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Abstract

Three studies explored the effectiveness of various-self presentational strategies that shy people can use to combat other's misperceptions of them. In Study 1, 83 undergraduates (57 women) completed a survey that assessed the perceived effectiveness of several self-presentation strategies. The results indicated that the strategy of future corrective action was perceived as most effective, whereas the strategy of showing low corrective effort was perceived as least effective. In Study 2, 193 adults (128 women) completed an anonymous online questionnaire in which participants imagined interacting with a target who was described as exhibiting overt shy behaviors and who then implemented one of four strategies (i.e., no acknowledgement, acknowledgement, future corrective action, and assured liking). As predicted, if targets acknowledged their shyness, it improved the overall impressions they made. Similarly, both implying future corrective action for shyness and assuring interaction partners that they were liked improved perceptions compared to only acknowledging shyness. Using a more realistic videotaped interaction (watched by 149 undergraduates, including 104 women), Study 3 sought to corroborate the findings of Study 2 and to rule out a potential alternative explanation (i.e., that acknowledging shyness acts as a self-disclosure). The results confirmed the effectiveness of the strategies presented when compared to the use of no strategy. Taken together, our findings suggest that simple strategies can be employed by shy individuals to enhance the overall impressions they make on others.

(N=229)

Strategies for Improving Perceptions of Shy Individuals

There is no need to tally self-help books or to rely on census data; in this day and age, it becomes clear that a problem is an epidemic if there is an application for it in the iTunes store. There are currently seven different applications available for quick and easy download that are meant to help people cope with and avoid socially awkward situations (iTunes, 2009). People are becoming rather creative when it comes to coping with their shy tendencies, but all of this technological trickery comes as no surprise after examining the statistics. A staggering 95% of U.S. students have reported experiencing some form of shyness in their lifetime (Zimbardo, 1977), and approximately half of Americans admit that shyness is a problem for them (Haemmerlie & Montgomery, 1982).

Shyness, however, is more than just a matter of avoiding discomfort in social situations. In addition to a desire to avoid rejection (Leary & Buckley, 2000) and to be perceived as likeable and friendly (Nezlek & Leary, 2002), shy individuals ultimately want to avoid making negative impressions (Shepperd & Arkin, 1990). Paradoxically, shy individuals are more likely than non-shy individuals to be perceived negatively (Lord & Zimbardo, 1985; Paulhus & Morgan, 1997). Specifically, they are perceived as less intelligent (Paulhus & Morgan, 1997), less friendly (Jones, Cheek, & Briggs, 1986), and more self-pitying (Lord & Zimbardo, 1985) than non-shy individuals. In fact, a profusion of negative characteristics are often ascribed to shy individuals during interactions, including disinterest, conceit, and boredom (Cheek & Buss, 1981).

It is important to note that these negative evaluations are misperceptions, not just negative perceptions. For example, Paulhus and Morgan (1997) demonstrated that based on amount of participation, quality of comments, communication skills, and lack of confidence, shy students were perceived as less intelligent than were non-shy students; however, an IQ test

revealed no significant differences between the two groups. Likewise, Gough and Thorne (1986) found that the perception that shy individuals have a lower IQ is false.

Because of these unfortunate negative perceptions, it is important that effective strategies for managing others' impressions of shyness be identified to offset and to improve the overwhelming number of misperceptions concerning shy individuals. Despite the fact that there are a number of effective therapeutic interventions for shyness (Jones et al., 1986), each requires a great deal of time and effort. For instance, interpersonal process training requires several weeks of gradual skills training; for treatment to be effective, shy individuals must attend 10 two-hour treatment sessions in which they learn to relax, assess social situations, and implement social skills during real life interactions (Alden & Cappe, 1986).

Fortunately, research on impression management for stigmas yields promising—yet much less time-consuming—strategies for improving perceptions (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Hebl & Skorinko, 2005; Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000). As one example, Hebl et al. (2000) found that stigmatized individuals benefit by openly addressing their stigma, because the acknowledgement decreases underlying tension and discomfort in an interaction by helping others know how to react (i.e., whether to feel sorry for the stigmatized individual or whether it will be offensive to discuss the stigmatized trait).

