasts of chances of success in difficult tasks and competitive environments (Kahneman & Lovallo, 1993), hence helping individuals overcome the natural inclination towards risk-aversion in such scenarios (Burson et al., 2010) and favoring optimal decision-making. However, even if these two biases can counteract each other, more recent theoretical works (Moore & Schatz, 2017) have argued that wise choices should be better facilitated by accurate perceptions of skill and competence than by opposing biases (i.e., risk-aversion and overconfidence) operating at cross-purposes. These critiques have led some scholars to state that evidence for the intrapersonal benefits of overconfidence is "less than completely persuasive" (Moore & Schatz, 2017, p. 7).

The third explanation focuses on the interpersonal processes associated with positive self-views. More precisely, numerous scholars have theorized that positively-biased self-views might provide individuals with social benefits (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Krebs & Denton, 1997; Leary, 2007; Trivers, 1985; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011; Waldman, 1994). In order to thrive socially, people need and seek to look competent in the eyes of others, as this bears implications

for how others treat them (e.g., Leary & Kowalski, 1990). It is important to note here, however, that individuals' actual competence is not always directly observable, and so evolutionary processes have produced heuristics that allow people to infer individual differences in competence. One such heuristic is confidence. Indeed, several studies suggest that confident individuals are seen as more persuasive and influential (Radzevick & Moore, 2011), more compelling leaders (Magee & Frazier, 2014), and are more likely to attain positions of status and influence within groups (Anderson et al., 2012), as people interpret displays of confidence as cues of actual competence. Proponents of the interpersonal account of overconfidence thus suggest that bolstering one's self-image facilitates such displays of confidence, and so makes people more likely to achieve better social outcomes. Of course, individuals could purposely misrepresent their confidence in the pursuit of such benefits. However, a genuine belief in one's competence, even if inaccurate, precludes the possibility of being appraised as fake and deceitful (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011), which could backfire and lead to loss of status and social attractiveness (Dufner et al., 2013). This interpersonal account of overconfidence has garnered considerable empirical support in the last decade (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Belmi et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019).

Manifestations and Operationalizations of Overconfidence

Scholars have described three forms in which overconfidence can manifest – overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement (Moore & Healy, 2008). The first one, overprecision, refers to the exaggerated belief that one's knowledge, ideas, and opinions are precise. Operationalizations of overprecision typically consist of asking participants questions with numerical answers (e.g., *"how high is the Eiffel Tower?"*) and subsequently have them provide 90% confidence intervals around their answers. Participants whose confidence intervals do not contain the right answer at least 90% of the times across several estimates are

categorized as exhibiting overprecision – the lower the percentage of correct intervals (i.e., those containing the right answer) the more overprecision.

The second form of overconfidence, overestimation, refers to excessively positive beliefs concerning one's abilities and performance. Overestimation has mostly been operationalized via different versions of multiple-choice quizzes, wherein participants are asked to choose the correct answer to several questions with three given alternatives answers each (e.g., *"how many days does a hen take to incubate an egg?", "7 days", "21 days", or "28 days"*). Participants subsequently indicate how confident they are that their answers are correct, in a scale ranging from 33% (*"not sure at all, just guessing"*) to 100% (*"absolutely sure"*). Researchers have adopted two different approaches to computing overestimation scores from these data. Some have asked participants to indicate their confidence in their answers to each of the quiz questions separately, with overestimation scores resulting from a comparison between each participant average accuracy and average confidence – if average confidence across items is above average accuracy across items, a participant is categorized as exhibiting overestimation. However, Moore and Healy (2008) noted that this procedure confounds overprecision and overestimation, as beliefs in the precision of one's knowledge (i.e., overprecision) and beliefs about one's performance (i.e., overestimation) must necessarily be the same at item level. Indeed, the extent to which one is sure to possess the right knowledge about a specific question (e.g., a hen takes 21 days to incubate an egg) cannot be different from one's beliefs regarding their performance on such item. To overcome this limitation, Moore and Healy (2008) suggested capturing participants' confidence at the overall level – that is, via one single time at the end of the quiz, hence allowing for a decoupling between beliefs in the precision of one's knowledge and beliefs about the quality of one's performance. In this case, participants are asked to indicate how well they think that they have performed overall in the

quiz, in a scale ranging from 0 (*"very poorly, I think all my answers are incorrect"*) to 100 (*"very well, I think all my answers are correct"*).

The last form of overconfidence, overplacement, refers to the exaggerated belief that one is more competent than others. In a way similar to overestimation, researchers have operationalized overplacement via multiple-choice quizzes – participants are presented with a series of questions with three possible alternative answers each. However, instead of having participants indicate how well they think that they have performed in the quiz, they are asked to indicate how well they think that they have performed in the quiz relative to the other participants in the study, in a scale ranging from 0 (*"very poorly, I think I did worse than 99% of the other participants"*) to 100 (*"very well, I think I did better than 99% of the other participants"*). To compute overplacement scores, researchers transform participants' performance in terms of correct answers into percentile rankings, and then compare their actual rank to their self-perceived rank – if self-perceived rank is above actual rank, a participant is categorized as exhibiting overplacement.

Throughout the present dissertation, I have operationalized overconfidence in these three different forms, and the results (especially those of Chapter 3, wherein I adopted a comprehensive methodological approach that allowed for a comparison of the effects of overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement) have led me to question whether these different forms of overconfidence are intrinsically different from each other, or, as I now lean to believe, merely different operationalizations of the same underlying, unitary construct – i.e., self-enhancement. Indeed, although in the initial chapters (2 and 3) I paid considerable attention to theoretically describing and methodologically differentiating overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement, in the latter chapters (4 and 5) I ceased to attend to this differentiation. This is an important issue that deserves discussion, and so I will return to it in more detail in the general discussion.

Self-Verification Theory as the Overarching Basis for Guiding Predictions

Just as the theoretical notion that overconfidence is a multifaceted construct gradually lost relevance in my investigations, another theoretical framework gradually emerged as an ideal basis for guiding overconfidence-related predictions – self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990).

The central idea behind self-verification theory was first articulated by Lecky (1945), who proposed that stable self-views provide people with a strong sense of coherence that helps them make sense of their worlds, predict outcomes and future events, and so organize their behavior. Building on this premise, the first proposition of self-verification theory is that people have a powerful inherent desire to confirm and stabilize their self-views. Since people form their self-views via social and interpersonal processes (i.e., through observing how others perceive them and treat them) (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), the second proposition of self-verification theory is that people can only sustain their self-views insofar as they receive self-congruent social responses from others. Therefore, people actively strive to ensure that their interactions with others and their experiences in groups confirm their self-views. Indeed, numerous studies over the last three decades have offered ample empirical support for these propositions (e.g., Ayduk et al., 2008; Burke, 1991; Cable & Kay, 2012; Kraus & Chen, 2014; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; see North & Swann, 2009 for a review).

These central tenets of self-verification theory bear at least two important implications for overconfidence research. First, overconfident individuals should strive to adopt behaviors strategically designed to facilitate validation of their exaggerated self-views. Second, due to the social origins of self-views, these "self-verification strivings" (Swann et al., 1992, p. 314) should operate eminently in the social domain. In the investigations comprising this dissertation, I relied on these two notions to establish predictions concerning the influence of

overconfidence on individual behavior within organizational contexts, with an emphasis on leadership processes.

Overview of Research Chapters

The current dissertation contains four research chapters, each of which is devoted to investigating the effects of overconfidence on different though related leadership processes. In the following sections, I provide a general overview of the central theoretical constructs and predictions tested in each investigation. Figure 1 offers a graphical overview of the constructs and proposed relationships investigated in Chapters 2 to 5, and Table 1 offers a summary of each chapter's title, main variables, hypotheses, studies, methodologies, key findings, and manuscript current status.

Chapter 2: Overconfidence and Perceptions of Leadership Suitability: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Explanatory Mechanisms

In this chapter, I investigated the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection, operationalized indirectly as perceptions of leadership suitability. Specifically, I suggested that an exaggerated perception of one's skill and competence (i.e., overconfidence) provides individuals with a psychological buffer against social evaluative stressors, which I formally labeled as affective robustness. This affective robustness was argued to provide overconfident candidates with an advantage in the context of leadership selection interviews, as it might serve to attenuate detrimental emotional shifts (i.e., decreases in positive affect and increases in negative affect) stemming from feelings of stress and anxiety that most people experience in these situations (Donaldson et al., 2002). Relieved from such emotional constraints, I suggested that overconfident candidates might be better able (relative to less self-assured competitors) to attain higher levels of performance in selection interviews, ultimately leading to more favorable perceptions of competence and, in turn, leadership suitability. These ideas were tested in three follow-up studies involving both correlational and experimental

designs. Chapter 2 was later integrated into a larger paper that consisted of five studies and was published in *The Leadership Quarterly* under the title "Playing the Trump Card: Why We Select Overconfident Leaders and Why It Matters", with Richard Ronay as the leading researcher and first author. Reference: Ronay, R., Oostrom, J. K., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., Mayoral, S., & Rusch, H. (2019). Playing the Trump Card: Why We Select Overconfident Leaders and Why It Matters. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *30*(6), 101316.

Chapter 3: Overconfidence and the Pursuit of High-Status Positions: A Test of Two Behavioral Strategies

The investigation described in Chapter 2 examined the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection by focusing on the positive evaluative biases that overconfidence elicits. However, in a series of studies posterior to the writing of Chapter 2, Belmi et al. (2020) reported a positive association between overconfidence and the desire for higher social status. This finding prompted the idea that overconfidence might also give rise to active status-seeking behaviors. Thus, in Chapter 3, I examined the relationship between overconfidence and the adoption of different forms of behavioral strategies intended to facilitate the attainment of high-status positions – such as leadership roles. More specifically, I first presented and tested the initial idea that overconfident individuals are particularly prone to the pursuit of high-status positions. Then, I examined the relationships between overconfidence, dominance, and prestige – two distinct behavioral strategies that people can adopt towards the attainment of high-status positions (Cheng et al., 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Maner & Case, 2016). Dominance refers to the pursuit of high-status through forceful, intimidating, fear-inducing, and coercive behaviors, and reflects an individuals' desire for power and control over others. Prestige, as opposed, refers to the pursuit of high-status via group-oriented behaviors, such as the sharing of valuable knowledge, and reflects an individuals' desire for others' respect and admiration. Both dominance and prestige have been

found to represent effective strategies for winning and maintaining higher social rank (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013). However, because overconfidence entails an exaggerated sense of one's competence, I argued that overconfident individuals might over time find it difficult to attain and maintain high-status positions via earned respect and admiration from others (e.g., their managers and co-workers), leading them to calibrate their status-seeking strategies away from prestige and towards dominance. To finalize, I posited that dominance-based strategies would feature as an explanatory mechanism between overconfidence and advancement to high-status positions. These ideas were tested via three follow-up studies, including a field study among real-world supervisor-subordinate dyads that were working together at the moment of participation. Chapter 3 is currently being revised and reformatted for submission at *Group and Organization Management*.

Chapter 4: Overconfidence, Moral Disengagement, and Deceptive Impression Management: Verifying an Idealized Self

In Chapter 4, I continued my investigations into the behavioral strategies associated with overconfidence. This time, I focused on impression management behaviors adopted by overconfident candidates in the specific context of selection processes. Specifically, building on self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) and the notion that overconfidence implies an exaggerated sense of one's own competence, I argued that overconfident candidates might be particularly prone to employ deceptive impression management behaviors (e.g., exaggerating or fabricating past professional achievements), as opposed to honest impression management behaviors (e.g., making sure to emphasize one's actual past professional achievements). Deceptive impression management behaviors are proposed to represent a strategic effort from the overconfident in aims to elicit in others self-congruent impressions of superior skill and competence, thereby facilitating the verification of their exaggerated self-views. Furthermore, I theorized that overconfidence, as a form of self-deception, is positively

related to another form of self-deceptive reasoning – moral disengagement, which I suggested operates as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between overconfidence and deceptive impression management. These ideas were tested in two follow-up studies involving fictional as well as real-world selection processes, with a focus on candidates' motivation letters and job interviews. Chapter 4 is currently being formatted for submission to *Human Resource Management*.

Chapter 5: Overconfidence in Power: Despotic Leadership as an Instrument towards Self-Verification

In the preceding chapters, I investigated the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection, as well as a series of intrapersonal (i.e., emotional robustness) and interpersonal (i.e., perceived competence, dominance, and deceptive impression management) mechanisms posited to underlie the positive association between overconfidence and attainment of leadership positions. In sight of the previous findings, in Chapter 5 I sought to answer perhaps the most natural follow-up question – if overconfidence facilitates the attainment of leadership positions, how do the overconfident behave once effectively in leadership roles? In answering this question, I proposed that overconfident leaders might be inclined to engage in despotic leadership, defined as the use of authoritarian and dominant behaviors in the service of one's personal goals and motives (e.g., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Specifically, I argued that despotic leadership might serve overconfident leaders as an instrument to protect and enhance their unrealistic self-image, hence again facilitating the fundamental human need for self-verification – i.e., the need to confirm and stabilize one's own image (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990). Moreover, I explored the role of power asymmetries in the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, suggesting that organizational contexts characterized by high-power-asymmetries between leaders and subordinates facilitate, and therefore strengthen, the use of despotic leadership behaviors from

overconfident leaders, relative to organizational contexts characterized by low-power-asymmetries. Chapter 5 is currently in the process of methodological refinement and further data collection.

Figure 1.

Graphical overview of the constructs and proposed relationships investigated in chapters 2 to 5.
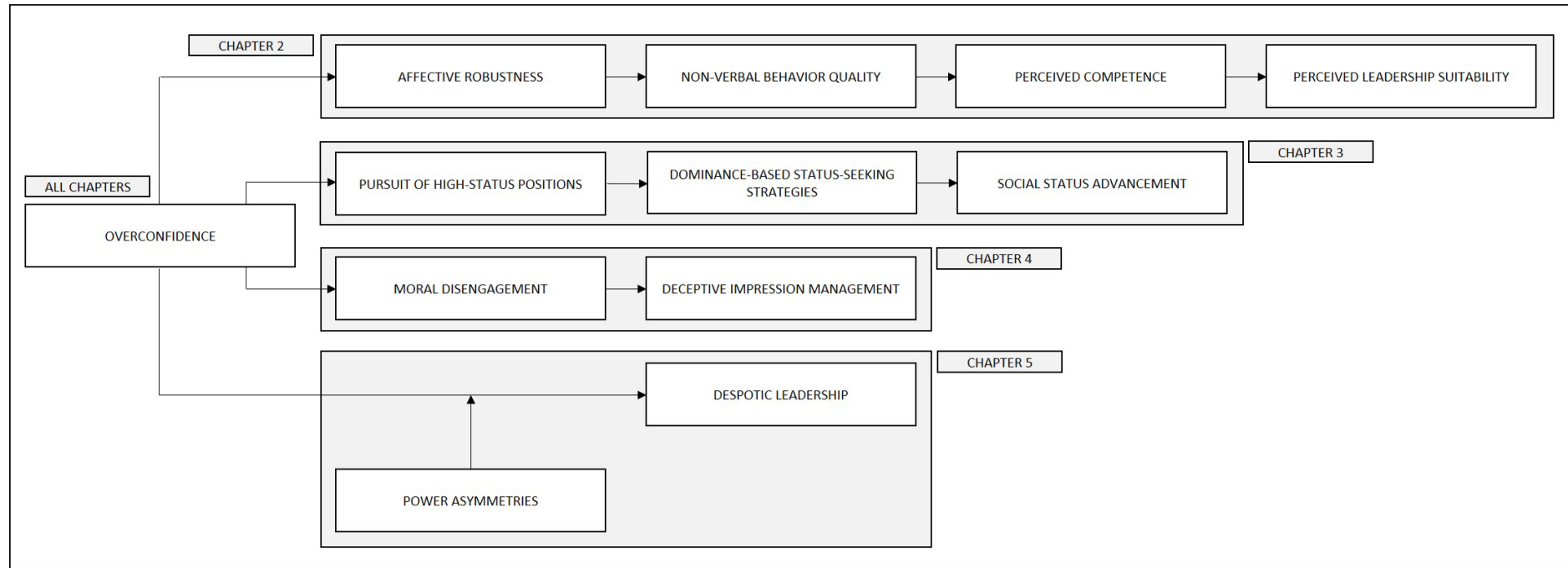
Table 1.

Summary of each chapter's title, main variables, hypotheses, studies, methodologies, key findings, and manuscript current status.

	TITLE	VARIABLES	STUDIES	METHODOLOGY	KEY FINDINGS	STATUS
Chapter 2	• Overconfidence and Perceptions of Leadership Suitability: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Explanatory Mechanisms	• Overconfidence • Affective Robustness • Interview Performance • Perceived Competence • Perceived Leadership Suitability	• 3	• Laboratory Study • Crowdsourcing Survey • Experimental Total N = 1097	• Overconfidence is positively related to non-verbal behavior interview performance through affective robustness in response to social stress • Overconfidence is positively related to perceptions of leadership suitability through perceptions of superior competence	• Published - Integrated into Ronay, R., Oostrom, J. K., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., Mayoral, S., & Rusch, H. (2019). Playing the Trump Card: Why We Select Overconfident Leaders and Why It Matters. The Leadership Quarterly, 30(6), 101-316
Chapter 3	• Overconfidence and the Pursuit of High-Status Positions: A Test of Two Behavioral Strategies	• Overconfidence • Pursuit of High-Status Positions • Dominance • Prestige • Social Status Advancement	• 3	• Crowdsourcing Survey • Field Survey Total N = 618, of which 330 were paired together for dyadic analyses (Study 3)	• Overconfidence is positively related to the pursuit of high-status positions • Overconfidence is positively related to dominance-based status-seeking strategies • Overconfidence is positively related to social status advancement through dominance-based status-seeking strategies	• Revising and reformatting for submission to Group and Organization Management
Chapter 4	• Overconfidence, Moral Disengagement, and Deceptive Impression Management: Verifying an Idealized Self	• Overconfidence • Impression Management • Moral Disengagement	• 2	• Crowdsourcing Survey • Field Survey Total N = 256	• Overconfidence is positively related to the use of deceptive impression management behavior in selection processes • Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors in selection processes	• Formatting for submission to Human Resource Management
Chapter 5	• Overconfidence in Power: Despotic Leadership as an Instrument towards Self-Verification	• Overconfidence • Despotic Leadership • Power Asymmetries	• 3	• Crowdsourcing Survey • Experimental Total N = 581	• Overconfidence is positively related to despotic leadership behavior • Power asymmetries moderate the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior	• Methodological refinement and further data collection

Chapter 2

Overconfidence and Perceived Leadership Suitability: Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Explanatory Mechanisms

The ubiquity of overconfidence is a well-documented, undisputed fact. Some have referred to it as the "most pervasive and potent bias to which human judgment is vulnerable" (Mannes & Moore, 2013, p.1, in reference to Kahneman, 2011). Indeed, numerous studies show that individuals tend to think of themselves as more capable than they actually are, as well as to believe that they are more competent than others (see Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Alicke & Sedikides 2009; Dunning et al., 2004 for reviews). For example, students consistently overestimate their own performance in academic exams (Clayson, 2005; Kennedy et al., 2002; Shepperd et al., 1996), CEO's overestimate the returns to their investments (Malmendier & Tate, 2005), drivers think of themselves as better skilled than the average driver (Williams, 2003), and physicians overrate the accuracy of their diagnoses (Bushyhead & Christensen-Szalanski, 1981). These skewed, overly positive conceptions of one's own abilities might be considered "creative self-deceptions of the healthy mind" (Maciel, Heckhausen, & Baltes, 1994, p. 82) and might actually bring some benefits to the individual, such as increased optimism, disposition to innovate, and self-efficacy (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988; Trevelyan, 2008). However, they are also associated with negative, often highly costly outcomes that can have enormous consequences, especially in the case of powerful people (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review). For instance, Malmendier and Tate (2005) found that overconfident CEOs are 65% more likely to make value destroying acquisitions, Schrand and Zechman (2012) observed overconfident executives to be at enhanced risk for committing accounting fraud, and Ronay et al., (2016) reported a positive association between overconfidence and persistence in failing plans when their reputation is at stake. Several theoretical and empirical works have even pointed to leaders' overconfidence as a primary cause of war (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006).

Despite these well-known consequences, leadership roles are often occupied by overconfident people, especially in organizational contexts (e.g., Meikle et al., 2016). One existing explanation for the prevalence of overconfidence among those in top positions is that the subjective experience of power that typically accompanies leadership roles nurtures overconfident self-views (Fast et al., 2012). From this perspective, overconfidence is thus seen as a consequence of occupying powerful positions of leadership and influence. In the current paper, I propose and investigate an alternative possibility – overconfident individuals may be more likely to be appointed for leadership positions in the first place.

Specifically, I suggest that overconfidence, due to its self-deceptive nature, provides individuals with a genuine sense of superior skill and competence that functions as a psychological buffer against social evaluative stressors. This psychological buffer is in turn argued to provide overconfident candidates an advantage in the context of leadership selection interviews, as it might serve to attenuate detrimental emotional shifts (i.e., decreases in positive affect and increases in negative affect) stemming from the feelings of stress and anxiety that most people experience in these situations (Donaldson et al., 2002). Unburdened by such emotional constrains, I propose that overconfident candidates might be better able (relative to less self-assured competitors) to attain higher levels of performance during selection interviews, ultimately leading to more positive perceptions of competence and leadership suitability.

The present research contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, I explicate two seemingly contrasting theoretical explanations of overconfidence – the intrapersonal account (e.g., Alicke et al., 1985; Dunning et al., 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988) versus the interpersonal account (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Murphy et al., 2015; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011) – and demonstrate the practical relationship between the intrapersonal and interpersonal advantages that follow from overconfidence. Specifically, I find that overconfidence leads to an advantage in leadership competitions (i.e., the interpersonal account)

due to the psychological buffer against social stress that it provides (i.e., the intrapersonal account), as this facilitates candidates' performance during selection interviews. This finding offers novel insights concerning the explanatory mechanisms underlying the relationship between overconfidence and status-attainment. Second, I extend prior reports concerning the status-enhancing effects of overconfidence (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Barnejee et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2013) – specifically, by showing that overconfidence is associated with a higher likelihood of selection for leadership roles. To my knowledge, the present research is the first to examine the effects of overconfidence in the specific context of formal leadership selection processes. Finally, by pairing different levels of candidate overconfidence together with objective evidence (i.e., resume) of high vs. low candidate competence, I experimentally examine the robustness of the overconfidence status-enhancing effects. The results indicate that overconfidence predicts positive perceptions of leadership suitability regardless of candidates' actual competence, thus contributing to the debate concerning the boundaries of overconfident signaling (Kennedy et al., 2013; Tenney et al., 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Defining Overconfidence

In broad terms, overconfidence is defined as "a belief about oneself or one's knowledge that is too extreme or too precise given a comparable and objective benchmark of reality" (Meikle et al., 2016, p. 123). Overconfidence, however, is not a single sided, unitary construct that manifests similarly across situations and methods (Moore & Healy, 2008), and it is therefore important to discriminate among its forms and to explicitly state how it is understood and operationalized within the context of any given research work. Researchers have differentiated between three different forms in which overconfidence may manifest (1) overprecision, referring to an excessive belief in the precision of one's knowledge, (2) overestimation, or overly positive perceptions concerning one's level of performance and

chances of success, and (3) overplacement, which refers to the exaggerated belief that one is better than others (Moore & Healy, 2008). In this paper, I measure overconfidence via the General Knowledge Questionnaire (Michailova & Katter, 2014), which was developed with the specific purpose of capturing overconfidence in empirical research. The questionnaire presents individuals with a set of easy through hard general knowledge questions and then asks them to indicate their confidence in the correctness of their answers. This procedure is the most commonly used paradigm in prior overconfidence research, and it indistinctly reflects individuals' beliefs concerning the accuracy of their knowledge (i.e., overprecision) and their beliefs concerning the quality of their performance (i.e., overestimation) (Moore & Healy, 2008). Therefore, throughout the current research, I operationalize overconfidence as the difference between individuals' confidence in their own knowledge and performance and an objective measure of their actual knowledge and performance.

Intrapersonal versus Interpersonal Accounts of Overconfidence

Traditionally, scholars have explained overconfidence mostly by focusing on the intrapersonal and hedonic psychological processes associated with positive self-views. More precisely, researchers have proposed that positive perceptions regarding one's own level of competence, irrespective of one's actual capacities, acts as an intrapsychic buffer against threats to self-esteem (Alicke, 1985), thus helping individuals sustain optimism (Dunning et al., 1995), increase task motivation and persistence (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002), and experience better mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988). In short, the intrapersonal account of overconfidence suggests that people tend to develop overconfident self-views because genuinely seeing oneself as competent, skilled, and knowledgeable favors positive emotions and good psychological adjustment (Moore & Schatz, 2017).

More recently, an alternative theoretical explanation has emerged, focusing instead on the interpersonal benefits that overconfidence may provide. Specifically, several researchers

have suggested that favorable self-deception (i.e., genuinely considering oneself as more capable, more competent, stronger than one really is) might help individuals convince others that they really are better than they actually are, hence facilitating social advancement (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Krebs & Denton, 1997; Leary, 2007; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011; Waldman, 1994). Indeed, in order to thrive within the ranks of social hierarchies, people need and try to look capable in the eyes of the others, as this has implications for how others perceive them and treat them (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). For example, confident individuals are typically seen as more persuasive and influential (Radzevick & Moore, 2011), more compelling leaders (Magee & Frazier, 2014), and are more likely to attain positions of status and authority within groups (Anderson et al., 2012), as people interpret displays of confidence as a cue of actual competence. Importantly, because confidence and overconfidence are behaviorally indistinguishable, advocates of the interpersonal account argue that overconfidence piggybacks on the information value of confidence, thus misleading observers to inaccurate perceptions of superior skill and competence. The interpersonal account of overconfidence thus suggests that people develop overconfident self-views because these helps them attain more privileged positions of status and influence.

Overconfidence and Leadership Selection: A Reconciliation Between Overconfidence Accounts

One possibility that has not yet been explored is the idea that these contrasting intrapersonal versus interpersonal drivers towards overconfidence may not represent opposing, independent processes that serve different aims, but rather reflect two sides of the same tool that operate in tandem to open the same door (i.e., social advancement). Indeed, I propose that the intrapersonal benefits of overconfidence (i.e., increased optimism, positive affect in the face of social stressors, and a fulsome belief in one's general prowess) facilitate the expression of behavioral signals that lead the overconfident to appear more competent in others' eyes, and

so place them in an advantageous position in the context of leadership selection interviews (i.e., interpersonal benefits).

The Intrapersonal Side

Selection interviews are psychologically stressful contexts. First, because candidates find themselves in a position where their professional skills and competence, as well as their personal characteristics, are openly examined; and second, because the outcomes of selection procedures often bear important implications for candidates (e.g., professional promotion, self-esteem, financial gains, etc.) (Donaldson et al., 2002). Drawing from intrapersonal explanations for overconfidence (e.g., Alicke, 1985; Bénabou & Tirole, 2002; Killingsworth & Moore, 2016; Taylor & Brown, 1988), I first argue that, in the face of such social evaluative stressors, an exaggerated perception of one's skill and competence (i.e., overconfidence) may serve to attenuate negative emotional shifts that may otherwise arise from feelings of self-doubt and insecurity (e.g., Rapee & Lim, 1992), an intrapersonal benefit that I henceforth refer to as affective robustness. To be precise, I define affective robustness as an individual difference that makes some individuals less susceptible to detrimental emotional changes stemming from stressful circumstances, such as leadership selection interviews.

Hypothesis 1: Overconfidence is positively related to affective robustness during leadership selection interviews.

The relationship between stress and performance is well understood. Indeed, researchers have long recognized that while moderate levels of stress can enhance performance, higher levels of stress tend instead to hamper people's performance (e.g., Anderson, 1977; Lazarus et al., 1958; Westman, 1990; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Building on this basic notion, I suggest that overconfident candidates' affective robustness might allow them to achieve higher levels of performance in selection interviews – for instance, by better articulating their ideas, qualifications, and past achievements, and/or by exhibiting more compelling non-verbal

behaviors, such as a calmer demeanor, a more factual and confident voice tone, or more direct eye contact. Indeed, prior studies show that people with higher self-perceptions of competence (such as the overconfident) more commonly tend to adopt these forms of behavior in their interactions with others (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2003). Consistent with this idea, Anderson et al. (2012) demonstrated that overconfident individuals are indeed more prone than those with more accurate self-views to display these specific forms of interpersonal behavior. The underlying mechanisms that explain such behavioral differences, however, have not yet been explored. The argument posed here is that this behavioral inclination of overconfident individuals follows from the affective robustness that overconfidence provides in the face of social evaluative situations, which may be particularly well-suited to the stress-inducing effects of selection interviews (Donaldson et al., 2002).

Hypothesis 2: Candidates' overconfidence is positively related to leadership selection interview ratings.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between candidates' overconfidence and leadership selection interview ratings is mediated by overconfident candidates' affective robustness in response to stress.

The Interpersonal Side

Prior studies show that these characteristic behaviors of the overconfident influence how people are perceived by others. For example, a relaxed and expansive posture (Imada & Hakel, 1977), fluent and confident speech (Reynolds & Gifford, 2002), or the use of more direct eye contact (Mehrabian & Williams, 1967) all predict favorable social perceptions of superior competence. Hence, to the extent that overconfident candidates elicit this image of confidence and competence in the eyes of selection panels, the outcomes of leadership selection interviews are more likely go their way. Indeed, numerous studies show that people harbor strong preferences for both self-confident as well as competent leaders. In a meta-analysis involving

over 70 studies and 222 correlations, Judge et al. (2002) found self-confidence to be among the most consistent predictors of leadership emergence and effectiveness. Similarly, in a review of the literature on leadership effectiveness, Hogan et al. (1994) highlighted that upper-level managers' evaluations of middle-level managers' effectiveness are more strongly influenced by judgements of their technical competence than by aspects such as their interpersonal abilities, managerial values, or growth vs. stagnation orientation. Therefore, our last prediction is that overconfident leadership candidates will be perceived by selection panels as more competent than less self-assured competitors, and will therefore be appraised as more suitable to take over leadership positions.