In addition to acknowledgement, past research on excuse making (Pontari & Schlenker, 2000; Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002) also offers strategies that may be effective in impression management. Pontari et al. (2002) found that perceptions of people who made excuses were improved when the excuse-maker was willing to correct his or her behavior in the future. Importantly, excuse-makers who openly avoided taking future corrective action were perceived as deceitful, self-absorbed, lacking in character, and less likeable (Pontari et al., 2002),

suggesting that implying future corrective action is a vital step toward improving perceptions. This same line of research provides a considerable number of other strategies for potential adaptation to improving the impressions of shy people. For example, Pontari (2009) examined the social interactions of shy and non-shy individuals with or without friends present, and found that anxious participants appeared more competent when a friend was present, suggesting that the presence of a friend who acts as a social surrogate or advocate may also improve perceptions of shy individuals during interactions.

Perhaps the most promising strategy for improving perceptions of shy people can be found in basic research on attraction. Research shows that people tend to like others who indicate reciprocal liking (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Curtis & Miller, 1986). Consistent with this notion, Curtis and Miller (1986) demonstrated that when pairs of students were arranged to interact, those who were secretly told they were liked by their interaction partner became more receptive, more agreeable, and more self-disclosing; however, such was not the case for those who were told they were disliked by their interaction partners. Because shy individuals often display overt negative behaviors that can be misinterpreted as disinterest (Hebl et al., 2000), it seems logical that assuring interaction partners that they are not disliked will improve perceptions of shy individuals as well.

Verbal assurance, however effective it may be, is typically difficult for those who suffer from shyness. Fortunately, stigma research (e.g., Singletary & Hebl, 2009) demonstrates the benefits of simply increasing positivity (e.g., agreeing and smiling) as a self-presentation strategy. In a similar manner, Leary and Buckley (2000) demonstrated that the use of back-channeling during interactions (i.e., indicating friendly interest in an interaction by smiling and nodding without ever actually speaking) also improves perceptions. It seems plausible that such

a strategy could easily and effectively be applied to the interactions of shy individuals.

Thus far, the evidence reviewed here suggests that multiple self-presentation strategies (i.e., acknowledgement, future corrective action, assured liking, claiming uncontrollability, increasing positivity, and making other-oriented statements) can be adapted for use in improving the negative impressions shy individuals make on others. Moreover, although a large body of research has addressed how individuals can improve perceptions in general (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008; Hebl & Kleck, 2002) as well as ways to combat shyness with complex therapeutic intervention (Jones et al., 1986), little research to date has explored strategies shy individuals can use to enhance and correct perceptions of themselves. To bridge this gap, three studies sought to investigate the efficacy of simple self-presentation strategies for shy individuals. Study 1 used a questionnaire to assess the perceived effectiveness of a broad range of strategies that shy individuals might enact during their interactions with others. As a follow-up to Study 1, Study 2 examined the perceived effectiveness of a narrower range of strategies (i.e., acknowledgement, future corrective action, and assured liking), using an online questionnaire that included a hypothetical conversation with a shy individual. Finally, Study 3 sought to (a) replicate the findings of Study 2 using a more realistic presentation method (i.e., standardized videotaped interactions) and (b) rule out a possible alternative explanation for the effectiveness of acknowledgement (i.e., that acknowledgment of shyness is merely a form of self-disclosure).

Overview and Predictions

Consistent with previous research on stigmas (e.g., Singletary & Hebl, 2009), we predicted that acknowledging shyness (either by oneself or a friend), increasing positivity in an interaction (both by smiling and nodding), and claiming uncontrollability of shyness would all be

generally perceived as more effective than would using no strategy at all. Furthermore, based on research on excuse-making (e.g., Pontari et al., 2002), we hypothesized that indicating future corrective action and making other-oriented statements would be perceived as more effective relative to exerting low effort, not indicating future corrective action, and making self-focused statements. Finally, based on research on interpersonal attraction (e.g., Curtis & Miller, 1986), we predicted that shy individuals would make better overall impressions when they assured their interaction partners that they were liked as compared to when shy individuals merely acknowledged their shyness or enacted no strategy at all.