> *Hypothesis 4:* Candidates' overconfidence is positively related to perceptions of leadership suitability.

> *Hypothesis 5:* The relationship between candidates' overconfidence and perceptions of leadership suitability is mediated by perceptions of competence.

Study 1: The Intrapersonal Side

Study 1 had three goals. First, I wanted to test the first step of the proposed theoretical model – i.e., that overconfidence is positively related to affective robustness against stressful social evaluative situations (Hypothesis 1). More specifically, I sought to assess whether overconfident leadership candidates are less susceptible to disadvantageous emotional changes during the course of selection interviews. Second, I wanted to examine the idea that candidates' overconfidence might be positively related to interview performance quality (Hypothesis 2), an effect that I proposed would be mediated by overconfident candidates' affective robustness (Hypothesis 3). The third goal of Study 1 was therefore to examine this proposed explanatory mechanism.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 132 students from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (82.6% women, $M_{age} = 20.00$, $SD = 1.90$, ranging from 17 to 27), who participated in exchange for course credits or 10 euros. In order to obtain a baseline for affect, participants first completed a questionnaire designed to capture positive and negative affective states (a commonly used procedure to measure affective changes in the face of social evaluative stressors; see Allen et al., 2014 for a review), followed by another questionnaire designed to capture individual differences in overconfidence. Participants were subsequently informed that they would be asked to deliver a 5-minute speech intended to convince a selection panel (consisting of two research assistants that were blind to the hypotheses) that they were the best possible candidate for a hypothetical leadership position, and were given 10 minutes to prepare their leadership selection interview speeches. Participants then delivered their speeches and completed the positive and negative affect questionnaire for a second time.

Measures

Overconfidence. To capture overconfidence, I used a previously adapted version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014). The questionnaire consists of 24 general knowledge questions (e.g., "*How many days does a hen take to incubate an egg?*") with 3 possible response alternatives each (e.g., "*4*", "*21*", "*28*"). Participants are instructed to select the correct answer and to indicate how confident they are that their answer is the correct one, in a scale ranging from 33% ("*not confident at all, just guessing*") to 100% ("*absolutely confident*"). Overconfidence scores are computed as the difference between participants' average confidence and average accuracy, with more positive scores reflecting increasing levels of overconfidence.

Affective Robustness. To capture participants' affective robustness, I used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson et al. 1988), before (T1) and after (T2) participants delivered their job talks. The questionnaire consists of 10 positive (e.g., "*determined*"; α = .81

at T1 and α = .87 at T2) and 10 negative (e.g., "*nervous*"; α = .86 at T1 and T2) emotion terms that participants use to reflect their current affective state, in a scaling ranging from 1 ("*very slightly or not at all*") to 5 ("*extremely*"). Participants' affective robustness was operationalized as pre-post talk variations in positive as well as negative affect.

Leadership Selection Interview Ratings. Two research assistants that acted as members of the selection panel assessed participants' job talks on 12 dimensions (α = .93), with 6 of them referring to verbal aspects (i.e., structure, speech, understandability, main points, voice, and persuasiveness; α = .89) and the remaining 6 referring to non-verbal aspects (i.e., eye contact, posture, gestures, use of space, calmness, and enthusiasm; α = .85). Each aspect was rated on a scale ranging from 1 ("*weak performance*") to 5 ("*strong performance*") and were averaged across raters. ICC estimates based on a mean-rating ($k = 2$), absolute-agreement, 2-way mixed-effects model, revealed a good reliability, ICC = .90 with a 95% confidence interval from .83 to .96.

Results

First, I examined whether candidates experienced the selection interview as a stressful situation. Indeed, I observed a significant decrease in positive affect from T1 ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.56$) to T2 ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(131) = 5.17$, $p < .01$, as well as significant increase in negative affect from T1 ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 1.49$) to T2 ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 0.46$), $t(131) = -2.86$, $p < 0.1$. To examine the relationship between overconfidence and these affective changes, I then regressed positive and negative affect at T2 onto candidates' overconfidence scores, while controlling for positive and negative affect at T1. This revealed a positive and marginally significant effect of overconfidence on positive affect, $\beta = .12$, $b = .89$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [-.00, .18], $t(129) = 1.85$, $p = .06$, and no significant effect of overconfidence on negative affect, $\beta = .04$, $b = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95%CI [-.06, .10], $t(129) = .54$, $p = .58$.

Second, I examined whether candidates' overconfidence was associated with their

leadership selection interview ratings. To do so, I regressed participants' overall leadership selection interview ratings (including both verbal and non-verbal aspects) onto their overconfidence scores. This revealed no significant effect of overconfidence on the overall leadership selection interview ratings, $\beta = .11$, $b = .06$, $SE = .05$, 95%CI [-.03, .16], $t(130) = 1.35$, $p = .17$. Then I moved to examining the effects of overconfidence on the verbal and non-verbal aspects of candidates' leadership selection interview ratings separately, finding no significant effect of overconfidence on the verbal aspect of candidates' leadership selection interview ratings , $\beta = .03$, $b = .01$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [-.08, .11], $t(130) = .35$, $p = .72$, and a positive and marginally significant effect of overconfidence on the non-verbal aspects of candidates' leadership selection interview ratings, $\beta = .16$, $b = .12$, $SE = .06$, 95%CI [-.00, .24], $t(130) = 1.93$, $p = .05$. Table 1 provides bivariate correlations between candidates' overconfidence and the twelve verbal and non-verbal aspects on their talks.

Lastly, I tested the proposed mediating role of affective robustness in the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection interview ratings, with a focus on non-verbal behavior. To do so, I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 4, fitting candidates' overconfidence as the predictor, non-verbal aspects of candidates' leadership selection interview ratings as the dependent variable, and positive affect at T2 as the mediator, while entering positive affect at T1 and negative affect at T1 and T2 as covariates. This revealed a positive and significant indirect effect of overconfidence on non-verbal aspects of candidates' leadership selection interview ratings through positive affect, $IE = .04$, $SE = .02$, 95%CI [.00, .09].

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I found overconfidence to be positively (and marginally) related to affective robustness in the face of social evaluative stressors. Specifically, I found overconfident candidates to be less susceptible to the stress-inducing effects of a leadership selection interview. It is important to note that this effect manifested in candidates' capacity to

maintain initial levels of positive affect, whereas we observed no effect of overconfidence on candidates' negative affect. In line with Hypothesis 2, I found candidates' overconfidence to be positively related to leadership selection interview ratings. More precisely, I observed overconfident candidates to attain higher ratings on the non-verbal aspects of their leadership selection interviews. In contrast, I observed no significant effect of overconfidence on the verbal aspects of candidates' interviews. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that non-verbal communication channels are acutely sensitive to states of psychosocial stress (Makatsori et al. 2004), as well as the most difficult to feign and conceal from attentive observers (Ekman & Friesen, 1974). Finally, in line with Hypothesis 3, I found the relationship between overconfidence and higher leadership selection interview ratings to be explained by overconfident candidates' affective robustness. Overall, Study 1 thus offered support for the theorized intrapersonal benefits of overconfidence in the context of leadership selection interviews. Therefore, in Study 2, I moved on to test the interpersonal side of our model.

Study 2: The Interpersonal Side

The results of Study 1 showed that overconfidence provides individuals with a psychological buffer against declining levels of positive affect stemming from socially stressful situations, as a consequence of which overconfident leadership candidates attained higher levels of performance in their interviews in terms of non-verbal behavior, relative to candidates with better calibrated self-views. In Study 2, I wanted to examine whether these intrapersonal benefits of overconfidence lead in turn to interpersonal benefits that facilitate leadership selection. Specifically, I expected overconfident candidates to be perceived as more suitable to occupy leadership positions (Hypothesis 4), an effect that I proposed would be mediated by perceptions of superior competence (Hypothesis 5).

Method

Participants and Procedure

In anticipation of the goals in Study 2, participants' leadership selection interviews in Study 1 were videotaped. To test my predictions, I took the first 30-second slice of each of the recorded videos and removed the audio, as it was this non-verbal aspect of the interviews that I found to be influenced by candidates' overconfidence. The resulting clips were presented to a total of 307 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (56% male, M_{age} = 37.77, SD = 12.52, ranging from 18 to 79), who were asked to watch the clips and indicate their perceptions of candidates' competence and leadership suitability. Participants were told that the clips had been videotaped in the context of a university course aimed to train postgraduate students for their upcoming job seeking process. For the last part of the course, students had been asked to prepare and deliver a speech in front of a selection panel that would then decide which candidates to hire for a hypothetical leadership position. Participants' mission was to help in this decision by offering their personal impressions. Each participant rated a randomly presented set of 5 clips, which accounted for a total of 1530 ratings. Each clip was assessed by an average of 11.59 (SD = 2.15) independent raters.

Measures

Perceptions of Competence. To capture perceptions of candidates' competence, raters responded to the question "*How much competence does this candidate have?*", providing their responses on a scale ranging from 1 ("*extremely low competence*") to 7 ("*extremely high competence*").

Perceptions of Leadership Suitability. To capture perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability, raters responded to the question "*How much potential does this candidate have as a leader?*", providing their responses in a scale ranging from 1 ("*extremely low potential*") to 7 ("*extremely high potential*").

Results

Table 2 provides bivariate correlations between candidates' overconfidence, raters'

perceptions of candidates' competence, and raters' perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability. First, I examined whether candidates' overconfidence predicted perceptions of leadership suitability. To do so, I regressed raters' perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability onto candidates' overconfidence scores. This revealed a positive and significant effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability, $\beta = .18$, $b = .12$, $SE = .05$, 95%CI [.01, .23], $t(130) = 2.17$, $p = .03$.

Then I tested the proposed mediation role of perceived competence in the relationship between overconfidence and perceptions of leadership suitability. To do so, I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 4, fitting candidates' overconfidence as the predictor, perceptions of leadership suitability as the dependent variable, and perceived competence as the mediator. This revealed positive and significant direct effects of overconfidence on perceived competence, $\beta = .19$, $b = .36$, $SE = .16$, 95%CI [.04, .68], $t(130) = 2.22$, $p = .02$, and perceived competence on perceptions of leadership suitability, $\beta = .84$, $b = .67$, $SE = .03$, 95%CI [.60, .74], $t(130) = 18.26$, $p < .001$, as well as a positive and significant indirect effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability through perceived competence, $IE = .10$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [.02, .18].

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, I found overconfidence to be positively related to perceptions of leadership suitability, operationalized as independent raters' appraisals of candidates' leadership potential. In line with Hypothesis 5, the relationship between overconfidence and leadership suitability was mediated by raters' perceptions of candidates' competence. It is important to emphasize that raters watched only 30-second silent clips of the job talks, which highlights the strength of overconfident behavior as a predictor of perceived competence and leadership suitability. Together, Studies 1 and 2 offered supportive evidence for the overarching theoretical proposition that the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of overconfidence are not separate phenomena, but rather cooperate in facilitating the attainment

of high-status leadership positions.

One limitation of Study 2 is that the pool of independent raters did not have access to additional, objective pieces of information concerning candidates' actual competence, hence being forced to form their impressions exclusively via indirect cues (i.e., candidates' non-verbal behavior). This is an important consideration because, in virtually every real-world selection procedure, assessors do have access to such additional pieces of objective information – most typically, candidates' resumes (Zibarras & Woods, 2002), which provides selection panels with a clear indication of candidates' competence via their education, professional experience, and past accomplishments. Therefore, while Study 2 did offer support for our theorizing, it is essential in terms of ecological validity to address this limitation. Such was the goal of Study 3, through which I sought to test whether the advantageous effects of overconfidence in leadership selection contexts remain when assessors possess clear information concerning candidates' competence.

Study 3: Testing the Boundaries of Overconfidence-Based Advantages

The main goal of Study 3 was to replicate the interpersonal benefits of overconfidence that were observed in Study 2, though this time adopting a more ecologically valid design that better resembled real-world selection procedures. To attain this goal, I mirrored the design of Study 2 with one important modification – providing raters with ostensible candidates' resumes that reflected either high or low levels of competence. My predictions remained the same – I expected candidates' overconfidence to predict perceptions of leadership suitability (Hypothesis 4), an effect that I proposed would be explained by assessors' appraisals of overconfident candidates' superior competence (Hypothesis 5).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 658 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (52.4% men, M_{age} = 36.42, *SD*

= 11.52, ranging from 18 to 74), who were asked to watch the clips and to indicate their perceptions of candidates' competence and leadership suitability. Twelve clips were removed from Study 2 to Study 3 due to redundant candidate overconfidence scores (3) or poor image quality (9), resulting in a final number of 120 clips. To contextualize the task, participants were provided with the same cover story that I used in Study 2, and each of them rated a randomly selected set of 5 clips.

Competence Manipulation

In order to manipulate candidates' competence, we created four false resumes, with two of them aimed at reflecting higher levels of competence and the remaining two aimed at reflecting lower levels of competence. To ensure that the resumes indeed communicated the intended levels of competence, I ran a pre-test pilot study in which 50 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (60% male, $M_{age} = 31.67$, $SD = 7.53$, ranging from 21 to 60) rated all four resumes in terms of perceived competence, in a scale ranging from 1 ("very low competence") to 7 ("very high competence"). The results confirmed that that the two high competence resumes ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.15$; $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.19$) were perceived as to reflect significantly higher competence than the two low competence resumes ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.40$; $M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.40$), all $p < .001$. Further analyses also showed that both the two high, $t(98) = -0.35$, $p = .72$, and the two low, $t(98) = -0.42$, $p = .67$, competence resumes did not significantly differ from each other, hence conforming homogeneous subsets of competence level. Each resume was then crossed with each of the clips for a total of 240 unique overconfidence-competence combinations, with half of those representing the high competence condition and the other half the low competence condition. Each overconfidence-competence combination was assessed by an average of 10.76 ($SD = 1.54$) independent raters, resulting in a total of 2584 ratings.

Measures

Perceptions of Competence. To capture perceptions of candidates' competence, raters

responded to the question "*How much competence does this candidate have?*", providing their responses in a scale ranging from 1 ("*extremely low competence*") to 7 ("*extremely high competence*").

Perceptions of Leadership Suitability. To capture perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability, raters responded to four questions adopted from Cole et al. (2007) (i.e., "*How likely is it that you would be interested in further interviewing this candidate?*", "*How likely is it that you would recommend this candidate be hired?*", "*If hired for the theoretical position, how likely is it that this candidate would succeed in the job?*", "*Taking everything into consideration regarding the candidate job talk and their resume, what is your overall evaluation of this candidate?*"), plus the same leadership potential question that I used in Study 2 (i.e., "*How much potential does this candidate have as a leader?*"), with all responses provided on a scale ranging from 1 ("*very unlikely*", "*very negative*", or "*extremely low potential*") to 7 ("*very likely*", "*very positive*", or "*extremely high potential*"). These five items together constituted a reliable scale in both the high ($\alpha = .97$) and low ($\alpha = .97$) competence conditions. Similarly, ICC estimates based on mean-rating ($k = 658$), absolute agreement, two-way mixed model, revealed a good reliability, ICC = .86 with a 95% confidence interval from .50 to .94.

Results

First, I inspected whether our competence manipulation was effective. Indeed, I observed perceptions of competence to be significantly higher in high competence condition ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 0.41$) than in the low competence condition ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.45$), $t(119) = 29.12$, $p < .001$.

Second, I examined whether candidates' overconfidence predicted perceptions of leadership suitability. To do so, I regressed raters' perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability onto candidates' overconfidence scores. This revealed a positive and significant

effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability, $\beta = .18$, $b = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95%CI [.00, .13], $t(118) = 2.04$, $p = .04$. To examine whether this effect of candidates' overconfidence on perceived leadership suitability was moderated by manipulated competence, I used the repeated measures approach in GLM, fitting raters' perceptions of leadership suitability in the high and low competence conditions as the repeated factor and candidates' overconfidence as a covariate. This revealed no significant interaction between overconfidence and manipulated competence in predicting perceptions of leadership suitability, $F(118) = 0.86$, $p = .35$, with overconfidence being positively and significantly related to perceived leadership suitability in both the high competence condition, $\beta = .17$, $b = .07$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [.00, .14], $t(118) = 1.98$, $p = .05$, and the low competence condition, $\beta = .22$, $b = .10$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [.02, .18], $t(118) = 2.54$, $p = .01$. Table 3 provides bivariate correlations between candidates' overconfidence, raters' perceptions of candidates' competence, and raters' perceptions of candidates' leadership suitability across conditions as well as at the high competence and low competence conditions separately.

Lastly, I tested the proposed mediation role of perceived competence in the relationship between overconfidence and perceptions of leadership suitability. To do so, I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 4, fitting candidates' overconfidence as the predictor, perceptions of leadership suitability as the dependent variable, and perceived competence as the mediator. This revealed a positive and marginally significant direct effect of overconfidence on perceived competence, $\beta = .17$, $b = .06$, $SE = .03$, 95%CI [-.00, .12], $t(118) = 1.92$, $p = .05$, and a positive and significant direct effect of perceived competence on perceptions of leadership suitability, $\beta = .88$, $b = .84$, $SE = .05$, 95%CI [.78, .99], $t(118) = 17.19$, $p < .001$, as well as a positive and significant indirect effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability through perceived competence, $IE = .05$, $SE = .02$, 95%CI [.00, .09]. To explore the possibility of moderated mediation, I also examined this indirect pathway in both the high and low

competence conditions separately. This revealed no significant indirect effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability though perceived competence in the high competence condition, $IE = .03$, $SE = .02$, 95%CI [-.02, .08], and a positive and significant indirect effect of overconfidence on perceptions of leadership suitability though perceived competence in the low competence condition, $IE = .09$, $SE = .02$, 95%CI [-.02, .08]. Figure 1 provides direct and indirect effects of overconfidence on perceived leadership suitability through perceived competence across conditions as well as at the high competence and low competence conditions separately.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated and extended the findings of Study 2. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, I found candidates' overconfidence to be positively related to perceptions of their leadership suitability. This effect emerged regardless of whether candidates' leadership selection interviews were presented together with a high competence or a low competence resume. In line with Hypothesis 5, I again observed the positive relationship between overconfidence and perceived leadership suitability to be explained by raters' perceptions of candidates' competence. Importantly, extending the findings of Study 2, the results of Study 3 indicated the presence of moderated mediation effect. Specifically, I found raters' perceptions of candidates' competence to mediate the relationship between overconfidence and leadership suitability in the low but not the high competence condition.

General Discussion

The goal of the present research was to investigate the effects of candidate overconfidence in leadership selection contexts. Specifically, I suggested the idea that overconfidence facilitates selection for leadership positions. Through three consecutive studies, I found support for this prediction and identified a series of underlying explanatory mechanisms. In Study 1, I found that overconfidence is associated with affective robustness

against detrimental drops of positive affect that candidates tend to experience during selection interviews. Moreover, I found such affective robustness to allow overconfident candidates to attain higher levels of performance during their interviews in terms of non-verbal behavior, though not in terms of verbal behavior. In Study 2, I found this enhanced non-verbal behavior to elicit positive perceptions of competence in selection panels, leading in turn to more favorable appraisals of leadership suitability. Finally, in Study 3, I found these interpersonal benefits of overconfidence to be particularly advantageous for candidates with lower levels of objective competence.

Theoretical and Applied Contributions

The current research offers a number of theoretical contributions. First, our studies indicate that overconfidence serves a clear social utility – specifically, exaggerated self-views seem to positively influence people's perceptions of competence, and so favor advancement to higher status positions of leadership and influence. This finding stands in line with interpersonal accounts of overconfidence (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Krebs & Denton, 1997; Leary, 2007; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011; Waldman, 1994), which posit that people develop overconfident self-views because it helps them succeed socially. Prior studies had offered evidence in this regard within informal groups (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012). However, our research is the first to test this theoretical proposition within the context of formal leadership selection procedures.

Second, our research identifies a number of explanatory mechanisms underlying the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection. Specifically, overconfidence seems to provide individuals with a psychological buffer against the stress-inducing effects of selection interviews, which is in turn related to higher interview performance leading to positive, though not necessarily accurate, perceptions of superior competence and leadership suitability. These findings bear important theoretical implications, as they reconcile standing, seemingly opposed theoretical accounts of overconfidence, hence contributing to "consensus

creation" (Hollenbeck, 2008). Specifically, our studies suggest that intrapersonal (e.g., Alicke, 1985; Bénabou & Tirole, 2002; Dunning et al., 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988) and interpersonal (e.g., Alexander, 1987; Krebs & Denton, 1997; Leary, 2007; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011; Waldman, 1994) theoretical explanations for overconfidence should not be considered mutually exclusive, as the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits deriving from overconfidence appear to operate complementarily, with intrapersonal benefits (i.e., affective robustness) serving to sustain, or, at the least, facilitate, interpersonal benefits (i.e., favorable perceptions and social advancement). The present research is therefore the first to transcend the "either-or" theoretical approach that has traditionally characterized research regarding the practical value of overconfident self-views.

Third, the present research contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and leadership, especially with regards to the prevalence of overconfidence among those in top positions. To date, explanations for this relationship have focused on the suggestion that the psychological experience of power that accompanies leadership positions promotes higher levels of overconfidence (Fast et al., 2012). My studies suggest that overconfidence precedes and favors leadership selection, although I do concur with the idea that subsequent increases in power and may further exacerbate leaders' overconfident self-views.

Finally, some practical implications can also be drawn from this research. First, given the detrimental outcomes associated with overconfident leadership (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review), organizations might consider screening for overconfidence before promoting people to leadership roles, as well as during leadership selection procedures. Indeed, I suggest that the benefits of measuring candidates' overconfidence and being able to control for this potentially dangerous trait clearly compensates the modest cost of adding a quick and non-invasive overconfidence measure, such as the one that I used here (i.e., GKQ; Michailova & Katter,

2014). Moreover, the assessment of individual overconfidence provides opportunities for the provision of feedback during leadership training and development programs, potentially serving to mitigate its detrimental effects.

Second, although the existing literature quite generally discourages selecting for overconfident leaders, the prevalence of overconfidence might make it difficult to prevent overconfident candidates from entering the leadership arena. Even if this was possible, and as I discussed above, research suggests that overconfidence might subsequently emerge in powerful leaders (Fast et al., 2012). In this sense, measuring overconfidence might allow organizations to plan for its presence and distribution in ways that help reduce the risks or extract collateral benefits. For instance, the current results as well as prior studies (Moore & Schatz, 2017) indicate that overconfidence is associated with positive affect, which in turn has been shown useful for sales or marketing tasks that require enthusiasm and persuasiveness (Seo & Barret, 2007). Therefore, firms might do well to take into consideration candidates' and employees' overconfidence not only with regards to hiring decisions but also in aims to (re)structure their workforce in less risky, more efficient setups.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The current studies have a number of strengths. First, candidates represented virtually the whole overconfidence spectrum (from 2.70 *SD* above the mean to -2.04 *SD* below the mean), which allowed me to have a rich test of the effects of overconfidence on candidate interview behavior and assessors' perceptions of competence and leadership suitability. Second, the data is extensive, as these studies involved a total of 946 independent raters for a total of 4162 ratings, combining correlational as well as experimental designs. Third, I consider these studies a conservative test of the effects of overconfidence in leadership selection contexts, since overconfident candidates benefited from misguided perceptions of superior competence and leadership suitability based exclusively on 30-second clips of non-verbal

behavior. Indeed, based on prior studies on persuasion and interpersonal impressions through online versus face-to-face communication channels (Okdie et al, 2011; Fullwood, 2007; Guadagno & Cialdini, 2002), I expect the positive impact of candidate overconfidence on raters' perceptions to increase in real-world, typically face-to-face interviews that allow for interactive communication. However, the current data does not allow to test this prediction, and I therefore raise it here only as a potential avenue for future research.

There are also some limitations to present studies that should be acknowledged. First, across studies I operationalized overconfidence via the same measurement instrument (i.e., GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014), which indistinctly reflects individuals' beliefs concerning the accuracy of their knowledge (i.e., overprecision) and their beliefs concerning the quality of their performance (i.e., overestimation) (Moore & Healy, 2008). Therefore, I am unable to offer a more fine-grained description of the influence of these different forms of overconfidence on recruiters' impressions of candidates. Similarly, I did not capture individual differences in overplacement, the third form of overconfidence described in the literature (see Moore & Healy, 2008 for a review). Hence, future studies could seek to extend the current findings by investigating whether the effects of overconfidence within leadership selection procedures differ between particular forms of overconfidence.

Second, the raters were aware that the leadership selection procedure was not real, and so their ratings bore no real consequences or implications, as it is the case in real-world selection procedures. The extent to which this is relevant for the current findings needs to be assessed in future studies. In this sense, researchers could seek collaboration with actual human resource or recruiting firms, capturing overconfidence levels of actual leadership candidates and examining its influence on the impressions of professional recruiters, as well as on actual selection outcomes. For researchers who might not have access to this possibility, perhaps another alternative could consist of a laboratory setting in which groups of participants are

asked to rank-nominate their group members for a leadership role on a subsequent group-based task, with group performance being tied to some desirable outcome, such as, for instance, a financial participation bonus. This procedure could help increase generalizability to real-world contexts, where leadership selection decisions carry critical implications in terms of organizational outcomes (e.g., Nohria et al., 2003).

Lastly, while overconfidence predicted more favorable perceptions of leadership suitability in both the high and low competence conditions, competent candidates (as per manipulated resumes) were on average preferred as leaders. This indicates that competence is a powerful variable that is likely to overcome the effects of overconfidence, at least when presented in extreme levels. However, I do not reject the possibility that overconfidence may still mislead selection panels to hire less competent (though more overconfident) candidates when interindividual differences in candidates' actual competence are not as clear as in our manipulation. Because I used only high versus low competence conditions, this design does not allow to draw any conclusion in such regard. Therefore, I urge future studies to examine this possibility given its potential harmful impact on selection decisions and, ultimately, organizations.

Conclusion

The present research suggests that overconfidence leads to inaccurate, overly positive perceptions of competence and leadership suitability. In part, this follows from the intrapsychic buffering that overconfidence provides in the face of social stressors, which in turn facilitates more compelling (non-verbal) behavioral attitudes from overconfident candidates. The perils of overconfident leadership, however, haven been largely documented in the literature, and should not be disregarded. Fortunately, given the modest cost of including overconfidence measures in selection procedures, it is perhaps only a matter of will for organizations to protect themselves from the potential negative consequences of

overconfidence among those in leadership positions.

Appendix

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between candidates' overconfidence and aspects of interview performance (Study 1).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Overconfidence	0.00	1.00													
2. Eye contact	4.02	0.85	.17*												
3. Posture	3.55	0.76	.04	.21*											
4. Gestures	3.16	1.08	.17*	.31**	.68**										
5. Use of space	2.81	0.61	.20*	.21*	.55**	.68**									
6. Calmness	3.17	0.78	.09*	.41**	.41**	.46**	.35**								
7. Enthusiasm	3.26	0.90	.15	.23**	.60**	.71**	.63**	.48**							
8. Structure	3.54	0.83	.01	.30**	.34**	.42**	.30**	.54**	.51**						
9. Speech	3.76	0.72	.04	.45**	.32**	.37**	.27**	.63**	.44**	.63**					
10. Understandability	3.98	0.53	.00	.40**	.25**	.27**	.17*	.47**	.29**	.56**	.64**				
11. Main point	3.58	0.63	.01	.13	.30**	.35**	.24**	.29**	.31**	.61**	.38**	.46**			
12. Voice	3.92	0.48	-.04	.27**	.17*	.15	.13	.52**	.21*	.30**	.52**	.45**	.21*		
13. Persuasiveness	3.29	0.97	.06	.34**	.45**	.58**	.47**	.64**	.63**	.78**	.66**	.59**	.66**	.38**	

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 2 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Overconfidence	0.00	1.00			
2. Perceived competence	4.75	0.52	.19*		
3. Perceived leadership suitability	4.48	0.65	.18*	.84*	

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Table 3.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 3 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overconfidence	0.00	1.00							
- Overall									
2. Perceived competence	4.83	0.35	.17†						
3. Perceived leadership suitability	4.12	0.36	.18*	.84**					
- Low competence condition									
4. Perceived competence	4.12	0.45	.25**	.79**	.67**				
5. Perceived leadership suitability	3.46	0.46	.22*	.68**	.84**	.82**			
- High competence condition									
6. Perceived competence	5.52	0.40	.10	.74**	.62**	.25**	.27**		
7. Perceived leadership suitability	4.77	0.39	.16†	.68**	.81**	.32**	.42**	.80**	

† *p* < .06, * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

Figure 1.

Direct and indirect effects of overconfidence on perceived leadership suitability (Study 3).

Overall: β = .17†
High-Competence condition: β = .10
Low-Competence condition: β = .25**

PERCEIVED COMPETENCE

Overall: β = .84***
High-Competence condition: β = .80***
Low-Competence condition: β = .82***

OVERCONFIDENCE

PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP SUITABILITY

Overall: β = .18* (β = .03)
High-Competence condition: β = .16 † (β = .08)
Low-Competence condition: β = .22* (β = .02)
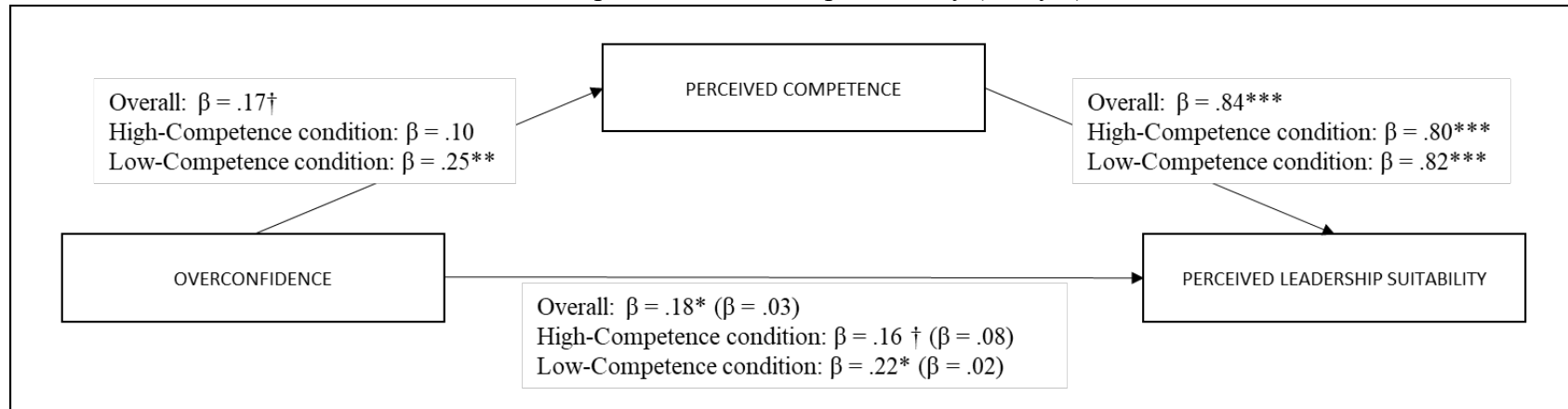
† $p < .08$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Chapter 3

Overconfidence and the Pursuit of High-Status Positions: A Test of Two Behavioral Strategies

Overconfident people often find themselves appointed to high-status positions of leadership (Banerjee et al., 2014; Goel & Thakor, 2008; Reuben et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019). Unfortunately, overconfidence and leadership can make for a hazardous combination, at times leading to "the most deleterious of outcomes" (Meikle et al., 2016, p. 129). For instance, overconfident leaders overestimate returns to their investments (Malmendier & Tate, 2008), often fail to detect flaws and deficiencies in their plans (Shipman & Mumford, 2011), are more likely to underestimate the downside risks of projects (Gervais et al., 2011), and more frequently persist in failing investments (Ronay et al., 2016). Furthermore, to cover their tracks when things go awry, overconfident CEOs are more likely to engage in accounting fraud (Schrand & Zechman, 2012).

To date, prior research on the relationship between overconfidence and the attainment of high-status positions has focused on the positive evaluative biases that overconfidence elicits in others. Specifically, researchers have found that overconfident individuals tend to remain cool and calm under social pressure (Ronay et al., 2019), and so exhibit a number of behaviors (e.g., speaking more often, speaking with a more factual vocal tone, making more direct eye contact, or making a better use of gestures) that others perceive as signals of superior competence and leadership potential (Anderson et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019). Therefore, current explanations for the positive link between overconfidence and the attainment of high-status positions depict overconfident individuals as passive actors in their own social ascension, which is seen as an unintended consequence of others' misperceptions. However, recent studies indicate that overconfident individuals tend to harbor particularly strong status motives (Belmi et al., 2020). To the extent that those motives trigger

behavior (Ajzen, 1985), this finding suggests that overconfident individuals might also play an active role in their social ascension, adopting strategic behaviors purposely aimed at realizing their status aspirations.

In the present paper, I seek to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and the attainment of high-status positions through examining the behavioral mechanisms that might lead the overconfident to achieve such positions of power and influence. Specifically, I suggest that overconfidence is associated with an active pursuit of high-status positions characterized by dominance-based strategies directed at attaining and securing higher social rank. To test these ideas, I behaviorally assessed the relationship between overconfidence and the pursuit of high-status positions (Study 1), examined the relationships between overconfidence and two different types of status-seeking strategies – dominance and prestige (Studies 2 and 3), and conducted a field study investigating how dominance- and prestige-based strategies position the overconfident to climb their respective social ladders (Study 3).

The present studies make several contributions to the existing literature. First, I extend current explanations for the relationship between overconfidence and the acquisition of high-status positions (Anderson et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019) by showing that overconfident individuals are more likely to actively pursue high-status positions. Second, I offer the first investigation of the specific status-seeking strategies associated with overconfidence. In particular, I focus on dominance and prestige (Cheng et al., 2013, Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Maner & Case, 2016; see also Bischof, 2009), and differentiate between the motivational and behavioral facets of these constructs. Third, I answer calls to test the effectiveness of dominance- and prestige-based strategies within actual field settings (Cheng et al., 2013). To date, the evidence in this regard has been limited to laboratory studies involving short-term groups and hierarchies (Cheng et al., 2013; de Waal-Andrews et al.,

2015), one online study (Belmi et al., 2020), and one longitudinal test among student groups (Redhead et al., 2019). In the present research, I extend these empirical tests of dominance and prestige as strategies for navigating social hierarchies by capturing both self- and supervisor-ratings of the constructs and mapping these onto supervisors' expectations of employees' future social rank advancement. The present research is therefore the first to assess the effects of dominance and prestige in stable, long-term hierarchies within real-world organizational contexts.

Theoretical Background

Overconfidence and the Pursuit of High-Status Positions

In broad terms, overconfidence is defined as an exaggerated perception of one's competence or capabilities (see Moore & Healy, 2008 for a review). Overconfidence is not the same as self-confidence, which refers to an accurate, positive evaluation of one's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004). Confidence is a strongly desired trait for leaders and people in general (e.g., Al-Hebaish, 2012; Bass, 1990; Magee & Frasier, 2014; Yukl, 2002). Overconfidence, on the other hand, occurs when individuals inaccurately evaluate themselves, believing and displaying a level of self-confidence that exceeds their real capabilities. Overconfidence is also different from impression management or self-presentation, which involve the purposeful modification of one's overt behaviors with the intent of creating a desirable social image (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Paulhus, 1984). Those who manage their impressions might or might not believe their own stories, and these stories might or might not reflect their true capabilities (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2016), whereas overconfident individuals hold a genuine, though inaccurate, aggrandized image of their own competence and abilities.

Like confidence, overconfidence has a strong influence on people's goals and behavioral choices. For example, students who see themselves as more competent than they

actually are develop higher academic aspirations (Zimmerman et al., 1992), undertake more challenging tasks (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), and exert greater effort in achieving their goals (Pajares & Graham, 1999); athletes who overperceive their athletic prowess report higher levels of expected performance in upcoming competitions (Kane et al., 1996); and professionals who overestimate their abilities to deal with occupational challenges aspire to earn more and to attain higher hierarchical positions (Abele & Spurk, 2009). In contrast, individuals with lower self-perceptions tend to focus on their limitations, settling for easier personal and professional goals (Vrugt & Koenis, 2002).

Indeed, prior studies show that self-perceived abilities (even exaggerated ones) often determine individuals' behavior to a greater extent than do actual abilities (Bugental & Lewis, 1999; Campbell et al., 2004; Markham et al., 2002; McNulty & Swann, 1994). This influence that self-views exert on behavior can be in part explained by self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), which posits that people tend to behave in ways that help them obtain social verification of their self-views. For example, individuals who see themselves as tolerant and accepting tend to seek romantic partners who also see them as tolerant and accepting, and individuals who see themselves as dominant and controlling preferentially seek romantic partners that see them as dominant and controlling (Katz & Beach, 2000). These strivings for self-congruent interactions and environments provides individuals with a sense of psychological coherence, control, and continuity, which in turn allows them to make sense of their worlds, predict future events, and ultimately guide their behavior (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990). In the absence of outside verification, people's self-views suffer and their psychological experience becomes uncomfortable.

Thus, in line with self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), overconfident individuals, who believe to have superior skill, knowledge, and competence, should strive to seek experiences and social environments that confirm their aggrandized self-views. Since

high-status positions are typically reserved for those thought to possess superior skill, knowledge, and competence, I argue that obtaining such positions might provide the overconfident with a sense of social verification of their exaggerated self-views. Indeed, consistent with this idea, researchers have argued that verification of one's self-views might be accomplished through the position held within professional and organizational hierarchies (Bartel et al., 2007). Therefore, I propose that overconfident individuals should exhibit a stronger motivation for high-status positions.

Hypothesis 1: Overconfidence is positively related to the pursuit of high-status positions.

Overconfidence, Dominance, and Prestige - Different Strategies Towards High-Status Positions

Researchers have differentiated between dominance and prestige as two different approaches to attaining higher social rank (Cheng et al., 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Maner & Case, 2016). Dominance refers to the pursuit of higher status through forceful, intimidating, fear-inducing, and coercive behaviors, and reflects an individuals' desire for power and control over others. Prestige, as opposed, refers to the pursuit of higher status via group-oriented behaviors, such as the sharing of valuable knowledge, and reflects an individuals' desire for others' respect and admiration. The constructs of dominance and prestige are therefore multifaceted, including a motivational aspect (power and control versus respect and admiration) as well as a behavioral approach to such motivation (conflict-based behaviors in service of oneself versus communal behaviors in service of the group). In a review of the literature, Maner and Case (2016) noted that even though dominance and prestige motivations lead to qualitatively different types of behaviors, they tend to correlate highly because both reflect the underlying desire for higher social rank. As such, to the extent that overconfident individuals harbor a desire for higher social rank, overconfidence should

therefore be positively related to both dominance and prestige motivations. Indeed, a recent study by Belmi et al. (2020) involving over a thousand participants found that overconfidence was associated with both dominance ($r = .77$) and prestige ($r = .80$) motivations.

Hypothesis 2: Overconfidence is positively related to both dominance and prestige motives.

In contrast, prior studies measuring dominance and prestige at the behavioral level have reported null relationships ($r = .01$) between these different strategic approaches to higher social rank (Cheng et al., 2013). Since motivational operationalizations of dominance and prestige tend to conflate the constructs, their predictive value concerning the behavioral expressions of status motives might be limited. Therefore, it is important to assess the relationship between overconfidence and dominance and prestige as behavioral manifestations of status motives.

Despite reflecting different behavioral approaches, both dominance and prestige have been shown to represent effective means to winning higher social rank (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013). It is important to note, however, that not everyone is equally well-placed to elicit admiration or compliance from others. For instance, knowledgeable and skilled individuals might be better positioned to gain status through prestige, whereas physically formidable or socially assertive individuals might be better served by adopting dominance. Indeed, researchers have suggested that individual differences might mitigate or strengthen the relative effectiveness of prestige and dominance in the acquisition of higher social rank (see Cheng & Tracy, 2014 for a review). This creates an interesting behavioral juncture for the overconfident in the pursuit of higher social rank. If overconfident individuals harbor a fulsome and unwavering belief in the superior nature of their competence and abilities, and so the expectation that others will concur with these positive self-evaluations, then we might expect a preference among the overconfident to follow a prestige route to higher social rank (e.g.,

presenting themselves as possessing the right knowledge or the necessary skills and abilities to advance a group's goals). However, because overconfidence reflects an exaggerated sense of one's knowledge and skill, overconfident individuals might in practice fail to demonstrate a level of competence that meets group members' expectations of their contributions to the group. Indeed, prior research on the dynamics of status allocation in groups has shown that behaviors that are initially associated with the conferral of higher status lose effectiveness if individuals' actual competence disappoints previously set expectations, ultimately resulting in a loss of status (Bendersky & Shah, 2013). Because prestige-based status must be granted by others and is conditional on (confirmed) perceptions of skill and competence, I reason that a prestige route towards higher social rank might often lead overconfident individuals to an unsatisfying realization, leading them to recalibrate their status-seeking strategies away from prestige and toward dominance. Consistent with this idea, the overconfidence literature suggests that the personality, emotional, and behavioral profiles associated with overconfidence might better suit and reflect a dominance-based approach to the pursuit of high-status positions.

First, past studies have shown that individuals predisposed to the use of prestige-based strategies tend to be humble and exhibit a number of prosocial traits such as altruism, helpfulness, strong moral convictions, and concern for the public good (Cheng et al., 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012; Weidman et al., 2018). In contrast, dominance-oriented individuals prioritize their own interest over the public good, are vain, narcissistic, and arrogant (Cheng et al., 2010; Maner & Mead 2010, 2012). Because overconfidence is associated with individualistic views in which one's importance, interest, and well-being are emphasized over the group (Antonczyk & Salzmann, 2014; Maner & Mead, 2010), I expect the overconfident to lean toward dominance. Indeed, others have argued that the emphasis the overconfident place on personal gains make them prone to unethical behaviors (Park & Chung, 2017), such

as those typically encapsulated in the pursuit of higher social rank via dominance strategies (e.g., forcefulness, intimidation, or coerciveness).

Second, dominance- and prestige-oriented individuals differ in their emotional responses to achievement and success. Prestige is associated with authentic pride (Cheng et al., 2010), which derives from "specific accomplishments or goal attainments and is often focused on the efforts made towards the goal" (Carver et al., 2010, p. 1). In contrast, dominance-oriented individuals tend to experience conceit-based hubristic pride (Cheng & Tracy, 2014), which is related to general and exaggerated views concerning one's competence and abilities (Tracy & Robins, 2004, 2007). These exaggerated self-views are the defining characteristic of overconfidence, which a number of researchers have modeled as generalizable across domains (e.g., Bornstein & Zickafoose, 1999; Pallier et al., 2002; Schraw, 1996; West & Stanovich, 1997). Indeed, prior studies among organizational managers have shown that overconfidence is related to executive hubris (Simon & Houghton, 2003), which often involves the imposition of one's will through power and dominance (Delbecq, 2006).

Third, dominance and prestige are associated with different interpersonal behavioral tendencies. During social interactions, dominant individuals adopt more relaxed and expansive postures (Buss, 1981) and exhibit more intimidating and self-entitled conversational patterns, such as speaking more often than others (Cameron & Kilduff, 2009), speaking with a more factual voice tone (Aries et al., 1983), pushing their own ideas and opinions (Cheng & Tracy, 2014), and making more direct eye contact (Snyder & Sutker, 1977). These behaviors are strikingly similar to "the overconfidence signature" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 727), a set of behaviors that also include speaking more often than others, speaking with a more factual voice tone, making more direct eye contact, and making more use of gestures (Anderson et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019). Overconfidence is also associated with more aggressive behaviors (e.g., Chou & Wang, 2011; Chyz et al., 2014), a characteristic feature of those that pursue status

through dominance-based strategies (Cheng et al., 2010; Maner & Mead 2010, 2012). In contrast, prestigious individuals demonstrate subtler and more accommodating interpersonal manners, such as showing warmth, agreeableness, and self-deprecation (Cheng et al., 2013; Tracy & Robins 2004).

Together with the notion that overconfident individuals may see any previous status-conferral wane when their true competence is revealed to group members, these sets of previous findings lead to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Overconfidence is positively related to dominance- but not prestige-based strategies towards high-status positions.

As discussed earlier, prior studies show that dominance is associated with social status advancement. For example, Lord et al. (1986) showed that the personality trait of dominance, defined as the propensity toward forceful, assertive, and aggressive behaviors, explains a substantial part of the variance in perceptions of leadership. Similarly, aggression, coercion, derogation, social exclusion, and manipulation – behaviors typically employed by those oriented towards dominance (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013; Maner & Mead, 2010) – are effective tactics for improving one's relative status (Buss et al., 1987; Griskevicius et al., 2009; Kyl-Heku & Buss, 1996). Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2013) showed that individuals high in dominance (as rated by peers and outside observers) tend to receive greater social attention and influence during group tasks. Thus, I expect dominance to feature as a mechanism between overconfidence and expectations of social status advancement.

Hypothesis 4: Overconfidence has an indirect effect on expected social status advancement through dominance-based strategies.

Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to assess the relationship between overconfidence and the pursuit of high-status positions (Hypothesis 1). To do so, I measured individual differences in

overconfidence and assessed participants' decisions regarding whether or not they were willing to invest their time and effort into competing for a higher-status leadership role. I also used Study 1 as an opportunity to explore the relationships between the pursuit of higher social rank and the different conceptualizations of overconfidence (i.e., overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement). According to Moore and Healy (2008), overestimation, overplacement, and overprecision are not different manifestations of the same underlying construct – they occur at different times and are expressed in different ways. Overprecision is the excessive faith in the precision of one's knowledge and beliefs. For example, when practitioners overrate the precision of their diagnoses (Christensen-Szalanski & Bushyhead, 1981). Overestimation is thinking that you are better than you really are. For example, when students overestimate their scores on academic exams (Kennedy, Lawton, & Plumlee, 2002; Shepperd, Ouellette, & Fernandez, 1996). Overplacement is the exaggerated belief that you are better than others. For example, when most drivers think of themselves as more skilled than the average driver (Williams, 2003). Scholars have argued for the inclusion of all three conceptualizations when assessing overconfidence, as they may have different relationships with external variables (Moore & Healy, 2008; Prims & Moore, 2017).

Method

Participants and Procedure

An a priori power analysis for logistic regression using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) estimated a required sample size of at least $N = 114$ to achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .18$) with an alpha of .05. I slightly oversampled and recruited 177 north-American Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. Due to incomplete responses, I removed 37 participants from the data set. The final sample therefore consisted of 140 participants (57.9% male, $M_{age} = 38.82$, $SD = 11.91$). Most participants had at least a bachelor's degree (79.3%), with the remaining holding either a master's degree or a PhD (20.7%). First,

participants read an informed consent form and completed a few demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, and educational level). Participants then completed two different multi-item quizzes designed to capture individual differences in overconfidence. Subsequently, participants were then informed that the current study had finished but that we were interested in recruiting a limited number of participants for a series of upcoming studies. In these ostensible future studies, participants would act as the leader of a group of five, resembling a small organizational team. Their task would be to assess and offer a solution for an organizational problem, with the leaders having the final decision concerning the team's submitted solution. Participants were also informed that leaders would receive twice the financial compensation for participating. However, I informed them that in order to be considered for the leadership role it was a required step to complete a leadership selection procedure. Participants read the following fragment:

> *"If you want to be considered as a leadership candidate for the mentioned studies, we would need you to complete several selection tests.* **The selection procedure may take you around 30 minutes, and based on the selection test scores only 5% of the participants will be selected. If you are not selected, you will not be paid for the time invested. If you are selected, however, your participation in the upcoming studies will be paid 2x the standard payment in Amazon Mechanical Turk."**

> *If you decide to apply, please selected the option "Yes, I would like to apply for a leader participation in the upcoming studies" and in the following pages we will need you to go through a selection procedure in which you will:*
> - *complete a **leadership style questionnaire** (~5 mins)*

- *complete a **previous work experience questionnaire** (~5 mins)*

- ***explain in 3-4 sentences how you would act in response to several hypothetical situations** that we will describe to you (~10 mins)*

- *write **a short text** (between 100 and 200 words) **in which you explain why you think you would be a good leader and why we should select you over other candidates** (~10 mins)*

The description of the leadership role, the selection procedure, and the financial conditions were all intended to resemble those of real-world organizations, where higher-ranked positions come with higher salaries but are also more difficult to reach and involve greater responsibilities. The exact nature of the organizational problem to be solved was kept vague in order to avoid differentially influencing participants with different work-experience backgrounds. Participants indicated their decision concerning whether or not to enter the leadership selection procedure and were then directed to a debriefing page. There they were informed of the study's purpose and the use of a cover story regarding the selection procedure and future group task.

Measures

Overconfidence. I measured overconfidence through two frequently used measures: a previously validated version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014), and an adapted of version of Anderson et al.'s (2012) geography quiz. These two measures allowed me to capture all three forms of overconfidence described in the literature – overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement (for a review see Moore & Healy, 2008).

GKQ. The GKQ consists of 24 general knowledge questions (e.g., "*How many letters does the Russian alphabet consists of?*") with three given alternative answers (e.g., "*40", "33",*

or "26") from which participants have to select the correct one. For each question, participants are asked to provide a number between 33% (*no certainty at all in the correctness of my answer, just guessing*) and 100% (*absolute certainty in the correctness of my answer*) indicating their level of confidence in their answer. Overconfidence scores were computed by subtracting participants' average accuracy (i.e., the percentage of correct answers) from their average confidence across the 24 items. As being excessively sure one got an item right reflects both overestimation of one's performance and excessive confidence in the precision of one's knowledge, this item-confidence paradigm captures a combination of overprecision and overestimation (Moore & Healy, 2008).

Geography quiz. Participants were presented with a map of the United States of America that was blank except for two red dots indicating the location of two cities (e.g., Los Angeles and Chicago). For each pair of cities (12 in total), participants were asked to provide (1) a distance interval within which they were at least 90% sure that the distance between the two cities lies, and (2) an exact distance estimate of the distance between the two cities. Once all estimates were completed, I asked participants to provide two additional estimates: one of their overall performance in the quiz, on a scale ranging from 0 (*poorly, I think I answered all questions incorrectly*) to 100 (*greatly, I think I answered all questions correctly*), and one of their overall performance relative to other participants, on a scale ranging from 0 (*I am at the very bottom, I got a worse final score than 99% of the other participants*) to 100 (*I am at the very top, I got a better final score than 99% of the other participants*). These questions allowed me to capture all three conceptualizations of overconfidence.

Overprecision. I calculated overprecision as the given confidence interval (i.e., 90%) minus the percentage of correct answers across the 12 items. This overprecision measure has been commonly used in prior overconfidence research (e.g., Fast et al. 2012; Glaser et al., 2005; Mannes & Moore, 2013; Soll & Klayman, 2004).

Overestimation. I calculated overestimation as participants' average confidence in their overall performance in the quiz minus their average accuracy across the 12 items. By measuring confidence over a set of items rather than item-wise (as in the GKQ), I reduced the confound between overestimation and overprecision (Moore & Healy, 2008). According to Moore and Healy (2008), almost three quarters of all published studies on overconfidence have used this overestimation paradigm.

Overplacement. I calculated overplacement as participants' self-perceived rank minus their actual rank, both in terms of final score in the quiz. To do so, I transformed their scores into percentile rankings. This overplacement measure has also been as well commonly used in prior overconfidence research (e.g., Anderson et al, 2012; Cain et al., 2015; Larrick et al., 2007; Macenczak et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008; Ren & Croson, 2013).

Pursuit of High-Status Positions. I operationalized the pursuit of higher social rank as a dichotomous choice between entering or not entering into the selection procedure for the leadership role described above. Participants were asked to select one of the following two possible responses: *"Yes, I would like to apply for a leadership role in the upcoming studies"* or *"No, thanks, I do not wish to apply"*. In total, 46 (32.9%) participants of the 140 that participated decided to go through the selection procedure and thus compete for one of the leadership roles.

Results

Table 1 provides bivariate correlations between participants' overconfidence (as measured via both the GKQ and the geography quiz) and their decisions on whether or not to compete for the leadership role. Overconfidence as measured by the GKQ showed moderate correlations with the different overconfidence measurements based on the geography quiz (r varied between .31 and .35, with all p's < .001). The three conceptualizations of overconfidence as measured by the geography quiz were highly correlated (r varied between .77 and .89, with

all p's < .001). For that reason, I also computed an overall overconfidence score on the geography quiz by standardizing the values within each overconfidence conceptualizations and calculating their mean.

To assess the relationships between overconfidence and the pursuit of high-status positions, I ran five separate logistic regressions, one for each overconfidence measurement, standardizing all predictors prior to analysis. Participants' decisions to enter the leadership competition were positively related to their overconfidence as measured by the GKQ, β = .61, SE = .20, 95%CI[.22,.99], Nagelkerke R^2 = .10, Wald's χ^2 (1) = 9.46, p < .01, and their overall overconfidence as measured by the geography quiz, β = .42, SE = .20, 95%CI[.04,.81], Nagelkerke R^2 = .05, Wald's χ^2 (1) = 4.56, p = .03. Looking at the relationships between decisions to enter the leadership competition and the three overconfidence conceptualizations, I observed marginal positive relationships with overprecision , β = .36, SE = .19, 95%CI[-.007,.72], Nagelkerke R^2 = .04, Wald's χ^2 (1) = 3.70, p = .05, and overestimation, β = .36, SE = .19, 95%CI[-.006,.72], Nagelkerke R^2 = .04, Wald's χ^2 (1) = 3.72, p = .05, and a positive and significant relationship with overplacement, β = .41, SE = .19, 95%CI[.04,.77], Nagelkerke R^2 = .05, Wald's χ^2 (1) = 4.71, p = .03.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants' overconfidence was associated with the pursuit of high-status positions, operationalized as their decision to compete for a leadership position. Of the two overconfidence measures, the GKQ (Michailova & Katter, 2014) seemed to be a slightly better predictor of participants' pursuit of high-status positions than the geography quiz (Anderson et al., 2012). The three overconfidence strands (i.e., overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement) within the geography quiz were highly correlated and showed only minimal differences in terms of their relationships with the pursuit of the high-status leadership role. These results suggest that the type of task to measure overconfidence

has a stronger influence on the validity of the measurement than the type of overconfidence conceptualization.

These results offer new insights into the relationship between overconfidence and the acquisition of high-status positions (Anderson et al., 2012). Due to its self-deceptive nature (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011), overconfidence seems to shape motivational processes in a similar manner as does confidence (e.g., Bénabou & Tirole, 2002; Sari et al., 2015), giving rise to the belief that one has "the right stuff", and so motivating the active pursuit of leadership opportunities. This motivational account extends current explanations for the status-enhancing effects of overconfidence, which to date have focused on the behavioral signals of overconfidence and how these increase type 1 errors regarding evaluations of competence and leadership potential (Anderson et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019). From an organizational perspective, our findings suggest that leadership selection panels will frequently encounter pools of overconfident leadership candidates, as it is the overconfident who are most likely to apply for high-status positions.

However, Study 1 leaves open the question of exactly what suite of behavioral strategies overconfident individuals tend to employ in their pursuit of high-status social positions. Understanding the specific motivations and behavioral strategies the overconfident tend to adopt would facilitate the possibilities to recognize and regulate the potential consequences of such behaviors (e.g., Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2008). Therefore, in Study 2, I assessed the specific motivations and behavioral manifestations of overconfident individuals' status motives.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to assess the relationship between overconfidence and two different types of status-seeking strategies – dominance and prestige. Although recent studies have shown that overconfidence is associated with both dominance and prestige, these prior

reports are based on assessments of motivation toward dominance and prestige as outcomes (Belmi et al., 2020). As such, these measures tend to conflate the two constructs because they tap on the same underlying desire for higher social rank (Maner & Case, 2016). To ensure a clear distinction between dominance and prestige as motives and behaviors, I implemented two different measures for both dominance and prestige – a motivational one and a behaviorally focused one. Based on prior findings (Belmi et al., 2020), I expected overconfidence to show positive correlations with both dominance and prestige motivations (Hypothesis 2). In contrast, at the behavioral level I expected overconfidence to be associated with dominance but not prestige (Hypothesis 3). This prediction rests on previous work that highlighted how the initial appeal of brash overconfident behaviors tends to wear thin over time (e.g., Redhead et al., 2019). In other words, the overconfident may not inspire in others the same level of reverence they reserve for themselves, making prestige a less viable route than dominance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

An a priori power analysis for linear regression using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) estimated a required sample size of at least $N = 150$ to achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .20$) with an alpha of .05. Participants were 148 north-American Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (61.5% male, $M_{age} = 37.24$, $SD = 10.35$). Most participants had at least a bachelor's degree (72.3%), with the remaining holding either a master's degree or a PhD (27.7%). Participants read an informed consent form, answered a few demographic questions (i.e., age, gender, and educational level), and were then re-directed to a series of questionnaires designed to capture their overconfidence levels, their dominance and prestige motivations, and their dominance and prestige behavioral orientations, respectively.

Measures

Overconfidence. As Study 1 indicated that the GKQ (Michailova & Katter, 2014) was a better predictor of individuals pursuit of high-status positions than the geography quiz (Anderson et al., 2012), I opted to capture overconfidence via the former paradigm. Because the GKQ does not capture the overprecision strand of overconfidence, I focused on overestimation and overplacement, which in Study 1 showed the highest correlations with individuals' pursuit of high-status positions. As in Study 1, overestimation was computed by subtracting participants' percentage of correct answers from their overall confidence levels (Moore & Healy, 2008), and overplacement was computed as participants' self-perceived rank on the questionnaire minus their actual rank (Anderson et al., 2012; Cain et al., 2015; Larrick et al., 2007; Macenczak et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008; Ren & Croson, 2013).

Dominance and Prestige – Motives. I measured participants' dominance and prestige motives through the dominance (7 items) and prestige (11 items) subscales of Cassidy and Lynn's (1989) Achievement Motivation Scale. Sample items of the dominance and prestige subscales are "*I think I would enjoy having authority over other people*" or "*I would like an important job where people looked up to me*", respectively. Answers were given in a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were .80 for the dominance subscale and .83 for the prestige subscale.

Dominance and Prestige – Behavior. I measured participants' dominance and prestige behavioral orientations through the dominance (8 items) and prestige (7 items) scales developed by Cheng et al. (2010). Sample items of the dominance and prestige subscales are "*I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way*" or "*My unique talents and abilities are recognized by others*", respectively. Answers were given in a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities were .80 for the dominance subscale and .77 for the prestige subscale.

Results

Table 2 provides the bivariate correlations between participants' overall overconfidence, overestimation, overplacement, dominance and prestige motives, and dominance and prestige behavioral orientations. Since the overestimation and overplacement strands were highly correlated, $r = .83$, $p < .001$, I again computed an overall overconfidence score by standardizing the values within the two overconfidence conceptualizations and calculating their mean.

Overconfidence and Dominance and Prestige Motives

To assess the relationship between overconfidence and dominance and prestige motives, I sequentially regressed participants' dominance and prestige motivations onto their overall overconfidence scores. This revealed positive and significant relationships between overall overconfidence and both dominance, $\beta = .28$, $b = .24$, $SE = .07$, $95\%CI[.11,.38]$, $t(146) = 3.60$, $p < .001$, and prestige motives, $\beta = .36$, $b = .29$, $SE = .06$, $95\%CI[.16,.40]$, $t(146) = 4.65$, $p < .001$. I then moved to assessing the relationship between each particular overconfidence strand (i.e., overestimation and overplacement) and dominance and prestige motives. For overestimation, I found positive and significant relationships with both dominance, $\beta = .30$, $b = .01$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.005,.017]$, $t(146) = 3.79$, $p < .001$, and prestige motives, $\beta = .35$, $b = .01$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.007,.018]$, $t(146) = 4.53$, $p < .001$. For overplacement, I also found positive and significant relationships with both dominance, $\beta = .25$, $b = .07$, $SE = .002$, $95\%CI[.003,.012]$, $t(146) = 3.09$, and prestige motives, $\beta = .34$, $b = .009$, $SE = .002$, $95\%CI[.005,.013]$, $t(146) = 4.31$, $p < .001$.