Study 1

As part of a larger study, participants completed an exploratory questionnaire that assessed the perceived effectiveness of several strategies that shy individuals might implement in their interactions with others. These strategies included indicating a willingness to undertake future corrective action, acknowledging shyness by self or by other, claiming uncontrollability for shyness, increasing positivity in an interaction, and assuring interaction partners that they are liked.

Method

Participants. The sample included 83 undergraduate students (57 women, 26 men) who ranged in age from 18 to 26 ($M = 19.37$, $SD = 1.33$) and were predominantly White/European American (72.3%). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling from high-traffic areas around campus (e.g., cafeteria, dorms, classrooms) and were asked to volunteer to complete a 10-min survey about “person perception.”

Design and procedure. Each participant completed a questionnaire assessing social attitudes and behaviors specifically related to shyness. Of particular interest were items

measuring participants' level of shyness (e.g., "I feel tense when I'm with people I don't know well"; Cheek & Buss, 1981), their perceptions of the controllability of shyness (e.g., "It is possible for people to overcome their shyness"), and their perceptions of the relative effectiveness of several self-presentation strategies.

First, participants were asked to imagine meeting someone for the first time who was very shy and reserved. Then, they then rated the perceived effectiveness of 9 strategies used by the shy target. Five of the strategies listed were derived from stigma-related research (e.g., based on Hebl et al., 2000): (a) self-acknowledgement ("I should tell you upfront that I'm shy"), (b) acknowledgement by another person (the person's friend tells others that the person is shy), (c) claimed uncontrollability ("I'm shy, and I think it's because everyone else in my family is shy"), (d) increased positivity by smiling (i.e., smiling and not saying much), and (e) increased positivity by agreeing (i.e., nodding in agreement). Four of the strategies were adapted from excuse-making research (e.g., based on Tyler & Feldman, 2007): (a) implied future corrective action ("I know that I'm shy, but I'm doing my best to work on it"), (b) indicated low effort ("I know that I'm shy, but I don't think there's anything I can do about it"), (c) other-oriented statement ("I feel bad. I know that my shyness can make it feel awkward interacting with me sometimes"), and (d) self-focused statement ("I know I'm shy, and it's always embarrassing for me").

The questionnaire ended with an additional open-ended item, which asked participants to identify factors that have influenced them to change their negative impressions of shy individuals in the past.

Results

First, we found that regardless of their own level of shyness, participants perceived shyness as a controllable trait ($M = 4.13$ vs. 3.00 , the midpoint of the scale), $t(82) = 19.89$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed). Next, we conducted a series of t -tests to analyze the relative effectiveness of the self-presentation strategies used by the shy target. As summarized in Table 1, the results indicated that the strategies of future corrective action and acknowledgement by others were perceived as most effective overall. The next most effective strategies included using an other-oriented statement, personally acknowledging shyness, using a self-focused statement, nodding in agreement, and smiling while not saying much. Not surprisingly, claiming uncontrollability over shyness was a less effective strategy, and demonstrating low effort was the least effective strategy overall. A content analysis of the open-ended question substantiated these findings by showing that negative impressions of shy people change most often when the shy person exerts effort to create or to maintain the relationship.

Discussion

Overall, the findings of Study 1 indicated that there may be strategies shy individuals can use to prevent negative misperceptions. In particular, the strategy of future corrective action was perceived as very effective (consistent with excuse-making research; e.g., Pontari et al., 2002). Not surprisingly, its efficacy was echoed multiple times in participants' responses to the open-ended question. For example, one participant wrote, "I do misperceive people that are shy because I don't think being shy is an excuse to be impolite. Not looking someone in the eye or one word answers are rude. They change when I see someone making an effort to try and overcome their shyness." Likewise, another participant remarked, "I don't mind people who are shy... It's better if the person makes a clear effort—being anxious is fine!"