Overconfidence and Dominance and Prestige Behavioral Orientations

To assess the relationship between overconfidence and dominance and prestige behavioral orientations, I sequentially regressed participants' dominance and prestige orientations onto their overall overconfidence scores. This revealed a positive and significant relationship between overall overconfidence and dominance orientation, $\beta = .33$, $b = .24$, $SE =$

.06, 95%CI[.13,.36], $t(146) = 4.29$, $p < .001$, and no significant relationship between overall overconfidence and prestige orientation, $\beta = .02$, $b = .03$, $SE = .06$, 95%CI[-.02,.13], $t(146) = .28$, $p = .78$. I then moved to assessing the relationship between each particular overconfidence strand (i.e., overestimation and overplacement) and dominance and prestige behavioral orientations. For overestimation, I found positive and significant relationship with dominance orientation, $\beta = .34$, $b = .011$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[.006,.016], $t(146) = 4.40$, $p < .001$, and no significant relationship with prestige orientation, $\beta = .06$, $b = .002$, $SE = .003$, 95%CI[-.003,.007], $t(146) = .68$, $p = .50$. For overplacement, I also found a positive and significant relationship with dominance orientation, $\beta = .30$, $b = .007$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[.003,.011], $t(146) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, and no significant relationship with prestige orientation, $\beta = -.01$, $b = .00$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[-.004,.004], $t(146) = -.13$, $p = .89$.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, participants' overconfidence was associated with both dominance and prestige motives. These results are in line with those reported in prior studies (Belmi et al., 2020) and with the notion that dominance and prestige tend to conflate when measured at the motivational level (Maner & Case, 2016), likely because both share in common the underlying desire for higher social rank. Indeed, dominance and prestige motives correlated highly ($r = .86$, $p < .001$). In contrast, and also consistent with prior studies (Cheng et al., 2013), dominance and prestige behavioral orientations were unrelated ($r = .10$, $p = .20$). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, overconfidence was associated with dominance- but not prestige-oriented behaviors towards higher social rank. This may be due to opportunities for prestige being constrained by externalities to a greater extent than dominance. In other words, because prestige must be granted by others, the overconfident may over time receive social and professional feedback that is inconsistent with the satisfaction of any prestige motives. Such feedback may lead them to calibrate their strategic moves away from prestige and toward

dominance. In Study 3, I sought to replicate these findings among a sample of working professionals where I could also examine the relative effectiveness of dominance and prestige behaviors in relation to expected social advancement.

Study 3

Study 3 had several goals. First, I wanted to replicate our findings in Study 2 by providing another test of the relationship between overconfidence and dominance and prestige behavioral orientations towards higher social rank – with the prediction again being that overconfidence is associated with dominance- but not prestige-oriented behaviors (Hypothesis 3). Second, I wanted to assess the effectiveness of dominance and prestige behaviors in terms of expected social advancement within actual organizational contexts. Based on prior studies (Brand & Mesoudi, 2019; Cheng et al., 2013; de Waal-Andrews et al., 2015), I expected both dominance and prestige behaviors to facilitate social advancement. However, based on the results of Study 2, I expected dominance to be the behavioral strategy preferred by the overconfident, mediating the relationship between overconfidence and expected social advancement (Hypothesis 4). To accomplish these goals, I recruited a field sample of supervisor-subordinate dyads, and measured subordinates' overconfidence and self-reported dominance and prestige behavioral orientations as well as supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' dominance and prestige behavioral orientations and expected changes in social status across five to ten years.

This design also allowed me to offer the first examination of the correlations between people's orientations towards dominance and prestige status-seeking behaviors (measured through subordinates' self-reports) and externally observed expressions of dominance and prestige (measured through supervisors' other-reports) in an organizational context. To my knowledge, Cheng et al. (2010) provided the only prior test of convergence between self- and other-ratings of dominance and prestige – specifically, within student sports teams, and found

correlations of .33 for dominance and .40 for prestige. However, it is unclear whether these results generalize to an organizational context, as the dynamics within sports teams are inherently different than the dynamics between subordinates and their supervisors. For example, in sports teams, tasks and expected behaviors are extremely well defined, and goals are clear and collective (Devine, 2002). In contrast, employees have considerably more room to craft their own goals and tasks and to display strategic tactics and impression management behaviors to influence their supervisor's perceptions (Tims et al., 2015). Thus, there is a clear need to gain a better understanding of how employees' dominance and prestige strategic behaviors interact in predicting supervisors' expectations of employees' social status advancement.

Method

Participants and Procedure

An a priori power analysis for mediation effects using MedPower (Kenny, 2017) estimated a required sample size of at least $N = 113$ to achieve 80% power to detect a medium-sized effect (an ab path of .07) with an alpha of .05. Participants were contacted via the social networks of several bachelor students who, in the context of a course assignment were asked to recruit subordinate-supervisor dyads from a wide variety of organizations. The initial sample consisted of 466 participants nested in 233 real-world subordinate-supervisor dyads. Each participant received a personalized email with a link to one of two online surveys (i.e., supervisor version or subordinate version). However, 68 participants did not access or complete their surveys. Excluding these participants and their dyadic partners from the data resulted in a final sample of 165 complete dyads ($N = 330$, 53.1% male, $M_{age} = 38.11$, $SD = 12.85$). Most participants held a bachelor's degree or higher (78.6%), with the remaining having completed at least high school (13.3%), primary school (6.0%), or other (2.1%). Participants were based either in the Netherlands (82.0%) or Spain (18.0%).

Both employees and supervisors first read an informed consent form and answered demographic questions regarding their age, gender, and educational level. Subordinates then completed the General Knowledge Questionnaire (Michailova & Katter, 2014) as well as self-reports of dominance and prestige behavioral orientations (Cheng et al., 2010). Supervisors also reported on subordinates' dominance and prestige behavioral orientations, and indicated their (1) perceptions of subordinates' current socioeconomic status as well as their (2) expectations of subordinates' future socioeconomic status (i.e., 5 to 10 years from now). These supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' social status at two different points in time acted as our main dependent variable in assessing the effectiveness of dominance and prestige strategies in attaining higher social rank.

Measures

Overconfidence. To limit the burden for the employees, I measured overconfidence with a subset of 12 items from the same GKQ (Michailova & Katter, 2014) that was used in Studies 1 and 2. Again, overestimation was computed by subtracting participants' percentage of correct answers from their overall confidence levels (Moore & Healy, 2008) and overplacement was computed as participants' self-perceived rank on the questionnaire minus their actual rank (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Cain et al., 2015; Larrick et al., 2007; Macenczak et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008; Ren & Croson, 2013).

Self- and Other Reported Dominance and Prestige Behavioral Orientations. To assess dominance and prestige behaviors, I again used the dominance (8 items) and prestige (9 items) scales developed by Cheng et al. (2010). Subordinates completed a self-report version (e.g., "*I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way*") and supervisors completed a peer-report version concerning their subordinates (e.g., "*He/she is willing to use aggressive tactics to get his/her way*"). Answers were given in a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities from the dominance and

prestige self-report ($\alpha = .71$ and $\alpha = .71$, respectively) and supervisor-report ($\alpha = .79$ and $\alpha = .77$, respectively) versions were acceptable.

Expected Social Status Advancement. To measure of the effectiveness of dominance and prestige strategies, I asked supervisors to rate their subordinates on the widely used McArthur scale of Subjective Socioeconomic Status (Adler et al., 2000). The scale consists of a graphical representation of a "social ladder" with ten steps accompanied by the following text: "*Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in your country. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off - those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off - those who have me least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job*". Supervisors were asked to indicate the rung on which they thought their subordinates (1) stand at this point in their life and (2) are likely to stand in five to ten years from now. The dependent variable (i.e., expected social status advancement) was subordinates' future socioeconomic status controlled for subordinates' current socioeconomic status.

Results

Table 3 provides bivariate correlations between subordinates' overall overconfidence, overestimation, overplacement, dominance and prestige behavioral orientations (both self- as well as supervisor-reported), and supervisors' expectations of their subordinates' social advancement. As overestimation and overplacement were highly correlated, $r = .72$, $p < .001$, we again computed an overall overconfidence score by standardizing the values within the two overconfidence conceptualizations and calculating their mean.

Overconfidence and Dominance and Prestige Behavioral Orientations

To test the associations between overconfidence and dominance and prestige behaviors, I first sequentially regressed subordinates' self-reported dominance and prestige onto their overall overconfidence. This revealed a positive relationship between subordinate's overall

overconfidence and dominance behaviors, $\beta = .17$, $b = .15$, $SE = .07$, 95%CI[.02,.29], $t(163) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, and a marginal relationship between subordinates' overconfidence and prestige behaviors, $\beta = .15$, $b = .13$, $SE = .07$, 95%CI[-.002,.26], $t(163) = 1.94$, $p = .05$. In contrast, supervisors' ratings of subordinates' dominance and prestige were unrelated to overconfidence (p's > .19).

Then I moved to assessing the relationship between each particular overconfidence strand (i.e., overestimation and overplacement) and dominance and prestige behavioral orientations. For overestimation, I found no significant relationship with dominance, $\beta = .11$, $b = .005$, $SE = .003$, 95%CI[-.002,.01], $t(163) = 1.47$, $p = .14$, nor prestige behaviors, $\beta = .12$, $b = .005$, $SE = .003$, 95%CI[-.001,.01], $t(163) = 1.53$, $p = .13$. For overplacement, I found a significant and positive relationship with dominance behaviors, $\beta = .20$, $b = .006$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[.001,.01], $t(163) = 2.61$, $p = .01$, and a positive and significant relationship with prestige behaviors, $\beta = .16$, $b = .004$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[.000,.008], $t(163) = 2.06$, $p = .04$. For supervisor ratings of employees' dominance and prestige, I again observed no relationships across overconfidence conceptualizations (p's > .52), except a marginal relationship between overplacement and prestige, $\beta = .15$, $b = .005$, $SE = .002$, 95%CI[.000,.01], $t(163) = 1.94$, $p = .05$.

Dominance and Prestige Behavioral Orientations and Expected Social Status Advancement

Self-report. To assess the relationship between self-reported dominance and prestige behaviors and expected social status advancement, I sequentially regressed supervisors' expectations of their subordinates' social status in the future onto subordinates' self-reported dominance and prestige orientations, while controlling for supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' current social status. This revealed a positive relationship between dominance orientation and expected social status advancement, $\beta = .15$, $b = .24$, $SE = .09$, 95%CI[.06,.42], $t(162) = 2.63$, $p < .001$, and no relationship between prestige orientation and expected social

status advancement, $\beta = .09$, $b = .14$, $SE = .10$, 95%CI[-.06,.35], $t(162) = 1.38$, $p = .17$. I also examined the interaction between dominance and prestige behaviors and found no significant effect, $\beta = -.05$, $b = -.07$, $SE = .08$, 95%CI[-.23,.09], $t(160) = -0.90$, $p = .37$.

Supervisor ratings. To assess the relationship between supervisor-reported dominance and prestige behaviors and expected social status advancement, I sequentially regressed supervisors' expectations of their subordinates' social status in the future onto supervisor-reported dominance and prestige behaviors, while controlling for supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' current social status. This revealed no significant relationship between dominance, $\beta = .01$, $b = .01$, $SE = .08$, 95%CI[-.15,.17], $t(162) = 0.16$, $p = .88$, nor prestige behaviors, $\beta = .10$, $b = .14$, $SE = .09$, 95%CI[-.04,.32], $t(162) = 1.58$, $p = .12$, and expected social status advancement. I also examined the interaction between dominance and prestige behaviors and found a significant effect, $\beta = .13$, $b = .19$, $SE = .09$, 95%CI[.01,.36], $t(160) = 2.08$, $p = .04$. Deconstructing this interaction revealed that at 1SD below the mean of supervisor-rated prestige, dominance was not related to expected social advancement, $\beta = -.11$, $b = -.14$, $SE = .12$, 95%CI[-.37,.09], $t(160) = -1.23$, $p = .22$. However, at 1SD above the mean of supervisor-rated prestige, the relationship between dominance and expected social advancement was marginally significant, $\beta = .17$, $b = .23$, $SE = .12$, 95%CI[-.01,.48], $t(160) = 1.86$, $p = .06$.

Self-report by supervisor ratings. To assess the importance of self-other agreement in terms of participants' dominance and prestige, I then looked at the interaction between self- and other-reports in predicting expectations of social status advancement. This revealed no interaction term for dominance, $\beta = .004$, $b = .005$, $SE = .07$, 95%CI[-.14,.15], $t(161) = 0.07$, $p = .94$, nor for prestige, $\beta = .09$, $b = .09$, $SE = .07$, 95%CI[-.04,.23], $t(161) = 1.40$, $p = .16$.

Mediation Analyses

To examine whether dominance functions as a mediator between overconfidence and expected social status advancement, I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 4, first fitting subordinates' overall overconfidence as the independent variable, supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' social status in the future as the dependent variable, and subordinates' self-reported dominance as the mediator, while controlling for supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' current social status. This revealed a positive and significant indirect effect between subordinates' overall overconfidence and expected status advancement through dominance, IE = .037, *SE* = .02, 95%CI[.004,.078]. I then moved to assessing the same mediation model with each particular overconfidence strand (i.e., overestimation and overplacement) as the predictor. This revealed no significant indirect effect of overestimation, IE = .001, *SE* = .0008, 95%CI[-.0002, .003], and a positive and significant indirect effect of overplacement on expected social status advancement through dominance, IE = .001, *SE* = .0006, 95%CI[.0002,.003]. No indirect effects were found for prestige, nor for supervisor-rated dominance and prestige.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 3 and the findings of Study 2, participants' overconfidence was associated with their self-reported dominance- but not prestige-based behavioral orientations. Notably, when examining overconfidence conceptualizations separately, I found the strongest relationship between overplacement and dominance behavioral orientation. Although I did not detect a direct relationship between overconfidence and supervisors' expectations of employees' social advancement, I did observe the indirect effect proposed by Hypothesis 4 – dominance (though not prestige) facilitated the expected social advancement of overconfident individuals.

Importantly, the dyadic design also allowed me to explore the relationships between supervisors' expectations of employees' social advancement and both self- and other-reports

of employees' dominance and prestige. It is worth noting that the positive correlations I observed between self- and other-reported dominance and prestige are consistent with those reported in the unpublished data of Cheng et al. (2010). Of more interest to the present investigation was the finding that while self-reported dominance, though not self-reported prestige, was positively related to supervisors' ratings of expected social advancement, supervisors' ratings of dominance and prestige were unrelated to expected future status. Moreover, supervisor-rated dominance and prestige interacted – only when supervisors observed employees to be prestigious did their ratings of employees' dominance were positively related to expectations of social advancement.

General Discussion

The goal of the present research was to investigate the behavioral mechanisms in the relationship between overconfidence and the acquisition of high-status positions. In Study 1, I found that overconfidence is associated with the active pursuit of high-status positions. In Study 2, I found overconfident individuals to exhibit dominance-based strategies (i.e., forcefulness, intimidation, coercion) in their pursuit of higher social rank to a greater extent than prestige-based strategies (i.e., sharing of valuable knowledge and skills). In Study 3, I found the relationship between employees' overconfidence and supervisor expectations of employees expected social advancement to be mediated by self-reported dominance behaviors.

Theoretical and Applied Contributions

Scholars have long theorized that overconfidence facilitates the attainment of higher social status (e.g., Krebs & Denton, 1997; Leary, 2007; Trivers, 1985; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). More precisely, these theories suggest that favorable self-deception (i.e., genuinely considering oneself more knowledgeable and skilled than one really is) assists individuals in convincing others that they are indeed more knowledgeable and skilled, even when that is not the case. Several studies in the last years have offered empirical support for this idea (Anderson

et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019). Importantly, while these theories explain the social ascension of overconfident individuals as a consequence of others' misperceptions of them, recent studies indicate that the overconfident tend to harbor stronger status motives (Belmi et al., 2020). This suggests that overconfident individuals might actually play an active role in their own social ascension, adopting strategic behaviors aimed at social advancement. In the present research, I tested and found support for this possibility, generating the following contributions.

First, I found that overconfidence is associated with the active pursuit of high social status, thereby driving self-selection into competitions for high-status positions. This has a number of consequences for leadership selection. First, these self-selection biases might skew candidate pools toward higher levels of average overconfidence, making overconfidence displays (and therefore the associated misperceptions; Anderson et al., 2012; Belmi et al., 2020; Ronay et al., 2019) more normative within leadership selection settings. Second, competent candidates who are humbler in their self-evaluations and less ostentatious in their behavioral displays might be disinclined to compete for high-status positions of power and leadership, or find themselves placed at a disadvantage if they do compete. Since confidence holds a strong currency in the context of leadership selection (e.g., Hogan et al., 1994; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991), a higher proportion of overconfident candidates runs the risk of obscuring the entry and selection of more competent candidates whose self-perceptions are better calibrated. This kind of "arms race" toward ever-greater overconfidence signaling has been modeled in the context of leadership selection in the past (Ronay et al., 2019). These results advance the existing literature by showing that overconfident individuals play an active role in their social ascension, rather than being passive actors that merely benefit from others' misperceptions of them. This finding bears important implications for the current understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and leadership. While prior accounts of overconfidence among those in leadership roles have focused on the notion that the psychological experience

of power that accompanies leadership roles leads to higher levels of overconfidence (Fast et al., 2012), the current results align with those of recent studies (Ronay et al., 2019) showing that overconfidence might also antecede the acquisition of leadership roles.

Second, to gain a deeper understanding of such active role of the overconfident, I also examined the behavioral strategies that overconfident individuals adopt in navigating social hierarchies. In particular, I looked at dominance and prestige behavioral orientations. Here I observed a consistent association between overconfidence and a behavioral orientation towards dominance (as opposed to prestige) in the pursuit of higher social rank. Even though in Study 3 I did observe an unexpected marginal relationship between overconfidence and prestige, the current findings suggest that overconfident individuals may at some level be aware that their inflated self-perceptions are insufficient to garner higher social status through prestige-based behaviors. In such cases, dominance may be construed by the overconfident as the most viable means of navigating their respective social hierarchies. This implies the possibility that overconfident individuals may be strategically self-deceiving, with moments of clarity that facilitate strategic planning (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011b). Future studies should therefore seek to examine the functional boundaries of self-deception.

The finding that overconfident individuals tend towards dominance-based behaviors bears also important practical implications for organizations. By adopting self-centered, power-seeking behaviors (e.g., manipulation, intimidation, or coercion), overconfident leaders might over time generate toxic organizational cultures in which abuse of control, bullying, exploitation, and personal agendas become the norm (Farrell & Dane, 2020; Gilbert et al., 2012; Hodson et al., 2006). Indeed, researchers have long argued and demonstrated that leadership plays a large role in shaping organizational culture (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Gilbert et al., 2012; Ofori, 2009; Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). Hence, the current findings suggest that the perils of selecting overconfident leaders might extend beyond the negative

consequences of overconfident decision-making (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review), contributing as well to the development of undesirable organizational cultures and ultimately hampering optimal organizational-level performance. This possibility, however, should be directly tested in future studies.

Third, these studies offer the first direct comparison between motivational (Cassidy & Lynn, 1989) and behavioral (Cheng et al., 2010) operationalizations of dominance and prestige, and highlight the importance of differentiating between these two facets of the dominance and prestige constructs. Whereas research to date has used these two measures as largely interchangeable, the current results suggest that motivational operationalizations of dominance and prestige might have limited value in predicting the behavioral expressions of individuals' desire for higher social rank. As such, researchers should carefully consider which dominance and prestige operationalizations (i.e., motivation, behavior, or both) best fit their specific interests and purposes.

Fourth, the current research also examined the effectiveness of dominance and prestige strategies towards higher social rank. Prior studies have reported positive associations between both dominance and prestige (other-reports) and social status (Cheng et al., 2013). These studies, however, were all conducted in lab settings involving short-term groups and hierarchies, or among groups of students. For this reason, researchers have called for generalization to more realistic field settings (Cheng et al. 2013). The data presented here from real-world organizational settings offer insight in this regard, since the status-enhancing benefits of dominance and prestige behaviors differed depending on whether dominance and prestige were self- or supervisor-reported. Specifically, self-reported dominance, though not prestige, was positively associated with expectations of social rank advancement. In contrast, supervisor-reported prestige and dominance did not predict expectations of social advancement.

This leads to the fifth contribution, which concerns the extent to which self- and other-reports of dominance and prestige converge. While I observed positive associations between subordinates' self-ratings of dominance and prestige and their supervisors' perceptions of their dominance and prestige, the correlations were nonetheless low ($r = .32$, $p < .01$ and $r = .51$, $p < .01$; respectively), suggesting that there is some noise between intention and expression, as well as between the expression and interpretation of these strategies. As such, this finding attests to the importance of carefully considering which dominance and prestige measurement method (i.e., self- vs. other-reports) best fit researchers' specific interests and purposes.

Finally, by adopting a comprehensive methodological approach to the construct of overconfidence, I found only small differences between the conceptualizations of overconfidence (i.e., overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement) and their associations with individuals' drive for higher social status. Specifically, I found the most consistent effects for overplacement and an overall measure of overconfidence in which multiple conceptualizations were combined. However, the largest differences were found between the two measures of overconfidence that we adopted in the present study (i.e., a multiple-choice general knowledge quiz and an open-ended geography quiz); suggesting that the type of measure has a stronger influence on the relationships between overconfidence and the pursuit of higher status than the type of overconfidence conceptualization. These findings show the importance of disentangling the effects of the three overconfidence conceptualizations from their measurement approach. Hence, more studies on overconfidence that employ such a comprehensive methodological approach are needed (Moore & Healy, 2008).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are also limitations to the current studies that can serve as avenues for future research. First, my reliance on a correlation approach prevents me from nailing down questions of causality – that is, whether overconfidence is a causal antecedent of the pursuit of higher

social rank. Therefore, one important future direction is to test the causal model derived from my theoretical reasoning and suggestive findings. In this sense, one possible approach is to provide participants with false positive versus false negative feedback on their performance in a given task, hence manipulating their perceptions of their own competence and abilities (i.e., overconfidence). Second, I assessed the status-enhancing effects of dominance and prestige through supervisors' expectations of their subordinates' social advancement over time. While employees' promotion to higher status positions is often based on supervisors' perceptions of their abilities and performance, the cross-sectional design impeded me to observe whether supervisors' expectations materialized in actual promotion to higher status positions, such as leadership roles. Longitudinal field studies would offer valuable insight in this regard. Third, although the samples comprised participants and organizations from three different countries (i.e., U.S.A., Spain, and the Netherlands), it is important to test these hypotheses in other cultures where the effects of overconfidence, dominance, and prestige might differ. For instance, self-interested exploitative behaviors characteristic of dominance often meet more severe negative social reactions in collectivistic cultures such as the Chinese and the Japanese (e.g., Adair & Semnani-Azad, 2011; Kowner & Wiseman, 2003). Cultural differences might therefore attenuate or even reverse the status-enhancing effects of dominance. Unfortunately, the existing evidence for the relationship between dominance and social status advancement, including the present studies, is so far limited to individualistic cultures.

Conclusion

To date, the ascension of overconfident individuals to positions of power and influence has been attributed to the inaccurate perceptions of higher knowledge and competence that overconfident behaviors elicit. This explanation portrays the overconfident as passive beneficiaries of others' misperceptions of them. However, the current studies suggest that there might be a less naïve side to this tale, one in which overconfident individuals actively pursue

high-status positions of power and influence. In such pursuits, the overconfident seem to lean

toward dominance-based, self-centered behaviors as their preferred strategy.

Appendix

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 1 variables.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Overconfidence - GKQ	0.00	1.00						
2. Overall Overconfidence - GEO	0.00	1.00	.35**					
- 3. Overprecision	0.00	1.00	.30**	.91**				
- 4. Overestimation	0.00	1.00	.35**	.94**	.77*			
- 5. Overplacement	0.00	1.00	.35**	.95**	.79**	.88**		
6. Pursuit High-Status Position	0.33	0.47	.27**	.18*	.16†	.16†	.18*	

† $p < .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 2 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overall Overconfidence	0.00	1.00							
2. Overestimation	0.00	1.00	.95**						
3. Overplacement	0.00	1.00	.95**	.82**					
4. Dominance - Motivation	5.36	0.81	.28**	.29**	.24**				
5. Prestige - Motivation	5.25	0.76	.36**	.35**	.33**	.86**			
6. Dominance - Behavior	4.63	0.69	.33**	.34**	.29**	.63**	.57**		
7. Prestige - Behavior	4.72	0.67	.02	.05	-.01	.37**	.27**	.10	

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

Table 3.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 3 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Overall Overconfidence	0.00	1.00								
2. Overestimation	0.00	1.00	.92**							
3. Overplacement	0.00	1.00	.92**	.71**						
4. Dominance - Self-rated	5.36	0.81	.17*	.11	.20**					
5. Prestige - Self-rated	5.25	0.76	.15†	.12	.15*	.06				
6. Dominance - Supervisor-rated	4.63	0.69	.04	.05	.03	.32**	-.13			
7. Prestige - Supervisor-rated	4.72	0.67	.10	.03	.15	-.08	.50**	-.19*		
8. Expected social advancement	4.72	0.67	.06	.00	.12	.20**	.10	.01	.11	

† $p < .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Chapter 4

Overconfidence, Moral Disengagement, and Deceptive Impression Management:

Verifying an Idealized Self

"Remember Jerry, it's not a lie if you believe it."

George Costanza

Personnel selection involves exchanges of information between organizations and job applicants regarding their relative offerings to a potential employment relationship. However, because neither employers nor applicants possess especially strong incentives to transmit purely honest information about their commitment or capacities (Ellis et al., 2002; Hogue et al., 2013; McGregor, 1989; Weiss & Feldman, 2006), job application contexts manifest incentives to (1) identify the transmission of honest information, and (2) transmit deceptive information (e.g., exaggerating or fabricating past achievements) that can be construed by the other as honest. The transmission of deceptive information is of course morally questionable, and also subject to detection, both of which tend to attenuate the use of outright lying (Bandura, 1991; Law et al., 2016). However, in the words of George Costanza, it is not a lie (or at least less likely to feel and look like one) if you believe it. In the current paper, I examine the role of self-deception and moral disengagement in applicants' transmission of deceptive information.

Deception is pervasive in job application contexts. Indeed, up to 81% of applicants admit to having used lies during job interviews (Weiss & Feldman, 2006). This is problematic because applicant deception hinders the proper functioning of selection processes, making them unreliable, unfair, and potentially resulting in the selection of less competent but more deceitful applicants (Rosenfeld, 1997; Roulin et al., 2015; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). Sparked by the practical value of mitigating these selection errors, recent research has focused on investigating which individuals are more likely to adopt deceptive behaviors. For example, we

know that applicants who score low on the personality traits of extraversion, conscientiousness, and honesty-humility tend to lie more in job interviews (Buehl & Melchers, 2017; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017; Bourdage et al., 2018). However, the psychological roots of applicant deception remain unclear, especially with regard to the motivational and cognitive mechanisms driving applicants use of deception. Such is the goal of the present paper, wherein I suggest that individuals' self-views influence the nature of the self-presentation behaviors they tend to adopt.

In particular, I propose that the extent to which applicants overestimate their own skills, knowledge, and capabilities (i.e., a widespread cognitive bias known as overconfidence; see Meikle et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008 for reviews) influences the likelihood that they will resort to deceptive self-presentation behaviors. Moreover, I suggest that this subterfuge is facilitated by a cognitive process that underlies the formation of these exaggerated self-views – self-deception (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Specifically, I argue that a heightened capacity for self-deception both falsely inflates one's own image and obfuscates the moral implications of unethical actions, thereby facilitating the adoption of deceptive self-presentation behaviors that lead to other-deception.

The present research contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, guided by self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), I highlight the value of deceptive self-presentation as an strategic means for applicants to confirm and stabilize overconfident self-views. Second, drawing on social cognitive theory of moral thought and action (Bandura, 1991), I propose and test the role of moral disengagement as an antecedent of applicant deceptive self-presentation. While moral disengagement has been previously documented as an antecedent of several intra-organizational unethical behaviors, such as corruption, cheating, or stealing (Moore, 2008; Moore et al., 2012), the present research is the first to explore the negative consequences of moral disengagement at the organization-entry level (i.e., motivation

letters and job interviews). Finally, building on evolutionary and social theories of overconfidence (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Mele, 1997; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011), I point to self-deception as a shared cognitive process in overconfidence and moral disengagement, and position moral disengagement as a mediator between overconfidence and applicants' deceptive self-presentation behaviors. All in all, the present studies advance the current understanding of applicant deception processes by offering a deeper, theoretically-based description of its motivational origins and underlying cognitive mechanisms.

Theoretical Background

Defining and Conceptualizing Overconfidence

Overconfidence is defined as the belief that one is better (e.g., more competent, more skilled, more knowledgeable) than one really is based on objective evidence (e.g., Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Meikle et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008). Researchers have theorized that individuals develop exaggerated self-views because these can help in convincing others that they truly possess superior qualities, ultimately facilitating their social advancement (e.g., Leary, 2007; Trivers, 1985; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Indeed, a number of studies have demonstrated that overconfident individuals tend to be perceived as more competent, and in turn, granted higher social status (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Belmi et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019). Critically, in order to sustain an aggrandized self-image, individuals must selectively ignore or downplay those pieces of evidence that point to a more realistic (though less favorable) version of themselves (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Mele, 1997; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Overconfidence, therefore, is seen as a self-deceptive process, wherein individuals look for and process information in a manner that supports an idealized self-image. In sum, overconfidence is not a matter of intentional bluff, but rather a genuine, self-deceptive belief that one is better than one actually is.

Self-Verification and Job Application Processes

Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) posits that people have a powerful desire to confirm and stabilize their self-views, as this provides a sense of psychological coherence allowing them to organize their experience, predict future events, and ultimately guide their behavior (Swann et al., 2003). Importantly, because self-views are formed through social and interpersonal processes (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979), individuals can only confirm and stabilize their self-views as long as they receive self-verifying social responses from others (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann et al., 2003). Hence, people strive to evoke social responses that are congruent with their self-views, a process known as self-verification strivings.

Job application processes strongly encourage self-verification strivings because individuals' characteristics are openly assessed, thus representing a salient opportunity to elicit self-congruent social responses (Cable & Kay, 2012). This highlights the importance of understanding how individuals' motivation for self-verification might influence job applicants' behavior. To date, however, only three investigations have addressed this issue (Cable & Kay, 2012; Moore et al., 2017; Wilhelmy et al., 2020). These studies have posited self-verification as a positive factor in job application processes because it might motivate applicants to present a more truthful image of themselves, counterbalancing inauthentic self-enhancement strategies and misrepresentation of the true self. Truthful self-presentation benefits hiring organizations and job candidates alike, as candid self-presentation tends to make candidates appear more authentic in the eyes of recruiters and selection panels, and therefore more attractive (e.g., Cameron et al., 2003; Kernis, 2003).

However, these proposed advantages are contingent on the assumption that individuals' self-views are accurate. Central to my own reasoning is the notion that this is often not the case, as people routinely overestimate their knowledge and capabilities and develop unrealistically positive self-views (e.g., Alicke et al., 1995; Dunning et al., 1989; Swann & Gill, 1997; see

Alicke & Govorum, 2005; Dunning et al., 2004 for reviews). If one's self-image is positively distorted, as is the case for overconfident applicants, self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) suggests that such individuals should strategically present themselves to others in ways that reflect their overly positive self-image, therefore facilitating self-verifying social responses. As such, the "self" that overconfident individuals depict in selection processes may not accurately reflect their true skills and capabilities, which may in turn introduce bias in hiring decisions (e.g., Barrick et al., 2009; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). In the present research, I thus focus on investigating the relationship between job applicants' overconfidence and their self-presentation behaviors. In personnel selection contexts, these self-presentation strategies are broadly known as impression management behaviors.

Overconfidence and Impression Management: Honest vs. Deceptive Strategies

Impression management refers to a broad set of self-presentation behaviors through which individuals purposely attempt to create a positive image of themselves in others' minds (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Roulin et al., 2015). Impression management behaviors have been typically classified into three different categories: self-promotion, ingratiation, and image protection (e.g., Ellis et al., 2002; Levashina & Campion, 2006; Bourdage et al., 2018; Van Iddekinge et al., 2007). Self-promotion refers to self-focused behaviors intended to convince interviewers that one is competent and possesses the attributes that a specific job requires (e.g., mentioning past professional achievements or emphasizing one's contribution for a positive organizational outcome). Ingratiation refers to other-focused behaviors aimed at appearing likeable and so increasing perceptions of person-organization fit (e.g., complimenting the interviewer or demonstrating goals and values similar to those of the organization). Finally, image protection refers to behaviors designed to protect or repair one's image (e.g., making excuses or justifying a negative aspect in one's resume).

These strategic self-presentation behaviors have been consistently demonstrated to positively influence recruiters' perceptions of candidates. Indeed, candidates who engage in impression management behaviors are seen as possessing better interpersonal skills, better problem-solving and decision-making abilities, and overall better qualifications than their competitors (e.g., Ellis et al., 2002; Gilmore et al., 1999; Kacmar et al., 1992, Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Roulin et al., 2015). Because impression management behaviors effectively elicit such positive perceptions and reactions from selection committees, I suggest that, in seeking to socially validate their aggrandized self-image, overconfident candidates might be especially likely to adopt impression management behaviors.

Hypothesis 1: Overconfidence is positively related to the use of impression management behaviors during selection processes.

Importantly, researchers have distinguished between honest and deceptive forms of impression management (Bourdage et al., 2018; Levashina & Campion, 2006; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). Honest impression management takes place when the information that applicants communicate truthfully depicts their qualifications, skills, or past professional experiences, whereas deceptive impression management involves purporting to fictitious qualifications, skills, or past professional experiences. Deceptive impression management behaviors have been classified in four different categories (i.e., slight image creation, extensive image creation, ingratiation, and image protection; e.g., Levashina & Campion, 2007; Roulin et al., 2018). These deceptive categories mirror those of honest impression management behaviors, with the exception that self-promotion branches into two forms of deceptive self-promotion – slight image creation and extensive image creation. The difference between slight and extensive image creation is a matter of magnitude. Whereas in slight image creation candidates embellish and tailor their past professional experiences and

qualifications, in extensive image creation candidates purely fabricate such past professional experiences and qualifications.

Since overconfidence reflects an idealized self-image of superior skill and competence, honest impression management (such as truthful recounts of past professional achievements) may result insufficient for overconfident candidates to elicit self-verifying impressions in others. Consequently, to signal an image of themselves that aligns with their exaggerated self-views, the overconfident might instead resort to deceptive impression management behaviors (such as fabricating past professional achievements) that better serve to verify their idealized self. Indeed, the very purpose of deceptive impression management behaviors is to elicit a positively-distorted image of oneself in others (Levashina & Campion, 2007; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). To be clear, I do not argue that overconfident applicants abstain entirely from honest impression management behaviors. In fact, to the extent that these behaviors can contribute to eliciting self-congruent impressions in others, we expect the overconfident to make use of these honest strategies as well. However, I expect overconfident applicants to make greater use of deceptive impression management behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Overconfident job applicants will make greater use of deceptive impression management behaviors than honest impression management behaviors.

Moral Disengagement as a Mediator Between Overconfidence and Deceptive Impression Management

The argument that overconfident individuals might harbor a stronger motivation for using deceptive impression management behaviors does not necessarily imply that they will do so. Indeed, during the course of socialization, individuals develop and internalize moral standards of right and wrong (Bandura, 1991). These moral standards guide behavior through what Bandura (1991) described as self-regulatory processes, which involve the monitoring and judging of one's own actions. If such actions correspond to moral standards of conduct,

individuals experience positive emotions (e.g., pride) and a sense of self-worth. However, if such actions are at odds with moral standards of conduct, individuals experience negative emotions (e.g., guilt) and self-rebuke. Because people are reflective fore-thinkers (Bandura, 2008), these evaluative reactions to one's own actions come to regulate behavior anticipatorily, thereby promoting moral conduct and deterring morally transgressive behavior. Therefore, in general, people tend to refrain from behaving in ways that violate moral standards of conduct.

However, Bandura (1999) also argued that these self-regulatory processes can be deactivated via moral disengagement mechanisms. Moral disengagement refers to a series of cognitive mechanisms that facilitate a decoupling of the association between morally transgressive behaviors and the negative emotions that should otherwise prevent them. For example, individuals may reframe their unethical actions as being in the service of a greater good, label them via neutralizing terminology such as "borrowing" instead of "stealing", or minimize the negative consequences of one's unethical behavior. Based on Bandura's (1999) theorizing, these cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms allow individuals to prevent or minimize self-censure and guilt, thereby facilitating morally transgressive behavior – such as deceptively presenting oneself in selection processes.

I reason that overconfident people might be more likely to morally disengage because overconfidence and moral disengagement share the common underlying process of self-deception. Indeed, for overconfident individuals to genuinely believe that they are more competent, more skilled, more knowledgeable than they actually are, they must process information in a way that ignores or attenuates contradictory evidence – or in other words, they must self-deceive (Kunda, 1990; Mele, 1997; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). This same process of self-deception has been posed as an essential component in mechanisms of moral disengagement, as it might help individuals to dilute the moral implications of unethical actions (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Indeed, for individuals to effectively decouple unethical actions

from their moral implications, therefore facilitating them (Bandura, 1999), there must exist a level of self-deception by which such implications can be minimized, disguised, or ignored outright (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). Hence, I argue that overconfident individuals' capacity to self-deceive in a manner that evokes an idealized self is similarly employed in the service of unethical behavior, and expressed via moral disengagement mechanisms.

By allowing overconfident job applicants to bypass the moral implications of their unethical actions, moral disengagement should in turn facilitate the adoption of deceptive impression management behaviors. For example, deceptive candidates might persuade themselves that "everyone uses deceit during their interviews", which is false (Law et al., 2016), or they might convince themselves that they are not really fabricating past professional experiences, "just adding some embellishments here and there". This cognitive chicanery might allow overconfident candidates to conceptualize deceptive self-presentation in selection processes as less morally transgressive. Indeed, some authors have pointed to moral disengagement as a possible predictor of deception in job application processes (Law et al., 2016), and others have stressed the role of self-deception in positively-biased self-presentations (Levashina & Campion, 2006). The existing literature, however, has yet to test these predictions.

Hypothesis 3: Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors.

Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was twofold. First, I sought to test the prediction that overconfidence is associated with a greater use of impression management behaviors in job application contexts (Hypothesis 1). Second, I wanted to assess the extent to which overconfident individuals adopt deceptive versus honest impression management behaviors, with our prediction being that overconfidence is more strongly related to the use of deceptive

than honest forms of impression management (Hypothesis 2). To accomplish this, I presented participants with a fictional job offer and asked them to write a short motivation letter advocating themselves for the described job position.

Method

Participants and Procedure

To obtain an estimate of the sample size needed, a power analysis for linear regression was conducted using GPower 3.1.9.2. (Faul et al., 2007). The results estimated a minimum sample size of $N = 123$ to achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .22$) with an alpha of .05. Since there are no prior studies on overconfidence and impression management, the effect size for the power analysis was derived from prior studies showing small-to-medium effects of other individual differences (e.g., extraversion, honesty-humility, core self-evaluations) on applicants' use of deceptive impression management (Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). The sample consisted of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers based on the United States of America. Since the design of Study 1 required participants to take significant time and effort to plan and write their motivation letters, I anticipated a high percentage of low-quality or non-compliant responses and thus decided to oversample. The initial sample consisted of 386 participants. However, in line with our expectation, I identified 255 low-quality or non-compliant motivation letters (e.g., blank space letters, one-word or one-sentence letters, copied and pasted text from the job offer or the internet, and non-sense text). Removing these cases resulted in a final sample size of 131 participants (60.3% male, $M_{age} = 38.54$, $SD = 11.53$). Most participants had at least a bachelor's degree (75.6%), with the remaining holding either a high school degree (24.4%) or none (1.5%).

Participants first read and responded to an informed consent form and completed a few demographic questions. Then, participants proceeded to complete a questionnaire that assessed their overconfidence levels. Third, I presented participants with a fictional job offer for a

leadership position at an ostensible company named G.M.B. Blue Skylark Foods. The job offer contained information about the company's sector, values, and culture, as well as a description of the most important tasks of the potential leaders (see Appendix 2 for the job offer that participants read). Participants were instructed to imagine that they were actually applying for the leadership position and that they wanted Blue Skylark to hire them. Their task was to write a motivation letter for the position, with the goal of convincing the selection committee that their actual professional and personal skills made them the perfect candidate for the job. Once participants had written their motivation letters, I asked them to complete an impression management questionnaire in which they indicated the extent to which they had engaged in different impression management behaviors. Participants were subsequently redirected to a debriefing page.

Measures

Overconfidence. To measure participants' overconfidence, I captured their overplacement, or the exaggerated belief that one is better than others (Meikle et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008). To do this, I used a previously adapted version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014). The questionnaire consisted of 24 general knowledge questions (e.g., "*How many letters does the Russian alphabet consists of?*") with three given alternative answers (e.g., "*40 letters*", "*33 letters*", or "*26 letters*") from which participants had to choose the correct one. Once participants had selected their answers to each of the 24 questions, I asked them to indicate their confidence in their overall performance in the quiz relative to other participants in the study, on a scale ranging from 0 (*I am at the very bottom, I got a worse final score than 99% of the other participants*) to 100 (*I am at the very top, I got a better final score than 99% of the other participants*). Overplacement was computed as participants' self-perceived rank minus their actual rank, both in terms of final score in the quiz. To calculate participants' actual rank, I

transformed their scores into percentile rankings. This measure has been widely used in prior overconfidence research (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Belmi et al., 2020; Macenczak et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008).

   Impression Management. To measure participants' impression management behaviors, I used the Short IM Scale develop by Bourdage et al. (2018). The scale consists of 28 items, of which 12 capture honest impression management tactics (with 4 items per category within honest impression management behaviors; i.e., self-promotion, ingratiation, and image protection) and 16 capture deceptive impression management tactics (again with 4 items per category within deceptive impression management behavior; i.e., slight image creation, extensive image creation, ingratiation, and image protection). Because the scale was originally developed to measure impression management tactics in face-to-face interview contexts, I adapted some items in order to make them consistent with the written format of the task. For example, I modified "*I made sure to let the interviewer know about my job credentials*" to "*I made sure to describe my job credentials*" or "*I tried to express the same opinions and attitudes as the interviewer*" to "*I tried to express the same opinions and values as the organization*". Answers were given in a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*to no extent*) and 5 (*to a very great extent*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the overall impression management scale (.88), the honest impression management subscale (.76), and the deceptive impression management subscale (.89) were all good.

Results

   Table 1 provides the bivariate correlations between all study variables. To test the prediction that overconfidence is positively related to the use of impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 1), I regressed participants' overall use of the impression management behaviors onto their overconfidence scores. The results revealed a positive relationship

between participants' overconfidence and their overall use of impression management behaviors, $\beta = .27$, $b = .006$, $SE = .002$, $95\%CI[.002,.010]$, $t(129) = 3.19$, $p < .01$.

To test the prediction that overconfident applicants make greater use of deceptive than honest impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 2), I first regressed participants' use of honest impression management behaviors and deceptive impression management behaviors onto their overconfidence scores, respectively. The results revealed a positive relationship between overconfidence and the use of both honest, $\beta = .223$, $b = .006$, $SE = .002$, $95\%CI[.001,.010]$, $t(129) = 2.60$, $p = .01$, and deceptive, $\beta = .229$, $b = .007$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.002,.012]$, $t(129) = 2.67$, $p < .01$, impression management behaviors. Comparing the standardized coefficients for honest and deceptive behaviors revealed no significant difference, $z = -.05$, $p = .48$.

To garner a more fine-grained picture of the relationship between overconfidence and the use of honest and deceptive impression management behaviors, I then regressed participants' use of the different categories within honest and deceptive behaviors onto their overconfidence scores, respectively. For honest impression management behaviors, the results revealed a positive relationship between overconfidence and honest image protection, $\beta = .205$, $b = .009$, $SE = .004$, $95\%CI[.002,.017]$, $t(129) = 2.38$, $p = .01$, but no significant relationships with self-promotion nor honest ingratiation (both $p's > .13$). For deceptive impression management behaviors, the results revealed positive relationships between overconfidence and slight image creation, $\beta = .234$, $b = .008$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.002,.015]$, $t(129) = 2.73$, $p < .01$, and extensive image creation, $\beta = .197$, $b = .008$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.001,.014]$, $t(129) = 2.28$, $p = .02$, and marginally significant relationships with deceptive ingratiation, $\beta = .171$, $b = .006$, $SE = .003$, $95\%CI[.000,.012]$, $t(129) = 1.96$, $p = .05$, and deceptive image protection, $\beta = .149$, $b = .006$, $SE = .004$, $95\%CI[-.001,.014]$, $t(129) = 1.71$, $p = .08$.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I found participants' overconfidence to be positively related to their overall use of impression management behaviors. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, while overconfidence was positively associated with the use of both honest and deceptive forms of impression management, overconfident applicants did make use of a greater variety of deceptive than honest impression management behaviors. Specifically, overconfidence was associated with only one (i.e., image protection) of the three categories within honest impression management behaviors, whereas I found overconfidence to predict a greater use of all four categories within deceptive impression management behaviors.

Although Study 1 did offer initial support for the hypothesized relationships, the fictional nature of the job application scenario that was used to measure participants' impression management behaviors does not capture certain aspects of real-world selection processes. First, because participants were not applying for an actual job position, Study 1 likely represented a low-stakes scenario, arguably influencing participants' motivation to adopt impression management behaviors. Second, participants were not able to choose the specific position they were applying for. In this scenario, it seems likely that participants' qualifications did not fit the described job requirements as much as if they were applying for a position of their choosing, which is typically the case in real-world contexts. This discrepancy might have artificially created a stronger need for image protection, and provided overconfident applicants with a means to defend insufficient qualifications via honest excuses and justifications. Indeed, I speculate this might explain the unexpected positive association that we observed between overconfidence and honest image protection. Lastly, while motivation letters are common within selection processes, the most weighted factor in making hiring decisions tends to be applicants' behavior during their job interviews (Dipboye, 1992; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Kinicki et al., 1990). Job interviews differ from motivation letters in that applicants must interact in real time with actual recruiters or hiring managers. This is important because face-

to-face deception often involves a degree of physiological arousal and negative affect that likely constrain deceptive impression management behaviors (Buller & Burgoon, 1996). The absence of these constraints in Study 1 impedes me to generalize these findings to job interview contexts. To overcome these limitations, in Study 2 I thus sought to replicate the current results within the context of real-world, naturally occurring face-to-face job interviews.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was also twofold. First, I wanted to strengthen the support for our theorizing by replicating the results of Study 1, this time within the context of naturalistic job interviews. To do so, I recruited a sample of individuals who had had at least one real-world job interview in the last 12 months. As in Study 1, I expected overconfidence to be associated with a greater use of impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 1), and especially with deceptive ones (Hypothesis 2). Second, I wanted to test the proposed role of moral disengagement in the use of deceptive impression management behaviors. In particular, I expected moral disengagement to mediate the positive relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants and Procedure

To obtain an estimate of the sample size needed, a power analysis for mediation effects was conducted using MedPower (Kenny, 2017). The results estimated a required sample size of at least $N = 113$ to achieve 80% power to detect a medium-sized indirect effect (an *ab* path of .09) with an alpha of .05. Participants were a convenience sample of 125 individuals (44.8% male, 1.6% non-binary, $M_{age} = 27.92$, $SD = 8.62$) who had gone through at least one real-world job interview within the last 12 months. Most participants had at least a bachelor's degree (67.2%), with the remaining holding a high school degree (32.8%). Participants first read and responded to an informed consent form and completed a few demographic questions. Then, I

asked participants to think back to their most recent job interview and to complete an impression management questionnaire indicating the extent to which they had engaged in different impression management behaviors during such interview. On average, participants' last job interview was 5.1 months (*SD* = 3.88) ago at the time of participation. Lastly, participants completed two final questionnaires aimed to capture their overconfidence levels and their propensity to morally disengage. Participants were subsequently redirected to a debriefing page.

Measures

Overconfidence. To measure participants' overconfidence, I used the same previously adapted version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014) that I used in Study 1. Again, overplacement was computed as participants' self-perceived rank minus their actual rank, both in terms of final score in the quiz. To calculate participants' actual rank, I transformed their scores into percentile rankings.

Impression Management. To measure participants' impression management behaviors, I again used the same Short IM Scale (Bourdage et al., 2018) that I employed in Study 1. Since the context in which I measured impression management in Study 2 mirrored the precise context for which the measure was developed (i.e., face-to-face interviews), this time I used the original scale without the modifications that I implemented in Study 1. Again, answers were given in a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*to no extent*) and 5 (*to a very great extent*). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for the overall impression management scale (.87), the honest impression management subscale (.76), and the deceptive impression management subscale (.88) were all good.

Moral Disengagement. To measure participants' use of cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms, I used the 16-item version of the Propensity to Morally Disengage Scale developed by Moore et al. (2012). Sample items are "*Considering the ways people*

grossly misrepresent themselves, it is hardly a sin to inflate your own credentials a bit" and "*It is ok to gloss over certain facts to make your point*". Answers were given in a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). Reliability was good (α= .85).

Results

Table 2 provides the bivariate correlations between all study variables. To test the prediction that overconfidence is positively related to the use of impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 1), I regressed participants' overall use of the impression management behaviors onto their overconfidence scores. The results revealed a marginally significant relationship between participants' overconfidence and their overall use of impression management behaviors, β = .161, b = .003, *SE* = .002, 95%CI[.000,.006], $t(123)$ = 1.80, p = .07.

To test the prediction that overconfident applicants make greater use of deceptive than honest impression management behaviors (Hypothesis 2), I first regressed participants' use of honest impression management behaviors and deceptive impression management behaviors onto their overconfidence scores, respectively. The results revealed no significant relationship between overconfidence and the use of honest impression management behaviors, β = -.031, b = -.001, *SE* = .002, 95%CI[-.004,.003], $t(123)$ = -.34, p = .72, and a positive relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors, β = .276, b = .006, *SE* = .002, 95%CI[.002,.010], $t(123)$ = 3.19, p < .01. Comparing the standardized coefficients for honest and deceptive behaviors revealed a significant difference, z = -2.45, p < .01.

As in Study 1, to garner a more detailed picture of the relationship between overconfidence and the use of honest and deceptive impression management behaviors, I again regressed participants' use of the different categories within honest and deceptive behaviors onto their overconfidence scores, respectively. For honest impression management behaviors,

the results revealed no significant relationship between overconfidence and all categories of honest impression management behaviors (all *p's* > .39). For deceptive impression management behaviors, the results revealed positive relationships with slight image creation, β = .206, *b* = .006, *SE* = .003, 95%CI[.001,.012], *t*(123) = 2.32, *p* = .02, ingratiation, β = .219, *b* = .007, *SE* = .003, 95%CI[.001,.012], *t*(123) = 2.48, *p* = .01, and image protection, β = .289, *b* = .008, *SE* = .002, 95%CI[.003,.013], *t*(123) = 3.34, *p* < .01, and a marginally significant relationship with extensive image creation, β = .166, *b* = .005, *SE* = .005, 95%CI[.000,.010], *t*(123) = 1.86, *p* = .06.

Finally, to assess the proposed mediating role of moral disengagement in the relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors, I first examined the relationship between overconfidence and moral disengagement and the relationship between moral disengagement and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors, respectively. This revealed a positive relationship between overconfidence and moral disengagement, β = .337, *b* = .007, *SE* = .002, 95%CI[.004,.010], *t*(123) = 3.97, *p* < .001, and a positive relationship between moral disengagement and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors, β = .503, *b* = .564, *SE* = .087, 95%CI[.391,.737], *t*(123) = 6.46, *p* < .001. In order to assess the proposed indirect effect, I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 4, fitting participants' overconfidence as the independent variable, their use of deceptive impression management behaviors as the dependent variable, and their propensity to morally disengage as the mediator. The results revealed a significant indirect effect between overconfidence and use of deceptive impression management behaviors through moral disengagement, IE = .003, *SE* = .001, 95%CI[.001,.005]. I found similar indirect effects of overconfidence on the use of all four categories within deceptive impression management behaviors through moral disengagement.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I found a positive (though marginal) relationship between applicants' overconfidence and their overall use of impression management behaviors. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, overconfident applicants made greater use of deceptive than honest impression management behaviors. In fact, overconfidence was unrelated to all three categories within honest impression management behaviors, while it was significantly associated with a greater use of all four categories within deceptive impression management behaviors. Study 2 also tested the relationship between overconfidence and moral disengagement. In line with my theoretical argumentation, overconfident applicants exhibited a higher degree of moral disengagement, which in turn mediated the relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors, thus offering support for Hypothesis 3.

General Discussion

The goal of the present research was to advance the understanding of applicant deception processes. To do so, I developed a theoretically-derived model describing a series of motivational and cognitive processes that I suggest drive and facilitate applicant deceptive behavior. Specifically, I proposed that deceptive self-presentation might represent a means for overconfident individuals to socially validate their overly positive self-views. Moreover, I suggested that cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms might facilitate applicant deceptive behavior by suspending or minimizing the moral implications associated with unethical actions. In line with expectations, I found applicants' overconfidence to be associated with a greater use of deceptive impression management behaviors (Studies 1 and 2), and that the relationship between overconfidence and deceptive self-presentation was explained by overconfident applicant's propensity to morally disengage (Study 2).

Theoretical Contributions

The current research offers a number of theoretical contributions. First, the current studies suggest that individuals' self-views influence the self-presentation strategies they tend to adopt during selection processes. Specifically, building on self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), I proposed and demonstrated that applicants who overestimate their own skills, knowledge, and capabilities are more prone to engage in deceptive self-presentation behaviors. This finding suggests that the motivational origins of applicants' deceptive behavior may lay deeper than immediate selection concerns, perhaps serving a basic human need for self-verification. Indeed, I argue that the perceptions of superior competence that follow from deceptive self-presentation (e.g., Ellis et al., 2002; Gilmore et al., 1999; Kacmar et al., 1992, Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Roulin et al., 2015) assist overconfident applicants in the attempt to socially validating their overly positive self-views. The current findings are thus consistent with self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), which argues that individuals actively pursue interpersonal strategies aimed at evoking self-congruent social responses. Importantly, these findings also identify one previously unexplored means of eliciting such self-congruent responses – deception. Swann's (1983, 1987, 1990) self-verification theory describes three possible strategies that individuals may enlist in seeking to verify their self-views: (1) selective affiliation, which refers to choosing interaction partners that see the individual as he or she sees themselves; (2) displaying identity cues, which refers to showcasing signs and symbols typically associated with the characteristics that one believes to possess; and (3) interpersonal prompts, which refers to directly soliciting the desired response from others. The theorizing and accompanying results here presented both suggest that deceptive self-presentation might represent an additional tactic through which individuals attempt to evoke self-verifying impressions in others. Moreover, these findings offer novel insight into the implications of self-verification motives within selection processes. Specifically, while prior studies have seen self-verification as beneficial in hiring contexts (Cable & Kay, 2012; Moore et al., 2017; Wilhelmy

et al., 2020), these findings suggest that self-verification might hide a darker side – when applicants hold overly positive self-views, self-verification strivings may lead to greater use of deceptive self-presentation behaviors.

The present research also examines the role of moral disengagement as an explanatory mechanism in the relationship between overconfidence and deceptive self-presentation behaviors. I build from the premise that both overconfidence and moral disengagement are facilitated by the same underlying process of self-deception (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004; von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Consistent with this reasoning, the current results reveal overconfident individuals to be more likely to engage cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms. In turn, and consistent with the untested predictions of Law et al. (2016), I find individuals' propensity to morally disengage to predict deceptive self-presentation behaviors within selection processes. This finding advances the understanding of the perils that moral disengagement poses for organizations. More precisely, while moral disengagement has been previously documented as an antecedent of several intra-organizational unethical behaviors, such as corruption, cheating, or stealing (Moore, 2008; Moore et al., 2012), the present research is the first to demonstrate the negative consequences of moral disengagement at the organization-entry level (i.e., deceptive self-presentation in motivation letters and job interviews). The present research is also the first to suggest and empirically test the theoretical overlap between overconfidence and moral disengagement, and to position moral disengagement as an explanatory mechanism between overconfidence and deceptive self-presentation behaviors. Moreover, by showing the relationships between overconfidence, moral disengagement, and deceptive self-presentation, the present research extends existing knowledge on the antecedents of applicant deceptive behavior.

Importantly, while I ground this work in the context of personnel selection, I also offer a theoretically-grounded cognitive mechanism (i.e., moral disengagement) that might help

explain the associations between overconfidence and other forms of unethical organizational behavior reported in the literature. For example, prior studies have shown that overconfident executives who overestimate their organizations' revenue are more likely to continue misstating earnings to cover their initial errors, thus violating securities laws and committing accounting fraud (Hribar & Yang, 2015; Libby & Rennekamp, 2012; McManus, 2018; Schrand & Zechman, 2012). Overconfident executives are also more likely to engage in tax avoidance activities as an instrument to meet earnings expectations (Hsieh et al., 2018). The current findings suggest that moral disengagement might have facilitated these overconfident executives' unethical actions, and so the notion that overconfidence and moral disengagement are intertwined cognitive processes might interest and serve researchers investigating different forms of overconfidence-related unethical conduct.

Finally, these studies advance current understanding of the processes through which overconfident individuals are often misperceived as to be more competent than they actually are. To date, scholars have shown that overconfident individuals tend to exhibit a number of non-verbal behaviors (e.g., making more direct eye contact, making a better use of gestures, adopting a more expanded posture, or showing a calmer and more relaxed demeanor; Anderson et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019) that interviewers misinterpret as signals of higher competence (Belmi et al., 2020; Ronay et al. 2019). Researchers, however, have long recognized that the effects of candidates' non-verbal behaviors on interview outcomes are generally small (e.g., Arvey & Campion, 1988; Rasmussen, 1984). The present research revealed that overconfidence is also associated with the verbal communication strategies deployed by job applicants. In particular, I demonstrated that overconfident applicants are more likely to misrepresent themselves via deceptive impression management behaviors, which prior studies have consistently shown to distort perceptions of competence and, in turn, hiring decisions (Ellis et al., 2002; Gilmore et al., 1999; Kacmar et al., 1992, Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Roulin

et al., 2015). This finding is in line with prior studies showing that overconfident individuals tend toward interpersonal strategies that are driven by self-interest and characterized by a lack of concern for moral standards (Belmi et al., 2020; McManus, 2018; Feldman, 2015). However, an examination of the specific forms in which these selfish motives manifest behaviorally in work and organizational contexts, such as I offer here, has thus far not been discussed in the literature.

Practical Implications

The present research bears a number of practical implications. First, organizations should consider optimizing selection processes through screening for candidate overconfidence. Indeed, the current studies suggest that overconfident applicants are more likely to misrepresent themselves, thus introducing bias in recruiters' impressions and hiring decisions. By taking applicants' overconfidence into account, recruiters might be less prone to base hiring decisions on dishonest "fairytale" stories and thus less likely as well to fall into the trap of deceit – for instance, through double-checking the references and claims made during the selection process. Recruiters could also tailor interview questions in a way that facilitates the detection of deceptive impression management behaviors. Specifically, Roulin et al. (2014) found that interviewers are more likely to identify instances of deception via past-behavior questions (i.e., asking participants how they behaved in past job-related situations) than via situational questions (i.e., asking participants to describe how they would behave in hypothetical job-related situations), as these are less verifiable in nature. Lastly, organizations might also consider disincentivizing overconfident candidates to manipulate their answers in the first place. Prior research indicates that one means to achieving this is to warn against the use of deception. For example, Law et al. (2016) found that identification warnings (i.e., informing applicants that deception can be detected) diminish applicants' perceived capacities to fake, which in turn reduces their use of deceptive self-presentation behaviors. Of course,

such an approach might be limited when applicants truly believe their own press releases, as in the case of the overconfident.