Not surprisingly, acknowledgement and increased positivity were also perceived as effective strategies (consistent with stigma literature; e.g., Singletary & Hebl, 2009). However, we found that acknowledgement by a shy individual was not perceived to be as effective as was having another individual acknowledge a friend's shyness. Similarly, nonverbal behaviors such as nodding and smiling were also not perceived to be as effective as future corrective action and acknowledgement by others, possibly because of the limited interaction that nonverbal behaviors allow. This final point was also reinforced by open-ended responses, which indicated that verbal communication was a factor that ultimately allowed negative impressions to be overcome (e.g., "I thought they were stuck-up or didn't like me. This changed when they opened up to me/talked more").

As expected, claiming uncontrollability and showing minimal effort to correct one's shyness were perceived as the worst strategies and actually resulted in shy individuals making impressions that were still negative. These results make sense in light of our finding that people perceive shyness as a controllable trait (and thus they might expect shy individuals to exert effort to overcome their shyness).

Although the present study suggested several potentially useful self-presentation strategies for shy individuals, the results are limited by their descriptive nature. As such, the preliminary findings from Study 1 were incorporated into written scenarios (Study 2) and videotaped interactions (Study 3) to experimentally examine the effectiveness of several of these strategies.

Study 2

Based on past research (Curtis & Miller, 1986; Hebl et al., 2000; Singletary & Hebl, 2009; Pontari et al., 2002), Study 2 sought to gain a better understanding of the strategies shy

individuals can use to manage others' impressions of them, with a focus on those identified as potentially beneficial in Study 1. Thus, as part of an experimental study, participants were asked to imagine being part of a conversation with a person who exhibited overt shy behaviors and used one of three strategies (acknowledgement, future corrective action, or assured liking) or who did not attempt to use any strategy at all.

It was predicted that the hypothetical shy target would be perceived more positively and would be liked more when his or her shyness was acknowledged than when it was not (based on research on stigmas; e.g., Hebl et al., 2000; Singletary & Hebl, 2009). Furthermore, it was predicted that when the shy target implied future corrective action or assured liking, the target would be perceived more positively and would be liked more than if the target simply acknowledged shyness (based on excuse-making and attraction research; e.g., Curtis & Miller, 1986; Pontari et al., 2002).

Method

Participants. The sample included 193 graduate and undergraduate students (128 women, 65 men), who ranged in age from 18 to 26 ($M = 20.23$, $SD = 1.78$) and were predominantly White/European American (80.8%).

Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. That is, a standardized solicitation email that included general information about the study was sent to students known by the researchers. This message asked participants if they would be willing to voluntarily participate in a 5-min online survey, and it included a hyperlink to the questionnaire. In addition, the message asked participants to forward the survey to other students who might be willing to participate. Other than a small number of participants (20 students) who received extra credit in an introductory psychology class for their participation, no incentives were

offered. In an effort to ensure that a single participant did not complete the survey multiple times, each personal computer was only allowed to access the questionnaire once.

Design and procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four getting-acquainted scenarios, in which they were asked to imagine that they were interacting with a person who exhibited overt shy behaviors (e.g., nervousness, having difficulty making eye contact, speaking softly) and who used one of four self-presentation strategies in the conversation: no acknowledgement, acknowledgement, future corrective action, or assured liking. After reading the scenario, participants rated the target on several items that assessed overall impression and likeability.

The online instructions explained that the study was examining “how students perceive each other during icebreaker activities assigned by professors on the first day of classes.”

Participants then imagined being part of the following vignette:

It's the first day of class and the professor asks you to get acquainted with the student next to you so that you can introduce that student to the class. You begin the exercise by telling the student about yourself. You notice that the student seems quiet and doesn't make much eye contact, so you decide to ask the student questions. The student responds with mostly one-word answers. The student also speaks softly and appears nervous. The professor tells the class to wrap up their conversations, so you prod the student to share any other important information. The student hesitates for a second and says...

The reply that ended the interaction varied according to the strategy that the shy target enacted.

In the *Control* condition (i.e., the *No Acknowledgement* condition) the target responded by saying, “Hmmm...I don't know. I can't really think of anything else.” In the *Acknowledgement* condition the target responded by saying, “I guess I'm really shy and it's kind of been an issue

for me.” In the *Future Corrective Action* condition, the shy target responded by saying “I guess I’m really shy and it’s kind of been an issue for me. Despite my shyness, I’m going to force myself to go to more parties this semester.” Finally, in the *Assured Liking* condition, the target responded by saying, “I guess I’m really shy and it’s kind of been an issue for me. Sometimes people think I’m not interested in the conversation or that I don’t like them, but it’s not really true.”