Taken together, these actions could help organizations reduce instances of deception in selection processes while providing recruiters with more tools to identify those (overconfident) candidates who might still be willing to take the "deception road" despite any prior warning against deceit. This might be especially important in the case of leadership selection, since prior studies suggest that overconfident individuals are more prone to self-select into leadership competitions (e.g., Abele & Spurk, 2009; Belmi et al., 2020; Pajares & Graham, 1999), likely making overconfidence more normative among leadership selection candidates.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are also limitations to the current studies and they provide avenues for future research. First, the sample for Study 2 consisted of individuals that had had a real-world job interview in the last 12 months. This time frame might entail a certain degree of mismatch between what participants reported to have communicated in their interviews and what they actually communicated. Indeed, prior studies on memory decay in eyewitness testimony show that individuals tend to less correctly recall information as time delay increases between events and reports (Tuckey & Brewer, 2003). While participants in Study 2 reported to have had their last interview an average of 5.2 months before participation in the study, which is line with prior studies on impression management behaviors in selection contexts (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2018), future studies could strengthen the present results by reducing the time delay between interviews and study participation.

Second, prior studies show that there are significant differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures regarding individuals' ethical attitudes and use of impression management behaviors. For example, Derous (2017) found that applicants from individualistic cultures are more prone to adopt self-focused impression management behaviors than

applicants from collectivistic cultures, who tend to make greater use of other-focused impression management behaviors. Although Derous' (2017) research did not attend to the honest versus deceptive nature of applicants' impression management behaviors, other studies suggest such differences. For example, Seiter et al. (2009) argued that individuals from individualistic cultures might find behaviors that promote self-interest, including deception, as more acceptable than individuals from collectivistic cultures. This suggests that the relationship between overconfidence and the expression of deceptive self-presentation might be sensitive to cultural considerations. However, because participants in the present studies were all from individualistic cultures (i.e., the U.S., Western Europe), the current data does not allow me to examine this possibility. Future studies could therefore attempt to replicate these results within a cross-cultural sample. This is an important endeavor given the remarkable fast rate at which organizations and the labor market are becoming multicultural (e.g., Derous, 2017; Manroop et al., 2013).

Future studies could also examine a number of other variables that might moderate the relationships between overconfidence, moral disengagement, and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors. For example, a number of studies have found that individuals that score high on the personality trait empathy are less prone to morally disengage (Bussey et al., 2015; Detert et al., 2008; Montero-Carretero et al., 2021). Empathy is defined as the ability to both understand and experience the emotions of others (e.g., Garaigordobil, 2009). This suggests that overconfident individuals that score high on empathy might have greater difficulties to enlist cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms than those who lack the ability to emphasize with others' emotions. As a consequence, empathy might attenuate overconfident applicants' use of deceptive self-presentation behaviors. These individuals might instead seek to verify their exaggerated self-views via behaviors that are void of moral connotations, such as selective affiliation or interpersonal prompts. Prior studies have also

found that individuals who harbor competitive worldviews (i.e., see the world as a "jungle" characterized by a heartless struggle for scarce resources) are more likely to enlist deceptive self-presentation behaviors in job interviews (Bourdage et al., 2018; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). Hence, as opposed to empathy, competitive worldviews might exacerbate the relationship between overconfidence and applicants' use of deceptive self-presentation behaviors. In sum, future studies exploring the role of these (and other) factors would help develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and deceptive self-presentation behaviors.

Conclusion

In the current paper, I examined the influence of self-deception on job applicants' self-presentation behaviors. The results here presented indicate that individuals' capacity to self-deceive with regards to their own competence (i.e., overconfidence) is associated with similar self-deceptive processes in the moral domain (i.e., moral disengagement), which in turn facilitate unethical behaviors (i.e., deceptive self-presentation) in the service of fundamental self-verification motives. The current research thus offers a series of novel motivational and cognitive mechanisms that further current scholarly understanding of applicant deceptive self-presentation behaviors. In order to be able to deceive others about one's exaggerated competence, it appears useful to first deceive oneself – remember, it's not a lie (or at least less apparently one), if you believe it.

Appendix

Table 1.
Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 1 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Overconfidence	0.00	1.00											
2. Self-promotion - H	3.81	0.83	.09										
3. Ingratiation - H	3.59	0.92	.13	.16									
4. Image protection - H	2.24	1.17	.20*	.13	.20*								
5. SIC - D	2.00	0.96	.23**	.00	.10	.49**							
6. EIC - D	1.89	1.03	.19*	.04	.13	.51**	.80**						
7. Ingratiation - D	2.80	0.96	.17†	-.08	.52**	.18*	.46**	.47**					
8. Image protection - D	2.74	1.12	.14†	.02	.22**	19*	.54**	.48**	.51**				
9. Honest IM overall	3.21	0.66	.22*	.57**	.66**	.75**	.34**	.39**	.31**	.23**			
10. Deceptive IM overall	2.36	0.83	.22**	.00	.30**	.42**	.86**	.84**	.74**	.79**	.39**		
11. IM overall	2.79	0.62	.27**	.30**	.55**	.67**	.75**	.77**	.66**	.65**	.79**	.87**	

Note: H stands for honest dimensions of impression management, D stands for deceptive dimensions of impression management, SIC stands for slight image creation, EIC stands for extensive image creation, and IM stands for impression management.
† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2.

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between Study 2 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Overconfidence	0.00	1.00												
2. Self-promotion - H	3.94	0.62	.02											
3. Ingratiation - H	3.45	0.72	.00	.36**										
4. Image protection - H	2.59	0.89	-.07	.18*	.31**									
5. SIC - D	2.48	0.84	.20*	.21*	.32**	.21*								
6. EIC - D	1.50	0.77	.16†	-.05	.19*	.22*	.53**							
7. Ingratiation - D	2.55	0.83	.21*	.38**	.56**	.23**	.63**	.40**						
8. Image protection - D	1.80	0.75	.28**	-.04	.17†	.28**	.49**	.55**	.37**					
9. Honest IM overall	3.33	0.54	-.03	.64**	.75**	.75**	.34**	.18*	.52**	.21*				
10. Deceptive IM overall	2.08	0.63	.27**	.16†	.40**	.29**	.85**	.77**	.77**	.75**	.40**			
11. IM overall	2.70	0.49	.16†	.46**	.67**	.60**	.73**	.60**	.78**	.60**	.80**	.86**		
12. MD	2.27	0.56	.33**	-.09	.15†	-.03	.44**	.45**	.32**	.36**	.01	.50**	.33**	

Note: H stands for honest dimensions of impression management, D stands for deceptive dimensions of impression management, SIC stands for slight image creation, EIC stands for extensive image creation, IM stands for impression management, and MD stands for moral disengagement.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Chapter 5

Overconfidence in Power: Despotic Leadership as an Instrument towards Self-Verification

"The measure of a man is what he does with power"

Plato

Overconfidence helps individuals attain leadership positions (Belmi et al., 2020; Reuben et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019) and leadership positions in turn breed overconfidence (Fast et al., 2011; Macenczak et al., 2016; Vitanova, 2019). As a consequence, overconfidence and leadership often go hand in hand, making it crucial to understand the impact of overconfidence on leadership behavior. Indeed, researchers have produced abundant work on the repercussions of overconfident leadership – we know, for instance, that overconfident leaders tend to make more aggressive financial decisions (Malmendier & Tate, 2008), underestimate potential risks (Gervais et al., 2011), and are more prone to commit accounting fraud (Schrand & Zechman, 2012). However, despite more than a decade of research on overconfidence and leadership (see Heavey et al., 2022; Meikle et al., 2016 for reviews), prior studies have thus far been limited to examining the effects of overconfidence on technical and decision-making aspects of leadership (e.g., investment decisions, risk-assessment, accounting misstatements), while neglecting the interpersonal component inherent to leadership roles.

Understanding how leaders treat and relate to their subordinates is essential because the nature of the leader-subordinate relationship lies at the core of numerous important workplace phenomena. For example, leaders who behave in a callous manner toward subordinates (e.g., verbal abuse, aggressiveness, arrogance, or public belittlement) give rise to multiple undesirable employee outcomes, including emotional exhaustion (Harvey et al., 2007), deviant work behavior (Duffy et al, 2002), absenteeism (Tepper et al., 2006), and turnover intentions (De Clercq et al., 2020), to name a few. Lamentably, with prevalence rates ranging between

33.5% and 61% (Aasland et al., 2010), such destructive forms of leadership are far from the exception. Indeed, a Gallup study (2013) involving over 7000 adults in the U.S. revealed that one in two had left their job "to get away from their manager" (p. 18). These numbers attest to the need for organizations to recognize and address the occurrence of destructive leadership behaviors, and have led numerous researchers to call for further investigations into the antecedents of such deleterious conduct (e.g., Aasland et al., 2010; Einarsen et al., 2018; Fosse et al., 2019; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Such is the goal of this paper, wherein I suggest that leader overconfidence is associated with subordinate mistreatment in the form of despotic leadership behavior.

Specifically, I theorize that despotic leadership, or the use of authoritarian and dominant behaviors in the service of personal goals and motives (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), serves overconfident leaders as an instrument to protect and enhance their unrealistic self-image, hence facilitating the fundamental human need for self-verification – i.e., the need to confirm and stabilize one's own image (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990). Furthermore, I propose that power asymmetries in the leader-subordinate dynamic interact with leaders' overconfidence in determining expressions of despotic leadership. More precisely, I theorize that organizational contexts characterized by high-power-asymmetries (versus low-power-asymmetries) facilitate despotic leadership behaviors, and so provide a favorable context for overconfident leaders to employ despotic leadership behaviors as an instrument in the pursuit of self-verification motives.

The present research contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, I advance current understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior. Specifically, drawing from self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), I propose and demonstrate that leader overconfidence is associated with greater use of despotic leadership behaviors. To my knowledge, the present studies represent the first investigation

into the relationship between overconfidence and the interpersonal aspects of leadership behavior. Second, while most prior studies on despotic leadership have focused on assessing its detrimental consequences at the organizational- and employee-level (e.g., Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Islam et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018), I answer calls to investigate the seminal forces driving the emergence of despotic leadership (Aasland et al., 2010; Einarsen et al., 2018; Fosse et al., 2019; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In particular, the current research identifies leader overconfidence and leader-subordinate power asymmetries as individual and contextual predictors of despotic leadership behavior, respectively. Finally, I examine the interacting effects of these two antecedents, and find that high-power-asymmetries exacerbate the strength of the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior. The current research thus also offers valuable insight concerning the current consensus surrounding the negative consequences of overconfident leadership (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review). Specifically, by showing that these negative outcomes may be attenuated by a previously untested boundary condition (i.e., low power asymmetries).

Theoretical Framework

Overconfidence

People sometimes fail to appraise their own competence accurately. For example, students overestimate their scores on academic exams (Kennedy et al., 2002), physicians overrate the accuracy of their diagnosis (Bushyhead & Christensen-Szalanski, 1981), and drivers think of themselves as better skilled than the average driver (Williams, 2003). These self-evaluative biases illustrate what researchers refer to as overconfidence, or the belief that one is better (i.e., more skilled, more competent, more knowledgeable) than one really is based on objective evidence (e.g., Johnson & Fowler, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Meikle et al., 2016; Moore & Healy, 2008). It is important to note that overconfidence is not the same as

mere high confidence, which may reflect an accurate, positive evaluation of one's abilities (Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004), nor the same as self-presentation or impression management, which refer to the purposeful modification of one's overt behavior with the intent of creating a positive social image (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Paulhus, 1984). Overconfidence occurs when individuals inaccurately, and genuinely, see themselves as more skilled, competent, and knowledgeable than they actually are.

Overconfidence and Self-Verification Theory

Scholars have long recognized the importance of stable self-views for human functioning, as these provide individuals with a sense of psychological coherence that enables them to make sense of their worlds, predict future events, and guide their behavior (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Lecky, 1945; Mead, 1934). Building on this premise, self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) posits that people harbor a fundamental need to confirm and stabilize their self-views. Indeed, numerous studies over the last three decades have shown that individuals tend to adopt behaviors that facilitate self-verification (e.g., Bosson & Swann, 1999; Cable & Kay, 2012; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Kraus & Chen, 2014; Swann et al., 1994) and that functioning and psychological well-being flounder when self-views are compromised (Ayduk et al., 2008; Burke, 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; Wood et al., 2005; see North & Swann, 2009 for a review).

Because self-views are shaped via social and interpersonal processes, scholars have stressed that individuals can confirm and stabilize their self-views only insofar as they receive self-verifying social responses from others (Swann et al., 2003; Swann & Buhrmester, 2012; Swann & Read, 1981). For example, someone that sees themselves as especially knowledgeable may experience difficulties maintaining such a self-image if others do not seek or value their opinions. Therefore, people seek to evoke social responses that are congruent with their self-views, a process known as self-verification strivings (Cable & Kay, 2012). Since

overconfidence reflects a self-image of superior skill and competence, self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) suggests that overconfident individuals should strive to behave in manners that help them confirm and stabilize their exaggerated self-views. In the current paper, I investigate the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior through the lens of self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990).

Due to the unwarranted nature of overconfident self-views, overconfident leaders might find it difficult to evoke self-congruent social responses simply via the expression of their actual skill and competence. Indeed, from a theoretical standpoint, overconfidence necessarily implies a deficit of actual relative to self-appraised competence (Michaila & Katter, 2014; Moore & Healy, 2008, von Hippel & Trivers, 2001). Furthermore, overconfidence is associated with excessive optimism, risk-taking, and illusions of control (Bernoster et al., 2018; Broihane et al., 2014; Camerer & Lovallo, 1999) that promote numerous detrimental behaviors. For instance, overconfident leaders tend to overestimate the returns to their investments (Malmendier & Tate, 2008), underestimate the downside risks of projects (Gervais et al., 2011), overlook flaws and deficiencies in their plans (Shipman & Mumford, 2011), and resist acknowledging and adjusting their errors when revealed (Ronay et al., 2016). As a consequence, these leaders often make ill-fated decisions leading to financial loss and poorer team and organizational performance (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review). These outcomes are inconsistent with an image of superior skill and competence, and should give rise to unfavorable impressions and negative social responses. Indeed, while overconfident behaviors are associated with perceptions of superior competence in the short term (Anderson et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2013; Ronay et al., 2019), such positive perceptions seem to wear thin over time (Bendersky & Shah, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2013; Redhead et al., 2019; Thoma, 2016).

In sum, the theoretical conceptualization of overconfidence, as well as the empirical record, both suggest that overconfident leaders may often fall short of eliciting self-congruent

social impressions via their actual capacities and achievements. These leaders might then devise alternative routes towards self-verification that circumvent the gap between their idealized and actual capacities. In doing so, I suggest that overconfident leaders might resort to despotic leadership behaviors.

Despotic Leadership as an Instrument towards Self-Verification

The primary focus of despotic leadership is to accentuate status differences over subordinates and develop relationships in which high power distance prevails (Aronson, 2001; Islam, 2020; Naseer et al., 2016; Schilling, 2009). To this end, despotic leaders require unquestioned compliance and submission from subordinates, are unwilling to relinquish control of tasks and projects, and restrict participation in decision-making (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016; Schilling, 2009). Despotic leaders tend to be arrogant, manipulative, unforgiving, and vengeful (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018), and exercise their power via punitive means while disregarding ethical norms and values (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Despotic leaders are also exploitative, unsupportive, reluctant to allow individual initiative, and prevent subordinates from engaging in actualization and knowledge-development activities (Nauman et al., 2020). Through these behaviors, I theorize that despotic leadership may function as a strategic tool employed by the overconfident to facilitate self-verification in two distinct ways – self-image protection and self-image enhancement.

First, I argue that despotic leadership behaviors allow overconfident leaders to negate undesired feedback and social responses from subordinates, hence serving as a form of self-protection. For example, despotic leaders are distant and difficult to reach, which limits opportunities for their subordinates to express criticism and disagreement (e.g., Naseer et al., 2016). Subordinates might also abstain from raising negative remarks in the first place, even when possible, to avoid punishment and retaliation from despotic leaders. Indeed, several studies indicate that despotic leadership behaviors induce fear in subordinates, who turn to

silence and avoidance to preserve their well-being (Jain et al., 2021; Kiewitz et al., 2016, Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003; Oh & Farh, 2017).

Moreover, despotic leadership works against subordinates' capacities and opportunities to generate novel and creative ideas (Guo et at., 2018) and attain higher levels of performance (Jabeen & Rahim, 2021; Nauman et al., 2020; Schaubroeck et al., 2017). By limiting subordinates' capacities and opportunities to "shine" and contribute meaningfully, despotic leadership might facilitate self-favorable social comparisons that help the overconfident reaffirm their sense of superior skill and competence. Consistent with this idea, researchers have noted that social comparisons are prevalent in organizational contexts and often considered in terms of self-threat (Garcia et al., 2006; Garcia et al., 2010; Jia et al., 2015). To minimize such threats, individuals adopt various strategies, including harmful and hostile behaviors similar to those of despotic leaders (e.g., Garcia et al., 2013; Pillutla & Ronson, 2005; Swann & Pelham, 2003).

In sum, I argue that overconfident leaders might resort to despotic leadership behaviors (e.g., top-down communication, limited participation, intimidation, or unsupportiveness) as a mechanism to prevent and ward off self-incongruent evidence, hence facilitating the maintenance of their exaggerated self-views.

In addition to providing self-protection, despotic leadership might also serve a self-enhancement function. More precisely, I argue that despotic leadership offers the overconfident an increased sense of power and status that nourishes their unrealistic self-image. Indeed, power and status can both have a strong influence on how individuals appraise their own skill and competence. For example, Fast et al. (2012) provide experimental evidence that individuals' confidence in their own capacities increases as a consequence of priming their subjective sense of power. Vitanova (2021) reported similar results within a field sample involving over 700 CEOs of public US companies – leaders' subjective sense of power boosted

their feelings of professional competence. In the same line, Belmi et al. (2020) found that higher social status, whether based on objective or subjective measures, was associated with the overestimation of one's actual competence, leading to the perception that one is better than others.

Together, these literatures indicate that the experience of power and superior status tends to imbue individuals with an exaggerated perception of their own competence and abilities. Building on this notion, I suggest that overconfident leaders might turn to despotic leadership behaviors (e.g., punitiveness, required compliance and submission, limited participation, or tight control over tasks and projects) to fabricate a social environment wherein their sense of power and status is amplified, and so generate self-congruent feelings of superior skill and competence. Consistent with this argument, researchers have referred to despotic leadership as an instrument in the service of self-aggrandizement (Den Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), and self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990) and research (e.g., Giesler et al., 1996; Swann & Brooks, 2012; Swann et al., 1994) both suggest that self-verification strivings often involve, and even require, the molding of one's social environment.

The idea that overconfident leaders might be inclined to adopt despotic leadership behaviors is consistent with numerous studies on the behavioral and cognitive correlates of overconfidence. For example, overconfident individuals are more prone to engage in hostile, defensive, and condescending interpersonal behaviors (e.g., Colvin et al., 1995; Hoorens, 2001; Paulhus, 1998), especially when their sense of self-worth is threatened (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Campbell et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 1997). Relatedly, prior studies among organizational managers have shown that overconfidence is related to executive hubris (Simon & Houghton, 2003), often involving the imposition of one's will through power and dominance (Delbecq, 2006). Scholars have also highlighted the relationship between overconfidence and lower moral awareness (McManus, 2016), and shown overconfident leaders to be more likely

to engage in unethical behaviors such as tax avoidance and accounting fraud (e.g., Hribar & Yang, 2015, Hsie et al., 2018; Schrand & Zechman, 2012). These behavioral and cognitive tendencies are defining features of despotic leaders, who also exhibit arrogant, hostile, and morally questionable self-serving behaviors at the expense of their subordinates and organizations (e.g., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Naseer et al., 2016). Collectively, these various sets of findings are in line with our theoretical proposition that overconfident leaders might be prone to enlist despotic leadership behaviors. To my knowledge, however, prior studies have not yet examined this possibility.

Hypothesis 1: Leader overconfidence is positively related to despotic leadership.

Favorable versus Unfavorable Contexts for Despotic Leadership: The Role of Power Asymmetries

Power is inherent to leadership. Indeed, next to motivating, coordinating, and directing group members (e.g., Bolton et al., 2013; Plowman et al., 2007; Schaffer, 2008; Yukl & van Fleet, 1992), organizational leaders are responsible for numerous decisions such as performance ratings, promotion recommendations, bonus allocations, and the hiring and dismissal of subordinates (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 1991; Cooper & Nirenberg, 2004; Rubenstein et al., 2018; Yukl, 2002). Due to this discretion over valuable outcomes and resources, leadership inevitably entails power.

However, organizations differ in the amount of power afforded to those in leadership positions. For example, while some leaders can hire or fire subordinates at will, others must garner support from higher-level echelons to do the same, or adhere to strict guidelines and protocols (e.g., Russ et al., 2010). Organizations also differ in the amount of leverage granted to subordinates with regards to decisions that directly affect them. For instance, some organizations allow and encourage subordinates to participate in decisions on the adoption of new policies, or on promotions and bonus allocations, whereas other organizations tend to

exclude lower-level employees from participation in these processes (e.g., Ohana et al., 2013; Price et al., 2006; Schminke et al., 2002). Therefore, while leaders do typically possess more power than do subordinates, the magnitude of such power asymmetries varies across organizations.

Drawing on several theories of power and leadership, I argue that such organizational differences in power asymmetries shape favorable versus unfavorable contexts for the expression of despotic leadership, such that high-power-asymmetries facilitate despotic leadership behaviors whereas low-power-asymmetries constrain them. To be specific, I refer to favorable contexts to denote the presence of cognitive, emotional, and instrumental conditions that enable and promote despotic leadership behaviors.

From a cognitive perspective, the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) and the situated focus theory of power (Guinote, 2007) both argue that as power affords greater material and social resources, powerful individuals become less dependent on others for their outcomes, and as a consequence, their cognitive processes become self-centered (e.g., personal needs) and oblivious to peripheral aspects (e.g., others' needs and perspectives). In this sense, Galinsky et al. (2006) offered experimental evidence that power tends to sway individuals to a psychological state wherein adopting others' perspectives is less common, which in turn promotes the construal of other people as mere instruments towards of one's private ends. Indeed, Gruenfeld et al. (2008) observed powerful top-ranking executives to be more prone than lower-level managers to see and approach their subordinates in terms of personal gain.

Disproportionate power might also favor despotic leadership behaviors from an emotional perspective. In particular, the social distance theory of power (Magee & Smith, 2013) posits that power promotes socially disengaging emotions, such as pride, anger, or contempt, that are often used to signal one's elevated social standing. Inversely, power causes

individuals to experience less socially engaging emotions, such as guilt and compassion, that tend to preclude unethical conduct. This emotional pattern has been shown to facilitate numerous behaviors characteristic of despotic leaders. For instance, Fida et al. (2015) found anger to increase manipulative behavior in the workplace, Yeung and Shen (2019) showed leader pride to be associated with derogative behavior towards subordinates, and White-Ajmani and Bursik (2014) observed individuals with a reduced sense of guilt to be more prone to engage in vengeful acts.

Finally, power asymmetries provide the instrumental conditions that enable despotic leadership. For example, subordinates might not tolerate despotic behaviors if their leaders do not possess the power to determine important outcomes (e.g., promotions) and resources (e.g., development programs) unilaterally, or if their reprehensible actions are subject to external control. Indeed, several leadership theories (Ronay et al., 2020, van Vugt & Ronay, 2014; von Hippel et al., 2016) suggest that steep organizational structures, which reflect considerable differences in power between leaders and subordinates, favor the emergence of more dominant and exploitative forms of leadership. Consistent with these perspectives, the Bathsheba syndrome (Ludwig & Longeneck, 1993) theorizes that disproportionate power affords disproportionate control over information and organizational processes, and so fosters unethical leadership through the belief than one's reprehensible actions will not be found out or punished.

Overall, the literature thus suggests that power asymmetries increase opportunities as well as capacities to engage in destructive, self-interested leadership behaviors, hence shaping a favorable context for despotic leadership. In contrast, the absence of these cognitive, emotional, and instrumental facilitators should shape an unfavorable context for despotic leadership. Indeed, empirical studies point to power restriction as an effective means to minimize self-serving, exploitative, and morally questionable behaviors from those in

leadership positions. For instance, Russ et al. (2012) observed leaders to be less likely to engage in self-serving behaviors in situations of low power than in situations of high power – as powerful leaders were less accountable for their actions and decisions. Together, the preceding theories and empirical findings lead to the following prediction.

Hypothesis 2: Power asymmetries are positively related to despotic leadership.

Power Asymmetries Moderate the Relationship between Overconfidence and Despotic Leadership

Scholars have long recognized the importance of situational factors in understanding the relationship between traits and behavior (e.g., Allport 1951; Bowers, 1973; Hartshorne & May, 1928; Lewin 1936, McClelland et al., 1953; Murray 1938). Indeed, Eysenck and Eysenck (1985) argued that "trait and situation are two sides of the same coin that cannot be separate from each other" (p. 39), and Kenrick and Funder (1988) noted that "traits influence behavior only in relevant situations" (p. 29). Building on this idea, trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000) suggests that traits are latent potentials to behave in certain manners that are triggered in trait-relevant situations – a situation is relevant to a trait to the degree that it offers opportunity for such a trait to be expressed. For example, individual differences in extraversion should more likely manifest at a social gathering with strangers than individual differences in conscientiousness, which might be better reflected in contexts related to academic or workplace performance.

Several studies have examined the influence of power asymmetries in the expression of individual differences. For instance, Hirst et al. (2011) found employee learning orientation to predict differences in creative behavior in organizational contexts characterized by low-power-asymmetries, but not in organizational contexts characterized by high-power-asymmetries. In the same line, Guinote et al. (2012) observed prosocial individuals to be more prone to exhibit cooperative behavior in high-power situations than in low-power situations. More germane to

my own theorizing, Barends et al. (2019) examined the relationship between honesty-humility and exploitative behavior across a continuum of power asymmetries. The results revealed low scores on honesty-humility to be associated with exploitative behavior in situations of high-power-asymmetries but not in situations of intermediate- or low-power-asymmetries, leading to the conclusion that in order to prevent destructive leadership behaviors "it is essential to limit excessive power centralization" (p. 13). In sum, prior theorical and empirical studies indicate that power tends to promote the behavioral expression of individuals' dispositional traits – in other words, high-power situations generally lead to trait activation. Therefore, I propose that situations of high-power-asymmetries between leaders and subordinates should strengthen the behavioral expression of overconfident leaders' predisposition towards despotic leadership, relative to situations of low-power-asymmetries.

Hypothesis 3: Leader overconfidence is more strongly associated with despotic leadership in situations of high-power-asymmetries than in situations of low-power-asymmetries.

Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to serve as an initial test of the prediction that overconfidence is positively related to despotic leadership (Hypothesis 1). To do so, I measured individual differences in overconfidence and observed their expression in the context of a fictional leadership scenario built around the dictator game – a classic economic game (cf. Camerer, 2003) wherein participants are asked to distribute an economic endowment between themselves (i.e., the allocator) and another individual (i.e., the recipient). In essence, the dictator game confronts participants with the decision to either act in a self-interested manner or to forgo self-interest in order to preserve the welfare of others (Forsynthe et al., 1994; Galinsky et al., 2015; Thielmann et al., 2015). Since despotic leadership revolves around self-serving behaviors, often at the expense of others (i.e., subordinates and organizations), the dictator game

represents an ideal paradigm to capture the most fundamental feature of despotic leadership –

self-interest (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008).

Method

Participants and Procedure

To obtain an estimate of the sample size needed, a power analysis was conducted using

GPower 3.1.9.2. (Faul et al., 2007). The results estimated a minimum sample size of $N = 150$ to

achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .20$) with an alpha of .05. Participants were

recruited through an open survey link that was advertised on different social media sites for a

period of two weeks. In total, 243 individuals accessed the link and started participation. Of these,

78 abandoned the survey before finalizing the tasks, thus resulting in incomplete responses.

Removing these cases resulted in a final sample of 165 individuals (64.8% female, $M_{age} = 31.72$,

$SD = 12.08$) from the general population. Most participants had a bachelor's degree or higher

(57%), with the remaining having completed either high school education (35.8%), elementary

education (6.7%), or no education at all (0.6%). Participants first read an inform consent form

and responded to a few demographic questions. Then, participants completed a general

knowledge questionnaire designed to assess their overconfidence. Finally, participants were

presented with a fictional leadership scenario based on the dictator game. In this scenario,

participants were asked to think of themselves as the leader of a team consisting of four people

that had just earned a financial bonus for good performance, and to distribute this bonus

between themselves, as leaders, on one side, and their subordinates, on the other side, as team

members. More precisely, participants read the following text:

> *"Imagine that you are working at an organization where you are the leader*
>
> *of a team of four people (yourself and three subordinates). Your team just*
>
> *successfully completed a project and earned a $4000 preestablished*
>
> *financial bonus for the good performance. As the team leader, you directed*

the team and were in charge of the final decisions, but everyone strived in

their respective tasks and did a good job. Since you are the leader of the

team, the organization leaves it up to you to decide how to distribute the

$4000 bonus between yourself and the rest of the team."

The purpose of the scenario was to utilize the logic of the dictator game while framing it within a leadership context. Participants made their decisions and were then redirected to a debriefing page.

Measures

Overconfidence. To measure participants' overconfidence, I used a previously adapted version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (Michailova & Katter, 2014). The questionnaire consists of 24 general knowledge questions (e.g., *"How many letters does the Russian alphabet consists of?"*) with three given alternative answers each (e.g., *"40 letters", "33 letters", or "26 letters"*) from which participants are instructed to choose the correct one. Participants are subsequently asked to indicate how well they think to have performed overall in the quiz, on a scale ranging from 0 (*"Poor, I think I incorrectly answered all questions"*) to 100 (*"Great, I think I correctly answered all questions"*). Participants' responses to this question represents their confidence, which is then compared to their actual performance, measured as the percentage of correct answers. Therefore, overconfidence is operationalized as participants' confidence in their overall performance in the quiz minus their actual performance. This overconfidence paradigm has been widely used in prior overconfidence research (e.g., Moore & Healy, 2008; Ronay et al., 2019; Schaeffer et al., 2004).

Despotic Leadership. To measure despotic leadership, I used the fictional leadership scenario described above, in which participants were asked to distribute a $4000 financial bonus between themselves and their subordinates. Participants were instructed to indicate *"how*

much of the $4000 bonus you would keep for yourself in such scenario" using a slide bar that could be set at any value between $0 and $4000. Despotic leadership was thus operationalized as the extent to which participants utilized their leadership position to serve their self-interest (i.e., cash in on the team's financial bonus) at the expense of their subordinates.

Results

On average, leaders kept for themselves 33.93% ($1357.40, $SD = 696.89$) of the $4000 of the financial bonus. This amount represents 11.91% ($476.54, $SD = 929.19$) more than what leaders assigned to their subordinates, each of whom received an average of 22.02% ($880.86, $SD = 232.29$) of the financial bonus. To test the prediction that overconfidence is positively related to despotic leadership behavior (Hypothesis 1), I regressed the amount of the financial bonus that leaders decided to keep for themselves onto their overconfidence scores. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, $\beta = .19$, $b = 7.16$, SE $= 2.88$, 95%CI[1.46,12.85], $t(163) = 2.48$, $p = .01$. In other words, each standard deviation increase in overconfidence was associated with a 3.33% ($133.33, $SD = 686.14$) increase in the share of the financial bonus that leaders assigned to themselves.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I found overconfidence to be positively related to despotic leadership. On average, leaders reserved for themselves a portion of the bonus greater than what remained for their subordinates. This tendency was nonetheless amplified in the case of overconfident leaders, who self-assigned an even larger amount of the financial bonus. Study 1 thus lent initial support for our theorizing. In Study 2, I sought to replicate the present finding while examining the suggested influence of power asymmetries (Hypotheses 2 and 3).

Study 2

The goal of study 2 was twofold. First, I wanted to strengthen the results of Study 1 by providing a second test of the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership (Hypothesis 1). Second, I wanted to examine the influence of leader-subordinate power asymmetries on the occurrence of despotic leadership behaviors, as well as the suggested interaction between power asymmetries and overconfidence in predicting despotic leadership behavior. Specifically, I theorized that high-power-asymmetries increase opportunities as well as capacities to engage in destructive, self-interested leadership behaviors, hence shaping a favorable context for despotic leadership – whereas low-power-asymmetries afford an unfavorable context for the adoption of despotic leadership. Therefore, I predicted power asymmetries to be positively related to the occurrence of despotic leadership behaviors (Hypothesis 2). Moreover, I proposed that such differential contexts (i.e., favorable vs. unfavorable) would influence the extent to which overconfident leaders see despotism as a viable means to protect and enhance their unrealistic self-image, therefore strengthening of the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership (Hypothesis 3).

To accomplish these goals, I mirrored and extended the design of Study 1 by including two additional economic games – the delta game and the ultimatum game. The delta and ultimatum games are similar to the dictator game in that all three games involve distributing an economic endowment between two parties. However, while the dictator game grants the allocator absolute power over the endowment's distribution, the delta and ultimatum games offer the recipient increasing levels of leverage, respectively – hence attenuating power asymmetries. The inclusion of these two additional games thus allowed me to examine the influence of power asymmetries on despotic leadership, as well as the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership across three different degrees of power asymmetry.

Method

Participants and Procedure

To obtain an estimate of the sample size needed, a power analysis for was conducted using GPower 3.1.9.2. (Faul et al., 2007). The results estimated a minimum sample size of $N = 246$ to achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .20$) with an alpha of .05. Oversampling led to an initial sample of 466 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers based in the United States of America. Of these, I removed 86 cases due to incomplete responses and 158 cases due to failed attention-comprehension check, resulting in a sample of 202 participants. In order to attain the minimum sample size required, I proceeded to recruit a second batch of 153 participants. Of these, I removed 15 cases due to incomplete responses and 52 cases due to failed attention-comprehension check, resulting in 86 additional participants. The final sample therefore consisted of 288 participants (50.3% male, $M_{age} = 39.26$, $SD = 12.62$). Most participants had a bachelor's degree or higher (75%), with the remaining having completed either high school education (23.6%) or elementary education (1.4%). Participants first responded to an informed consent form and answered a few demographic questions. Then, participants completed a general knowledge questionnaire designed to assess their overconfidence. Finally, participants were presented with the same fictional leadership scenario that we used in Study 1. This time, however, participants were assigned via random allocation to one of three possible experimental conditions, which differed in whether the leadership scenario was built around the dictator, delta, or ultimatum game – hence setting participants in a context of either high, intermediate, or low power asymmetries. Participants made their decisions and were then redirected to a debriefing page.

Measures

Overconfidence. To measure participants' overconfidence, I used the same previously adapted version (Ronay et al., 2017) of the General Knowledge Questionnaire (GKQ; Michailova & Katter, 2014) that I used in Study 1, with overconfidence again being

operationalized as participants' confidence in their overall performance in the quiz minus their actual performance.

Despotic Leadership. To measure despotic leadership, I also used the same fictional leadership scenario that I relied on in Study 1, in which participants were asked to distribute a $4000 financial bonus between themselves and their subordinates. By using a slide bar that could be set at any value between $0 and $4000, participants were again instructed to indicate *"how much of the $4000 bonus you would keep for yourself in such scenario"*. Hence, despotic leadership was again operationalized as the extent to which participants utilized their leadership position to serve their self-interest (i.e., cash in on the team's financial bonus) at the expense of their subordinates.

Power Asymmetries. The power manipulation derived from the three different economic games to which participants could be assigned to within the context of the aforementioned leadership scenario – dictator, delta, or ultimatum game. The dictator game represents a context of high-power-asymmetry, wherein the allocator (i.e., participant) decides how to distribute the endowment and the recipients (i.e., subordinates) have no influence whatsoever on the outcome. The delta game represents a context of intermediate-power-asymmetry. In this game, once the allocator decides how to distribute the endowment, the recipient can either accept or reject the proposed distribution – if accepted, the endowment is distributed as proposed; if rejected, both parties receive half the amount of the proposed distribution. The ultimatum game represents a context of low-power-asymmetry. In this game, the recipient can also either accept or reject the allocator's proposed distribution – if accepted, the endowment is distributed as proposed; but if rejected, both parties get nothing. These three games represent a continuum of power that prior studies have both used (Barends et al., 2019; Handgraaf et at., 2008; van Dijk et al., 2004) and validated (Barends et al., 2019) as a manipulation of power.

The manipulation was introduced via an additional paragraph during the presentation of the leadership scenario. Participants assigned to the high-power-asymmetry condition (i.e., dictator game) were informed that *"your subordinates have no power whatsoever to invalidate your decision"*, participants assigned to the intermediate-power-asymmetry condition (i.e., delta game) were informed that *"if your subordinates reject your decision, you and your subordinates will both receive half the amount of the proposed distribution"*, and participants assigned to the low power asymmetries condition (i.e., ultimatum game) were informed that *"if your subordinates reject your decision, you and your subordinates will both get nothing"*. To make sure that participants understood the logic behind the games, several examples were provided.

Results

On average, leaders kept for themselves 43.84% ($1753.72, *SD* = 985.75) of the $4000 of the financial bonus. This amount represents 25.12% ($1004.97, *SD* = 1314.34) more than what leaders assigned to their subordinates, each of whom received an average of 18.71% ($748.75, *SD* = 328.58) of the financial bonus. To test the prediction that overconfidence is positively related to despotic leadership behavior (Hypothesis 1), I regressed the amount of the financial bonus that leaders decided to keep for themselves onto their overconfidence scores. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior, $\beta = .31$, $b = 12.87$, SE = 2.33, 95%CI[8.27,17.48], $t(286) = 5.50$, $p < .01$. In other words, each standard deviation increase in overconfidence was associated with a 7.63% ($305.28, *SD* = 938.92) increase in the share of the financial bonus leaders assigned to themselves.

To test the prediction that power asymmetries are positively related to despotic leadership behavior (Hypothesis 2), I ran univariate general lineal model analyses, introducing power asymmetries as the dummy-coded predictor and despotic leadership as the dependent

variable. The results revealed a significant differences in despotic leadership in both the high-power-asymmetry condition, β = .73, b = 719.63, SE = 138.63, 95%CI[446.11,993.16], t(184) = 5.19, p < .001, and the intermediate-power-asymmetry condition, β = .54, b = 536.06, SE = 132.12, 95%CI[275.28,796.84], t(174) = 4.05, p < .001, relative to the low-power-asymmetry condition. However, I observed no significant differences in despotic leadership between the high- and intermediate-power-asymmetry conditions, β = .18, b = 183.57, SE = 140.17, 95%CI[-92.73,459.88], t(212) = 1.31, p = .19.

Finally, to test the prediction that overconfident leaders will make greater use of despotic leadership behaviors in contexts of high-power-asymmetry than in contexts of low-power-asymmetry (Hypothesis 3), I used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 1, fitting participants' overconfidence as the independent variable, despotic leadership as the dependent variable, and power asymmetries as the moderator. The results revealed a significant moderation effect of power asymmetries on the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, β = .17, b = 7.34, SE = 3.08, 95%CI[1.27,13.42], t(284) = 2.38, p = .01. Hence, I proceeded to examine the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership in each power condition. The results revealed positive and significant relationships between overconfidence and despotic leadership in the high-power-asymmetries condition, β = .42, b = 18.50, SE = 3.75, 95%CI[11.05,25.95], t(110) = 4.92, p < .001, and the intermediate-power-asymmetries condition, β = .22, b = 8.74, SE = 3.80, 95%CI[1.19,16.30], t(100) = 2.29, p = .02. However, I found no significant relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership in the low-power-asymmetries condition, β = .10, b = 3.69, SE = 3.99, 95%CI[-4.26,11.66], t(72) = .92, p = .35. In other words, each standard deviation increase in overconfidence was associated with a 10.97% ($438.70, SD = 964.35) increase in the share of the financial bonus that leaders assigned to themselves in the higher-power-asymmetries condition, a 5.18% ($207.33, SD = 962.47) increase in the intermediate-power-asymmetries condition, and a 2.19% ($87.62, SD

= 670.43) increase in the low-power-asymmetries condition – with the latter not representing a significant increase. Figure 1 visualizes the simple slopes of the interaction between overconfidence and power asymmetries in predicting despotic leadership.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I found participants' overconfidence to be associated with despotic leadership. On average, leaders reserved for themselves a portion of the bonus greater than what remained for their subordinates. However, this tendency was again amplified in the case of overconfident leaders, who self-assigned an even larger amount of the financial bonus. In line with Hypothesis 2, I found power asymmetries to be positively related to despotic leadership. Specifically, I observed an increase in despotic leadership behavior in contexts of high- and intermediate-power-asymmetries relative to contexts of low-power-asymmetries – I observed no significant differences in despotic leadership between the high- and intermediate-power-asymmetry conditions. Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 3, I found the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership to be subject to the magnitude of power asymmetries between leaders and subordinates. More precisely, I observed overconfidence to predict greater use of despotic leadership in contexts of high and intermediate power asymmetries, but not in contexts of low power asymmetries. Indeed, when situated in a context of low power asymmetries, overconfidence no longer precited differences in despotic leadership behavior.

Overall, the results of Study 2 thus replicate and extend the findings of Study 1. There are nonetheless two limitations to Studies 1 and 2 that could be noted. First, both studies operationalize despotic leadership in terms of self-interested behavior. Indeed, numerous researchers have highlighted self-interest as the most fundamental feature of despotic leadership (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2020; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Naseer et al., 2016; Schilling, 2009). However, despotic leadership encompasses several other forms of destructive

behavior. For example, despotic leaders are also punitive, imperious, manipulative, or reluctant to allow individual initiative. Therefore, Studies 1 and 2 did not capture some important manifestations of despotic leadership. Second, while the fictional scenario that I used to measure despotic leadership allowed me to adopt an experimental approach in Study 2, it also prevented me from generalizing these results to real-world organizational contexts. For example, leaders' decisions were void of moral implications or reputation concerns, which prior studies have shown to attenuate despotic leadership behaviors (e.g., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Joosten et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2004; Treviño et al., 2000). In this sense, researchers have also stressed that most organizational research on power has over-relied on experimental, context-poor settings that fail to reflect the complexities of organizational dynamics (Schaerer et al., 2018), leading to "little or no ecological validity" (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015, p. 150). Therefore, despite the advantages of experimental studies, it is essential to reproduce the effects of experimentally-induced power in field settings. In Study 3, I sought to address these limitations.

Study 3

Study 3 served two goals. First, I wanted to measure despotic leadership in a more comprehensive manner, capturing a wider repertoire of despotic leadership behaviors. Indeed, the argument is that despotic leadership serves self-verification motives for the overconfident via multiple behaviors – such as demanding obedience, exerting tight control, or utilizing punishment. Hence, according to my theorizing, overconfidence should also predict other forms of despotic leadership behavior besides the self-interested financial exploitation of their subordinates that was observed in Studies 1 and 2. Second, I wanted to replicate the findings of Studies 1 and 2 within a more realistic setting involving actual organizational contexts, wherein leadership behavior and power bear actual consequences. In order to accomplish these goals, I recruited a sample of active workers whose professional occupation involved

interacting with a direct supervisor, and captured participants' perceptions of their supervisors' overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior, as well as the magnitude of power asymmetries between themselves and their supervisors. My predictions were again that overconfidence and power asymmetries both predict greater despotic leadership behavior (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Similarly, I again expected the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership to be stronger in contexts of high-power-asymmetries than in contexts of low power asymmetries (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants and Procedure

To obtain an estimate of the sample size needed, a power analysis was conducted using GPower 3.1.9.2. (Faul et al., 2007). The results estimated a minimum sample size of $N = 150$ to achieve 80% power to detect a small effect ($r = .20$) with an alpha of .05. Oversampling led to an initial sample of 248 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers based in the United States of America. Of these, I removed 32 cases due to incomplete responses and 2 cases that failed to meet participation criteria. More precisely, these 2 participants indicated not to be employed at the moment. The final sample therefore consisted of 214 individuals (64.00% female, $M_{age} = 39.50$, $SD = 11.02$). Most participants held a bachelor's degree or higher (89.7%), with the remaining having completed high school education (10.3%). Participants first read an inform consent form and responded to a few demographic questions. Then, participants read a short text explaining the concept of overconfidence, and were subsequently asked to indicate the extent to which their supervisors harbored an overconfident image of themselves. Finally, participants completed two measures designed to capture despotic leadership and power asymmetries between themselves and their supervisors, respectively. Upon finalizing these measures, participants were redirected to a debriefing page.

Measures

Overconfidence. To measure leaders' overconfidence, I utilized their subordinates' perceptions. More precisely, participants read the following text:

"Overconfidence refers to the belief that one is better (more skilled, more knowledgeable, more competent) than one actually is based on objective evidence. In other words, a person is overconfident when he or she has an exaggerated, overly positive image of his or herself. Now that you understand the concept of overconfidence, please think of your direct supervisor, and using the slide bar below, indicate the extent to which you think that he or she is overconfident."

Participants provided their answers via a slide bar that could be set at any value between 0 (*not at all overconfident*) and 100 (*highly overconfident*).

Despotic Leadership. To measure despotic leadership, I used a version of the Multi-Culture Leader Behavior Questionnaire (Hanges & Dickson, 2004) adapted by De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) to capture despotic leadership. The questionnaire consists of six items reflecting different forms of despotic leadership behavior. Sample items are *"my supervisor is punitive, has no pity or compassion"*, *"my supervisor is in charge and does not tolerate disagreement or questioning; gives orders"*, or *"my supervisor tends to be unwilling or unable to relinquish control of tasks and projects"*. Responses were given a 5-point Likert anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). This questionnaire has been used in most prior research on despotic leadership (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2020; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Nauman et al., 2018; Naseer et al., 2016; van Prooijen & de Vries, 2016). Cronbach's alpha reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .94$).

Power Asymmetries. To capture naturally-occurring power asymmetries, I relied on the construct of organizational centralization (Hage & Aiken, 1967), which refers to the extent to which power is concentrated (vs. distributed) within an organization. Organizational

centralization is comprised of two subdimensions – participation in decision-making and hierarchy of authority. Participation in decision-making reflects macro-level aspects of organizational centralization, describing power asymmetries with regards to decisions on new policies, new programs, or selection processes. Hierarchy of authority reflects micro-level aspects of organizational centralization, describing power asymmetries with regards to day-to-day task performance and decisions. Because I was interested in the magnitude of power asymmetries between subordinates and their direct supervisors, I opted to focus on micro-level aspects of organizational centralization (i.e., hierarchy of authority). To do so, I used the original questionnaire developed by Hage and Aiken (1969) and validated by Dewar et al. (1980). The questionnaire consists of five items reflecting the extent to which subordinates must defer to their supervisors when making decisions about their job tasks and activities. Sample items are *"there can be little action here until a supervisor approves a decision", "a person who wants to make their own decisions would be quickly discouraged" or "I have to ask my supervisor before I do almost anything"*. Responses were given in a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). This questionnaire has been widely used in prior organizational research (e.g., Sarros et al., 2002; Schminke et al., 2000; Schminke et al., 2002; Tata & Prasad, 2004). Cronbach's alpha reliability was excellent ($\alpha = .92$).

Results

To test the prediction that overconfidence is associated with despotic leadership (Hypothesis 1), I regressed despotic leadership scores onto subordinates' perceptions of their supervisor's overconfidence. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, $\beta = .68$, $b = .03$, SE $= .00$, 95%CI[0.02,0.03], $t(212) = 13.78$, $p < .001$.

To test the prediction that power asymmetries are positively related to despotic leadership (Hypothesis 2), I regressed despotic leadership scores onto our measure of power

asymmetries (i.e., hierarchy of authority). The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between power asymmetries and despotic leadership, $\beta = .75$, $b = .82$, SE $= .05$, 95%CI[0.72,0.92], $t(212) = 16.64$, $p < .001$.

Finally, to test the prediction that overconfident leaders will make greater use of despotic leadership behaviors in contexts of high-power-asymmetries than in contexts of low-power-asymmetries (Hypothesis 3), I again used Process (Hayes, 2013) Model 1, fitting subordinates' perceptions of their supervisor overconfidence as the independent variable, despotic leadership as the dependent variable, and power asymmetries as the moderator. The results revealed a significant moderation effect of power asymmetries on the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, $\beta = .09$, $b = .003$, SE $= .001$, 95%CI[.000,.006], $t(210) = 2.28$, $p = .02$. Hence, I proceeded to examine the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership at high, intermediate, and low levels of power asymmetries. The results revealed positive and significant relationships between overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior at high (i.e., 84th percentile), $\beta = .48$, $b = .02$, SE $= .003$, 95%CI[.015,.027], $t(210) = 6.35$, $p < .001$, intermediate (i.e., 50th percentile), $\beta = .40$, $b = .01$, SE $= .002$, 95%CI[.012,.022], $t(210) = 7.26$, $p < .001$, and low (i.e., 16th percentile), $\beta = .27$, $b = .01$, SE $= .002$, 95%CI[.006,.017], $t(210) = 4.46$, $p < .001$, levels of power asymmetries. Figure 2 visualizes the simple slopes of the interaction between overconfidence and power asymmetries in predicting despotic leadership behavior.

Discussion

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and the findings of Studies 1 and 2, I again found overconfidence to be positively related to despotic leadership. Specifically, supervisors who were appraised as overconfident were also perceived to exhibit greater despotic leadership than supervisors who were not appraised as overconfident. In line with Hypothesis 2 and the results of Study 2, I found despotic leadership to be more prevalent in organizational contexts of higher

power asymmetries than lower power asymmetries. Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 3 and in line with the findings of Study 2, results suggest that power asymmetries influence the extent to which overconfident leaders engage in despotic leadership behaviors – the higher the magnitude of power asymmetries between supervisors and subordinates the stronger the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership. However, in contrast to Study 2, overconfidence predicted greater use of despotic leadership behaviors even in contexts of low power asymmetries – though to a lesser extent than in contexts of high-power-asymmetries.

One possible explanation for this difference across studies might concern the experimental versus naturalistic approach that I adopted in Studies 2 and 3 to examining the role of power asymmetries. More precisely, in Study 2, the low power asymmetries condition afforded subordinates the power to invalidate outright their supervisors' decisions on how to distribute the financial bonus, thus representing a context of actual power symmetry. In real-world organizations, supervisors might generally retain a certain degree of power over their subordinates even in contexts of low power asymmetries, hence attenuating the observed moderation effect of power asymmetries in Study 3 relative to Study 2. Therefore, while Study 3 does replicate the findings of Studies 1 and 2, it also highlights the perils of generalizing the effects of experimentally-induced power to real-world organizational contexts.

General Discussion

The goal of the present research was to examine the influence of leader overconfidence on leadership behavior. More specifically, I proposed that leader overconfidence is associated with the mistreatment of subordinates in the form of despotic leadership behavior. Moreover, I suggested that the magnitude of power asymmetries in the leader-subordinate dynamic shape the strength of the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership, such that overconfident leaders make greater use of despotic leadership behaviors in contexts of high-power-asymmetries than in contexts of low-power-asymmetries. In line with these predictions,

I found that overconfident leaders are more prone to adopt despotic leadership behaviors than leaders who harbor less exaggerated self-views (Studies 1, 2, and 3), and that the higher the power asymmetries between leaders and subordinates the more overconfident leaders tend to resort to such form of destructive leadership behavior (Studies 2 and 3).

Theoretical Contributions

The present research contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, these studies represent the first investigation into how leader overconfidence influences the leader-subordinate relationship. Specifically, drawing on self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990), I suggested that overconfident leaders tend to utilize their powerful position as an instrument to protect and enhance their self-image via derogating and unsupportive behaviors towards subordinates, hence generating a sense of superior skill and competence that facilitates the verification of their exaggerated self-concept. In line with this prediction, I found leader overconfidence to predict a greater use of despotic leadership behaviors. This finding offers novel insight into the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior, which to date has been limited to the effects of leader overconfidence on technical and decision-making aspects of leadership (e.g., investment decisions, risk-assessment, or accounting misstatements; see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review). By attending to a previously unexplored aspect in the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior – i.e., how overconfident leaders treat and relate to their subordinates – the research extends current knowledge on how overconfidence influences the behavior of those in leadership roles. This is an important contribution given the growing evidence for overconfidence being pervasive among leaders (e.g., Belmi et al., 2020; Fast et al., 2011; Macenczak et al., 2016; Ronay et al., 2019; Vitanova, 2019).

The present studies also examine the role of power asymmetries as a contextual factor influencing the extent to which overconfident leaders engage in despotic actions. More

precisely, building on various theories of power (Guinote, 2007; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee & Smith, 2013) and leadership (Ludwig & Longeneck, 1993; Ronay et al., 2020, van Vugt & Ronay, 2014; von Hippel et al., 2016), I proposed that organizational contexts characterized by a high degree of power asymmetries between leaders and subordinates shape a series of cognitive, emotional, and instrumental conditions that enable and promote despotic leadership behavior. In turn, I expected such favorable contexts to influence the extent to which the overconfident see in despotic leadership a viable means to nourish their aggrandized self-image, thereby increasing instances of despotic behavior. Indeed, I found despotic leadership behaviors to be more common in situations of high-power-asymmetries than low-power-asymmetries, especially in the case of overconfident leaders. These findings align with those of prior studies showing that disproportionate leader power is associated with a higher prevalence of destructive leadership behaviors (e.g., Atwater & Yammarino, 1996; Russ et al., 2012), and that the magnitude of power asymmetries modulates the expression of unethical behavior by those predisposed (e.g., low honesty-humility; Barends et al., 2019). However, the present research offers at least two novel contributions in this regard.

First, because I captured power asymmetries both in experimental (Study 2) and field (Study 3) contexts, the current research allowed me to examine differences with regards to the effects of manipulated versus naturally-occurring power. The results suggest that manipulated power produces stronger effects than real-world power. In particular, I observed experimentally-induced high-power-asymmetries to strengthen the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership to a greater extent than do naturally-occurring high-power-asymmetries; and vice versa – I observed experimentally-induced low-power-asymmetries to attenuate the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership more so than naturally-occurring low-power-asymmetries. Even though the moderating effect of power asymmetries remained significant across studies regardless of their different

methodologies, the results do stress the importance of combining measurement methods in power research – as this allows for a more generalizable, fine-grained understanding of the effects of organizational power. However, despite prior warnings that experimental manipulations of power may yield effects hard to reproduce in real-world contexts (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015), the adoption of a multi-method approach to power research, such as I offered here, continues to be rare in the existing literature (Schaerer et al., 2018).

Second, given the well-known negative consequences associated with overconfidence, researchers have investigated possible strategies to mitigate such undesirable outcomes. For example, Schall et al. (2016) observed that providing individuals with overconfidence warnings (e.g., telling participants that "people are usually overconfident in this task") can reduce overconfidence, and early studies on performance feedback proofed timely, personalized feedback to be able to diminish overconfidence in subsequent tasks (Lichtenstein & Fischhoff, 1980). However, a recent review of the overconfidence literature concluded that while warnings and feedback both have the potential to reduce overconfidence, in practice they are difficult to apply and often ineffective (Meikle et al., 2016), especially in large-scale contexts such as big companies. Furthermore, even if these measures can be useful under the right circumstances, their practical scope is limited to reducing the effects of overconfidence on the specific domain of task-related decision-making, bearing little or no relevance for preventing the interpersonal negative consequences of overconfident leadership reported here. The current research suggests that limiting leader power may represent a more effective approach to counteracting the perils of overconfident leadership. Indeed, while the studies presented here focused on examining the effects of power in relation to despotic leadership behavior, power restrictions are likely useful to address a broader range of undesirable behaviors from overconfident leaders – specifically, through implementing decision-making procedures that preclude unilateral, unchecked decisions from those in leadership roles, whether such decisions

involve technical aspects (e.g., relating to investment or accounting decisions) or interpersonal aspects (e.g., relating to subordinate mistreatment via bonus assignment or task distribution decisions).

The current research also contributes to a deeper understanding of the forces giving rise to despotic leadership behavior. More precisely, I position leader overconfidence and leader-subordinate power asymmetries as individual and contextual predictors of despotic leadership, respectively. These are important antecedents to recognize because both overconfidence (Belmi et al., 2020; Fast et al., 2011; Macenczak et al., 2016; Reuben et al., 2012; Ronay et al., 2019; Vitanova, 2019) and power asymmetries (e.g., Avolio & Bass, 1991; Cooper & Nirenberg, 2004; Rubenstein et al., 2018; Yukl, 2002) tend to accompany those in leadership positions, and might therefore be playing an important role in shaping the astonishing figures of despotic leadership behavior prevalence reported in the literature (Aasland et al., 2010). Considering the wealth of prior studies highlighting the wide-arching negative consequences of despotic leadership (e.g., De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Islam et al., 2020; De Clercq et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2016; Nauman et al., 2018), there remains little doubt concerning the urgency for organizations to initiate or strengthen action against such harmful leadership behavior. Regrettably, research on the antecedents of despotic leadership is scarce, leaving organizations unaided in this important task – indeed, to my knowledge, only one prior investigation has provided some insight in this regard, showing low levels of leader social responsibility to be associated with higher likelihood of engaging in despotic leadership behavior (de Hoogh & den Hartog, 2008). By showing the roles of overconfidence and leader-subordinate power asymmetries as antecedents of despotic leadership, these present research contributes to filling an important gap in the existing literature.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, the above findings bear a number of implications. First, organizations should consider implementing overconfidence screenings within leadership selection procedures, as well as among those in leadership positions. Indeed, while overconfidence can lead to undesired outcomes at all levels within organizational hierarchies (Meikle et al., 2016), leader overconfidence might be especially pernicious given the prominent influence that leaders have over organizational dynamics. For example, researchers have long reasoned and demonstrated that leaders are seen as role-models and so play a critical role in shaping organizational culture (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Dietz et al., 2020; Gächter & Renner, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2012; Ofori, 2009; Ogbonna & Harris, 2000; Sarros et al., 2008; Sims & Brinkman, 2002). Therefore, despotic behaviors characteristic of overconfident leaders, such as manipulation, unsupportiveness, or derogation of co-workers, may over time generate toxic organizational cultures that hamper optimal organizational functioning. Leader overconfidence might thus represent a problem that extends well beyond the individual level. Fortunately, given the small costs and time requirements of overconfidence assessments, organizations may not need much to preempt such undesirable scenario.

The current studies indicate as well a direct relationship between leader power and despotic leadership, irrespective of leader overconfidence. Hence, organizations should carefully calibrate the amount of power conferred to those in leadership roles. Of course, leadership implies a certain degree of influence over subordinate outcomes and resources, as well as decision-making responsibilities. However, organizations could seek to implement strategies that help them counterweigh leader-subordinate power asymmetries without directly restricting leader power. For example, organizations can make sure to provide employees with formal means to report despotic leadership behaviors to specific, neutral entities – such as an organizational ombudsman (e.g., Gadlin, 2000; Marzionna, 2019; Rowe & Gadlin, 2014). In

the same line, organizations could require decisions that involve significant consequences for subordinates, such as contract terminations, bonus allocations, or promotions, to run through peer-review processes, thereby disincentivizing powerful leaders to utilize their authority in self-interested and wrongful ways (McCabe & Lewin, 1992). These measures could help organizations counteract the perils of high-power-asymmetries while preserving leader power.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations to the current studies that could serve as avenues for future research. First, in Studies 1 and 2 I operationalized despotic leadership in terms of financially-based self-interested behavior. Despotic leaders may nonetheless exhibit self-interested behaviors in several other forms, such as investing less time in group projects or taking disproportionate credit for jobs that required much time and efforts from their subordinates (e.g., Russ et al., 2010; Barelds et al., 2018; Wisse et al., 2019). While in Study 3 I addressed this limitation by adopting a more comprehensive measure of despotic leadership, future studies should seek to strengthen the current findings via examining the effects of overconfidence on such different forms of self-serving conduct.

Second, the measures for overconfidence and despotic leadership in Study 3 were obtained from the same source (i.e., subordinates). Hence, even though the observed relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership was robust and consistent across studies, the results of Study 3 may have been biased to some extent due to common-method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Future studies should thus seek to replicate the current results through methodologies that avoid such common-method variance. In this sense, one possible approach could consist of recruiting samples of leader-subordinate dyads that allow to capture overconfidence via the leaders (as we did in Studies 1 and 2) and despotic leadership via subordinates' reports (as we did in Study 3). Until then, the finding that overconfidence

predicts despotic leadership behaviors also in real-world organizational contexts should be seen as preliminary evidence, and therefore interpreted with caution.

Finally, although the samples consisted of participants from different countries (i.e., U.S.A. and western Europe), it is important to test the current hypotheses in other cultures where the effects of overconfidence and despotic leadership might differ. For instance, self-interested, exploitative, and interpersonally callous behaviors characteristic of despotic leaders often meet more severe negative social reactions in collectivistic cultures, such as the Chinese and the Japanese (e.g., Adair & Semnani-Azad, 2011; Kowner & Wiseman, 2003). In such cultural contexts, the greater costs associated with engaging in despotic leadership behaviors may drive overconfident leaders toward other, less costly self-verification strategies, such as selective affiliation (i.e., seeking contexts where one anticipates to be seen in line with their self-views) or the display of signs and symbols typically associated with the self-image that one desires to instill in others (e.g., wearing specific cloth items or consuming certain products). Given the remarkably fast rate at which organizations are becoming multicultural (e.g., Derous, 2017; Manroop et al., 2013), I believe this is an important vein for future research to explore.

Conclusion

The perils of overconfident leadership are largely documented in the literature. To date, however, prior reports concerning the negative consequences overconfidence have revolved around technical and decision-making aspects of leadership. The current findings suggest that such negative consequences might as well extend to the interpersonal domain via authoritarian and self-serving despotic leadership behaviors. Considering the increasing amount of evidence regarding the prevalence of overconfidence among those in leadership positions, it is thus critical for organizations to redouble efforts against such unethical and destructive forms of

leadership – indeed, while "the measure of a man is what he does with power", the measure of an organization might as well be the measure of their leaders.

Appendix

Figure 1.

Overconfidence and Despotic Leadership at High, Intermediate, and Low Levels of Manipulated Power Asymmetries (Study 2).
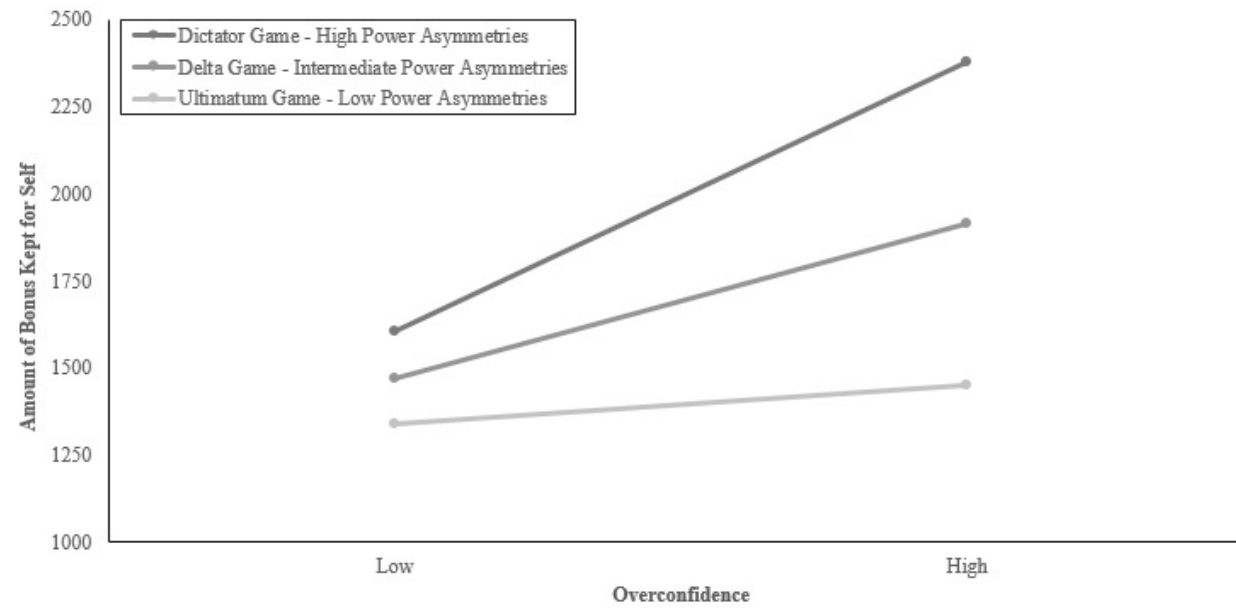
Figure 2.

Overconfidence and Despotic Leadership at High, Intermediate, and Low Levels of Naturally-Occurring Power Asymmetries (Study 3).
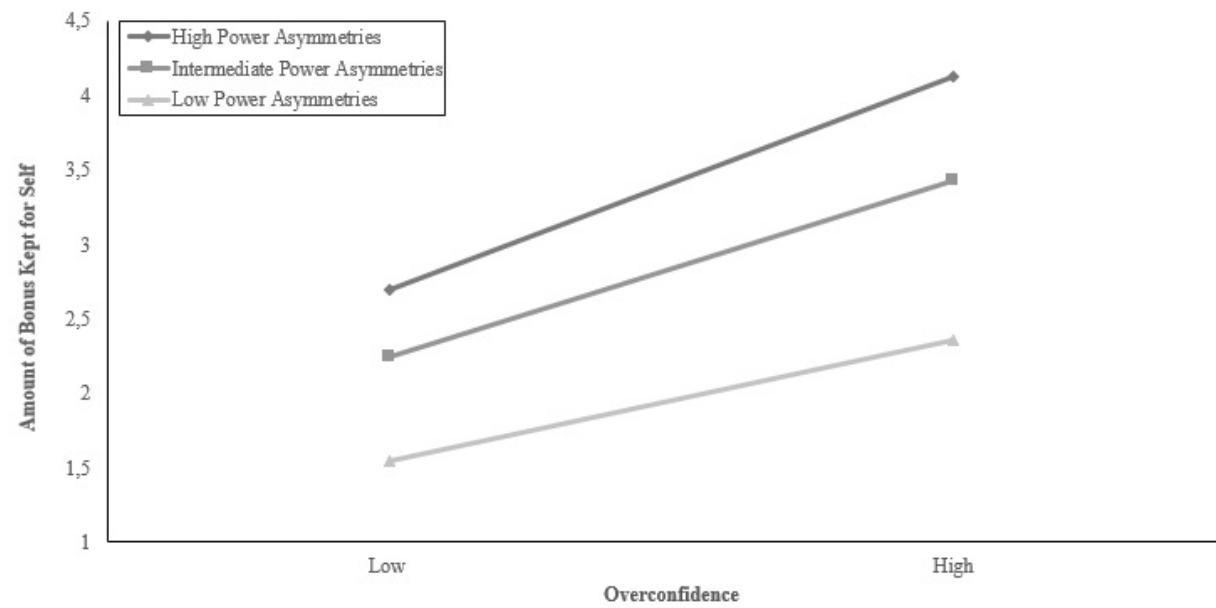
Chapter 6

General Discussion

In the four research chapters comprising this dissertation, I investigated the effects of overconfidence in several leadership-related processes, including leadership selection, leadership-attainment strategies, and leadership behavior. The main conclusions presented in the preceding chapters suggest (1) that overconfidence facilitates the attainment of formal leadership roles, (2) that overconfident people actively pursue such positions of status and influence and do so via dominance-based status-seeking strategies, (3) that overconfident leadership candidates are more prone to resort to deceptive forms of impression management during selection processes, and (4) that overconfidence is promotes the adoption of despotic leadership behaviors. In this final chapter, I first summarize the central findings emerging from each of the reported investigations, explicate their relevance, and elaborate on how the different chapters are interrelated and conform a cohesive line of research. I then proceed to discuss methodological choices with regards to measuring overconfidence throughout the different chapters, and whether overconfidence should be considered a multifaceted – versus a unitary – construct within which it is important to differentiate between overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement. Lastly, I highlight some cross-ranging methodological limitations to several of the studies here presented and provide a number of future research directions and challenges in overconfidence research.

Summary, Relevance, and Interrelatedness of Findings

The initial finding reported in this dissertation concerns the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection. More concretely, I found evidence suggesting that overconfidence facilitates the attainment of leadership roles. This finding is consistent with prior reports showing that overconfident individuals tend to be granted higher social status within informal groups (Anderson et al., 2012). However, the investigation presented in

Chapter 2 is the first to investigate the status-enhancing effects of overconfidence within the specific context of formal leadership selection procedures. Moreover, I identified a series of intrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms underlying the relationship between overconfidence and leadership selection. Specifically, I proposed and found supportive evidence for the idea that an exaggerated sense of one's own competence and abilities (i.e., overconfidence) provides individuals with a psychological buffer in the form of affective robustness (i.e., sustained positive affect) against the stress-inducing effects of social evaluative situations, such as leadership selection interviews. This emotional robustness, in turn, appears to facilitate a number of non-verbal behaviors (i.e., more compelling use of gestures, better use of space, more direct eye contact, and calmed demeanor) that others interpret as signals of superior competence, ultimately leading to more favorable evaluations of leadership suitability.

Together, these findings contribute to the existing literature in two main ways. First, I offer a novel, complementary account for the prevalence of overconfidence among those in top positions. Indeed, while prior explanations for this relationship have focused on the finding that the psychological experience of power promotes higher levels of overconfidence (Fast et al., 2012), the studies presented in Chapter 2 suggest that overconfidence precedes and actually favors leadership selection. The coexistence of these two mechanisms offers a broader picture of how overconfidence and leadership are interrelated. Second, I find suggestive evidence that the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of overconfidence represent interrelated mechanisms that jointly facilitate social advancement. Chapter 2 is the first to theoretically and empirically connect these intrapersonal and interpersonal explanations regarding the practical value of overconfident self-views.

In Chapter 3, I continued to investigate the relationship between overconfidence and leadership attainment. More precisely, I suggested and explored the idea that overconfident

individuals might actively pursue high-status positions, and examined the precise behavioral strategies (dominance versus prestige; e.g., Cheng et al., 2013, Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Maner & Case, 2016) through which the overconfident seek to materialize such social advancement motives. Indeed, Chapter 3 offered supportive evidence for the notion that overconfidence is associated with the active pursuit of high-status positions, operationalized as self-selection for a leadership selection procedure. Furthermore, I found that in such strivings for social advancement, overconfident individuals tend to adopt dominance-based strategies (i.e., forceful, intimidating, fear-inducing, and coercive behaviors) over prestige-based strategies (i.e., group-serving behaviors involving the sharing of valuable knowledge and skills).

These findings contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, I show that the relationship between overconfidence and leadership attainment may also follow from overconfident individuals' volitional behavior towards social advancement, rather than representing a mere byproduct of others' misperceptions of superior competence and leadership suitability, as shown in Chapter 2. Together, Chapters 2 and 3 thus offer a complementary, two-pronged account for the social ascension of overconfident individuals to leadership positions. Chapter 3 also represents the first examination of the effectiveness of dominance and prestige as strategies for navigating social hierarchies in real-world organizational settings. To date, evidence in this regard has been limited to laboratory studies involving short-term groups and hierarchies (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013), one online test (Belmi et al., 2020), and one longitudinal investigation among student groups (Redhead et al., 2019). The finding that dominance is associated with social advancement is real-world organizational contexts is consistent with longitudinal data showing that firmness (which encompasses dominance along with decisiveness, independence, self-confidence, and stress-resistance) predicts salary growth and tenure over a period of thirteen years (Jansen & Vinkenburg, 2005). Methodologically,

Chapter 3 offered the first direct comparison between motivational (Cassidy & Lynn, 1989) and behavioral (Cheng et al., 2010) operationalizations of dominance and prestige, highlighting the importance of differentiating between these two facets of the dominance and prestige constructs. Specifically, the results of Chapter 3 suggest that motivational operationalizations of dominance and prestige have limited value in predicting the behavioral expressions of individuals' desire for higher social rank – whether this limitation extends to other behavioral phenomena remains to be explored, and researchers should therefore carefully consider which form of dominance and prestige operationalizations (i.e., motivation, behavior, or both) best serve their specific interests and purposes. In the particular case of status-seeking strategies adopted by overconfident individuals, I observed the behaviorally-oriented scale developed by Cheng et al. (2010) to represent a better predictor.

The notion that overconfidence is associated with dominance-based strategies towards higher social rank (Chapter 3) suggests that overconfident people might be particularly willing to engage in unethical behaviors in their pursuit of higher social rank. In Chapter 4 I further examined this idea by investigating the relationship between overconfidence and different forms of impression management behavior – i.e., honest versus deceptive (e.g., Bourdage et al., 2018; Levashina & Campion, 2006; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). I found that overconfident leadership candidates are more prone than those with accurate self-views to enlist deceptive impression management behaviors during leadership selection procedures, such as fabricating past professional achievements or hiding negative information. Moreover, I proposed that overconfident individuals' capacity to self-deceive with regards to their own competence and abilities might be associated with self-deceptive reasoning in other domains. Specifically, I suggested that overconfidence is related to the use of cognitive moral disengagement mechanisms that help people transgress social norms (e.g., not to lie) without experiencing negative emotions and self-rebuke. Indeed, I observed a positive association between

overconfidence and moral disengagement, an effect that in turn mediated the positive relationship between overconfidence and the use of deceptive impression management behaviors.

Chapter 4 advances the existing literature in various domains. First, by showing a positive association between overconfidence and deceptive impression management, I extend current scholarly understanding of the relationship between overconfidence and social advancement. More concretely, this finding suggests that overconfidence influences the verbal communication strategies that individuals utilize during selection procedures (i.e., deceptive self-presentation), hence complementing the findings reported in Chapter 2 regarding the influence of overconfidence on candidates' non-verbal behavior. In this sense, Chapter 4 thus offers new insight regarding the processes through which overconfident individuals are often misperceived to be more competent than they actually are – indeed, the use of deceptive impression management behaviors has been shown to positively distort interviewers' perceptions of candidates' competence (Ellis et al., 2002; Gilmore et al., 1999; Kacmar et al., 1992, Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Roulin et al., 2015). Second, Chapter 4 offers a theoretically-grounded cognitive mechanism (i.e., moral disengagement) that might help researchers better understand the relationships between overconfidence and several forms of unethical behavior reported in the organizational literature, such as tax avoidance (Hsieh et al., 2018) or accounting fraud (Schrand & Zechman, 2012). Together, the findings of Chapter 4 align with and extend those of Chapter 3 regarding the unethical means that overconfident individuals appear prone to enlist in their efforts to attain higher status positions. Morever, by showing the positive associations of both overconfidence and moral disengagement with deceptive impression management, Chapter 4 also advances existing knowledge on the antecedents of applicant deceptive behavior (Bourdage et al., 2018; Law et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2021; Roulin & Bourdage, 2017). Lastly, Chapter 4 identifies one previously unexplored means of

through which individuals may attempt to attain self-congruent social responses – i.e., interpersonal deception. This is an important finding that sets the ground for extending self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1987, 1990).

Finally, in Chapter 5, as a logical next step given the findings reported in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I found it pertinent and important to investigate the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior. In this aim, I theorized that overconfident leaders might exhibit an inclination to engage in despotic leadership behaviors, such as making self-serving decisions at the expense of subordinates or exercising their power in punitive ways (e.g., de Hoogh & den Hartog, 2008, Erkutlu & Chafra, 2018; Naseer et al., 2016). Moreover, I proposed that power asymmetries would function as a moderator in the relationship between overconfidence and despotic leadership. Indeed, across three studies, I found higher scores on overconfidence to predict greater use of despotic leadership behaviors, an effect that in experimental as well as real-life settings appeared to increase in contexts characterized by high-power-asymmetries relative to contexts characterized by low-power-asymmetries.

Chapter 5 makes three main contributions to the existing literature. First, I offer novel insight into the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior, which so far has been limited to the effects of overconfidence on technical and decision-making aspects of leadership, such as investment decisions, risk-assessment, or accounting misstatements (see Meikle et al., 2016 for a review). By attending to a previously overlooked aspect in the relationship between overconfidence and leadership behavior (i.e., how overconfident leaders treat and relate to their subordinates), Chapter 5 advances current knowledge on how overconfidence influences the behavior of those in leadership positions. Second, Chapter 5 highlights the relevance of leader power in either promoting or constraining instances of destructive leadership behavior, such as despotic leadership. Importantly, by capturing power asymmetries both in experimental and field settings, Chapter 5 represents one of the first

comparisons of the effects of manipulated versus naturally-occurring power asymmetries (Schaerer et al., 2018), indicating that manipulated power produces stronger effects than real-world power. Third, by showing the role of both overconfidence and power asymmetries as antecedents of despotic leadership behavior, Chapter 5 also contributes to a wider understanding of the forces giving rise to such destructive form of leadership.

Overprecision, Overestimation, and Overplacement: One or Three Constructs?

To date, it remains unclear whether overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement are intrinsically distinct from one another or are rather merely different manifestations of the underlying construct – i.e., self-enhancement. Some researchers, guided by Moore and Healy's (2008) influential paper on "the trouble with overconfidence" (to which I refer in more detail below), understand or assume that these three forms of overconfidence emerge from different psychological mechanisms and predict different beliefs, choices, and behaviors (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Meikle et al., 2017; Prims & Moore, 2017). However, no prior studies have tested such theoretical proposition formally, especially with regards to their predictive value, and much of the existing literature on overconfidence has treated them as interchangeable (e.g., Barber & Odean, 2001; Belsky & Gilovich, 2000; Dunning, 2005; Malmendier & Tate, 2005; Kwan et al., 2004; Stotz & von Nitzsch, 2005).

My personal understanding on these different forms of overconfidence has changed over the course of my Ph.D. journey. Accordingly, so has changed my theoretical and methodological approach. Initially, with little experience on overconfidence research, I followed Moore and Healy's (2008) proposition that overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement are essentially distinct constructs. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I explicitly referred to these different conceptualizations of overconfidence and clearly described how overconfidence was operationalized. Specifically, I employed the most commonly used paradigm for capturing individual differences in overconfidence (i.e., 64% of empirical

research on overconfidence; based on Moore & Healy, 2008). However, as discussed in the general introduction, one important limitation of this paradigm is that it does not allow for a distinction between overprecision and overestimation, and so conflates their (presumably different) effects. This limitation is acknowledged in the discussion of Chapter 2, where I suggest that future studies should examine whether the effects of overconfidence differ between particular forms of overconfidence – a suggestion that I followed in Chapter 3.

Indeed, in Chapter 3, I adopted a comprehensive methodological approach that allowed me to capture all three forms of overconfidence, and so examine their unique effects on the dependent variables (i.e., status-seeking and status-seeking strategies). Interestingly, the results revealed only small differences in their predictive value, and between-strands correlations were exceptionally high, ranging from .71 up to .95. Moreover, in two unsuccessful submissions to two international peer-reviewed journals, reviewers generally appeared confused by the facts that (1) considerable attention was paid to the methodological differentiation between overconfidence strands, (2) yet no different theoretical predictions were made, and (3) results were (3.1) rather similar irrespective of the particular form of overconfidence used as the independent variable, or (3.2) inconsistent across studies, casting doubt over the theoretical soundness of such differentiation. Together, these comments, with which I concur, discouraged me from adopting such a comprehensive methodological approach to measuring overconfidence in subsequent investigations (i.e., Chapters 4 and 5), out of pragmatic considerations. Ever since, however, this puzzle remained vividly within me, and it is only recently that I began to make sense of and understand this conundrum.

Before Moore and Healy's (2008) paper on "the trouble with overconfidence", different operationalizations of overconfidence found in the literature were interpreted by researchers simply as that, mere different operationalizations (e.g., Barber & Odean, 2001; Belsky & Gilovich, 2000; Dunning, 2005; Malmendier & Tate, 2005; Kwan et al., 2004; Stotz & von

Nitzsch, 2005). Moore and Healy (2008) challenged this stand, and proposed a theory of overconfidence wherein they differentiated between overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement as conceptually and empirically distinct forms of overconfidence. The core idea behind Moore and Healy's (2008) theory is that people often have imperfect information about theirs as well as others' performance, leading to regressive estimates of performance. The term regressive refers here to conservative, or tending towards the mean. These regressive estimates are posed to represent a cognitive response to the uncertainty that derives from different degrees of imperfect information about actual performance. Therefore, when perceived performance is exceptionally high, people tend to underestimate their own performance (i.e., underestimation), but underestimate others' performance even more so, as information is typically more imperfect about others than oneself. Consequently, this results in the belief that one is better than others (i.e., overplacement). Conversely, when perceived performance is exceptionally low, people tend to overestimate their own performance (i.e., overestimation), but overestimate others' performance even more so, thus resulting in the belief that one is worse than others (i.e., underplacement).

Moore and Healy's (2008) theory of overconfidence has been greatly influential for at least two reasons. First, it arguably represented the first fully formalized theory of overconfidence, which the authors accompanied by supportive empirical evidence. Second, it offered an explanation for prior inconsistent findings regarding intraindividual variations in people's overconfidence, which Moore and Healy (2008) resolved by demonstrating that easy tasks (where perceived performance is usually higher) tend to attenuate overconfidence in one's competence and abilities (due to the aforementioned regressive estimates), and that difficult tasks (where perceived performance is usually lower) tend to exacerbate overconfidence. It is critical to note, however, that while the cognitive mechanisms identified by Moore and Healy (2008) provide a deeper understanding of overconfidence biases, they are

also intrinsically tied to, and dependent on, task difficulty as a contextual factor, and have therefore less value for explaining people's general inclination towards overconfidence (e.g., Bondt and Thaler, 1995; Dunning et al., 2004; Kahneman, 2011; Plous, 1993), as well as the motivational effects of overconfidence investigated in much of the existing literature, including the present dissertation.

Indeed, Moore and Healy's (2008) theorizing, from which the distinction between overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement emerges, does not offer much ground for differential predictions concerning the effects of these different forms of overconfidence on individual behavior. To be clear, I do not intend to express that Moore and Healy's (2008) theory of overconfidence is invalid. In fact, I do believe it significantly advanced our understanding of this common bias. But I also think that its value for understanding social and organizational processes related to overconfidence is limited, as is the distinction between overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement. Five years ago, however, I lacked the knowledge and experience required to identify and truly comprehend these limitations, and subsequently the self-confidence required to decouple my methodological approach to overconfidence from Moore and Healy's (2008) theoretical distinctions. Today, I personally no longer believe that overprecision, overestimation, and overplacement should be seen as different forms of overconfidence, but rather as different cognitive mechanisms serving to explain contextual fluctuations on a pre-existing, general sense of superior skill and competence. Indeed, from a logical standpoint, the extent to which one believes their own knowledge to be precise, even if that is not the case (i.e., overprecision), should be associated with individuals' perceptions of their abilities to perform well and achieve success (i.e., overestimation), both of which should function as the basis upon which people consider themselves to be able to perform better than others (i.e., overplacement). For instance, if one considers themselves to be knowledgeable on mathematics, then such person should harbor

more positive expectations of performance on a mathematical exam than those who consider themselves not to be knowledgeable on mathematics, hence resulting in a positive association between overprecision and overestimation. These exaggerated self-perceptions of knowledge and abilities to perform should in turn predict the extent to which one expects to outperform others (i.e., overplacement) on the exam. This logical argumentation finds support in the positive, often high correlations between "forms" of overconfidence reported in Chapter 3, as well as in prior studies (e.g., Duttle, 2016; Fellner & Krügel, 2012; Wohleber & Matthews, 2014). Of course, this does not preclude that people's overconfidence might manifest to different strengths in different contexts depending on whether a given task is perceived by individuals to be easy or difficult, as per Moore and Healy's (2008) theorizing. I gradually formed this personal understanding of the overconfidence construct over the last five years of research, and so it is not fully reflected in the methodological approach adopted in the investigations here presented – although I assume readers noticed a gradual decrease in attention to the overconfidence strands in the last versus the initial chapters. The present section is expressly intended to explain the underlying factors leading to such discrepancies.

Methodological Limitations and Future Research Directions

The investigations here presented have at least two overarching methodological limitations that should be noted. Perhaps the most important one concerns the extent to which overconfidence can be positioned as a causal antecedent of the observed effects. For example, all studies adopted a cross-sectional design, which does not allow claim to cause-effect relationships. Experimental manipulations can help overcome this limitation. However, because overconfidence is conceptualized as a stable individual difference, similar to personality dimensions, it is difficult to manipulate it in reliable ways – indeed, to my knowledge none of the existing social sciences literature on overconfidence has adopted such

an experimental approach (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012, Belmi et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2013, Reuben et al., 2012; Shipman & Mumford, 2011).

One possible means to manipulate overconfidence could consist of inducing higher versus lower levels of confidence via false feedback. More specifically, researchers could have participants complete a series of tasks and then provide them with performance feedback either below or above their actual level of competence, hence manipulating their perceptions of their own competence and abilities. Manipulation checks could then seek to ensure whether the desired effects (i.e., higher versus lower overconfidence) were effectively induced. However, even if this procedure may to some extent increase or reduce individuals' overconfidence, it does seem improbable that these variations would reflect a deep, genuine change in people's self-views. Indeed, prior research suggest that single-point interventions on self-views (e.g., to improve self-esteem) often result in "fanciful and ephemeral" changes (e.g., Crocker & Park, 2004; Swann, 1996; Swann et al., 2007, p. 90). In this sense, researchers have stressed that interventions (or in our case, manipulations) designed to alter self-views should be based on cultivating behaviors and social environments that provide a basis for sound and sustainable changes in people's self-concepts (Swann et al., 2007). Researchers could therefore attempt to manipulate overconfidence via "slow-cooking" interventions, which would necessarily entail a longitudinal approach. However, while these interventions do seem to be effective to alter people's self-views, effects sizes tend to be modest, which leads to question the cost-to-benefit ratio of such approach. Most importantly, intervening on people's self-views with purposes other than clinical and therapeutic (e.g., improving self-esteem) may stand outside of what is considered an ethical research practice. In sum, while the findings presented here are sustained on correlational evidence, establishing causal effects on overconfidence research appears to be a difficult endeavor. This is perhaps the biggest challenge that overconfidence researchers face.

The second methodological limitation in the studies that comprise this dissertation concerns the use of proxies to measure dependent variables. For example, in Chapter 2, wherein I claim that overconfidence favors leadership selection, I relied on perceptions of leadership potential and leadership suitability as indirect measures of leadership selection. Even if these positive perceptions are logical antecedents of leadership selection, such a methodological approach still requires a certain degree of inference. In order to strengthen evidence for this relationship, researchers should seek to test the effects of overconfidence in real-world leadership selection processes. Indeed, in the published version of the investigation presented in Chapter 2 (which, as noted in the general introduction, involved three additional studies), my co-authors and I successfully replicated the positive effects of overconfidence on leadership selection in a field setting involving actual candidates that were assessed by professional consultants in the process an actual leadership selection procedure.

The use of indirect measures also concerns Chapter 3, wherein I investigated the effects of overconfidence on social status advancement. Here, I assessed the status-enhancing effects of overconfidence through supervisors' expectations of their subordinates' social advancement over time. Even though employees' promotion to higher status positions is often based on supervisors' perceptions of their abilities and performance, I did not examine whether such supervisors' expectations eventually materialized in actual promotion to higher status positions. Therefore, again this indirect measure involves an untested assumption. In this particular case, perhaps the most appropriate methodological improvement would be to adopt a longitudinal approach, wherein researchers compare employees' professional positions at one initial point time versus a specific point time later in the future – hence moving from expectations of social advancement to actual social advancement.

In addition to addressing these two methodological limitations (i.e., causality of overconfidence and indirect measures), future research could also seek to explore the

possibility of a more positive side of overconfident leadership. For example, research on organizational- and team-level resilience (i.e., a system's ability to continue to meet its objectives in the face of challenges) points to leadership as one important antecedent (see Barasa et al., 2018 for a review) – specifically, via fostering a clear vision or promoting motivation and commitment. In this sense, characteristics such as optimism, persistence, self-assuredness and compelling communicative manners often associated with overconfident self-views might help overconfident leaders sustain conviction, effort, and motivation in their subordinates during difficult times or following disappointing results. Of course, given the findings of Chapter 5 (i.e., association between overconfidence and despotic leadership behavior), organizations should carefully calibrate the extent to which such potential benefits of overconfident leadership overweigh its costs, or find ways to harness the former while preventing the later. Fortunately, Chapter 5 also offers some possibilities in this regard, demonstrating that reducing power asymmetries can effectively decrease instances of despotic leadership behavior. In sum, while the existing literature and the present dissertation both suggest against selecting for overconfident leaders, it remains to be explored whether overconfidence may also provide some benefits to organizations. Research in this direction would help gain a more wholesome understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of overconfident leadership.

Conclusion

Organizations are small-scaled societies, inevitably defined by their members' psychological states and processes. Understanding these states and processes is of uppermost importance, and its relevance impossible to understate. In the present dissertation, I investigated the influence of individuals' self-views (perhaps one of the most qualitatively unique features of the human mind) on several organizationally-relevant phenomena, and found people's (mis)perceptions of their own competence and abilities to predict status-

attainment outcomes, status-seeking strategies, and leadership behavior. These findings speak to the power and influence granted to individuals on the basis of self-evaluative *over*estimations. This power and influence affects not only the viability of organizations as a whole, but also the daily experience of those who compose them. For this reason, I hope the findings presented here serve to inform, and perhaps help optimize, the joint well-being of organizations and their people.

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