Immediately following the vignette, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt that certain statements were characteristic of their interaction partner using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Of particular interest were five statements ($\alpha = .85$) used to measure the participants’ overall impression of the shy interaction partner. These statements included: “Overall, the student made a good impression,” “I feel that the student was genuinely interested in the conversation,” “In general, the student seems motivated to make a good impression,” “I would describe the student as warm,” and “I would describe the student as friendly.” In addition, the item “How much do you think you would like this student?”, which was rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very Much*), was used to assess the likeability of the target.

Six additional filler items (which were not used for analysis) were included to maintain the validity of the cover story, and participants were presented with three items inquiring about their perceptions of the getting-acquainted activity (i.e., how effective it was, how much they enjoyed it, and how likely they would be to recommend it for other classes). The final question was a suspicion check item disguised as an evaluation of the study (i.e., “In your opinion, what do you think the experimenters are studying and what do you think they expect to find?”). Importantly, none of the participants identified the purpose of the study or the variables being

manipulated. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were thanked for their contribution and were provided with researcher contact information in order to send questions or concerns and to request a summary of the results.

Results

A series of planned *t*-tests were used to test specific a priori hypotheses about the relative effectiveness of self-presentation strategies for improving perceptions of shy individuals. Consistent with Study 1, the analyses revealed no consistent pattern of participant gender effects; thus gender is not discussed further. All results for Study 2 are depicted in Table 2.

Effectiveness of acknowledging shyness. As predicted, shy individuals made a better overall impression when they acknowledged ($M = 3.07$) their shyness than when they did not ($M = 2.49$), $t(76) = -2.26$, $p = .006$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .59$. In addition, shy individuals were liked more when they acknowledged their shyness ($M = 3.66$) than when they did not ($M = 3.23$), $t(75) = -1.80$, $p = .038$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .41$.

Effectiveness of implying future corrective action. Consistent with predictions, the results also revealed a further improvement in perceptions of shyness due to an implication of future corrective action for shyness as compared to simply acknowledging shyness. Specifically, shy individuals made a better overall impression if they implied future corrective action ($M = 3.71$), than if they merely acknowledged their shyness ($M = 3.07$), $t(78) = -2.97$, $p = .002$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .65$. Moreover, shy individuals were liked more when they implied future corrective action ($M = 4.12$), than when they merely acknowledged their shyness ($M = 3.66$), $t(78) = -1.70$, $p = .047$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .38$.

Effectiveness of assured liking. The results also confirmed that when shy individuals assured their interaction partners that they enjoyed speaking with them despite common

misconceptions that they do not, the shy interaction partners were perceived more positively than when they simply acknowledged their shyness. Shy targets made a better overall impression if they assured liking ($M = 3.98$) than if they simply acknowledged their shyness ($M = 3.07$), $t(71) = -3.30$, $p = .001$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .77$. Similarly, shy targets were also liked more if they assured liking ($M = 4.09$) than if they simply acknowledged ($M = 3.66$), $t(71) = -1.85$, $p = .035$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .44$.

Finally, there was no significant difference between the strategies of future corrective action and assured liking for any of the dependent variables, $ts < 1$, *ns*.

Discussion

Not surprisingly, Study 2 indicated that all three of the strategies presented provided improvement in the perceptions of a shy student's overall impression and likeability. In short, our results suggest that several self-presentation strategies can be used by shy individuals to avoid misperceptions and to improve the ways they are perceived by others. In particular, when shy individuals indicated a willingness to undertake future corrective action, they made better overall impressions and were perceived as more likeable than when they did not state this willingness. Importantly, use of the assured liking strategy resulted in an equal improvement in participants' perceptions of the shy individual's overall impression and likeability.

Although we found clear support that several impression management strategies can be extended to the trait of shyness, this study was not without limitations. First, Study 2 was limited in its failure to assess how people respond if they view an actual interaction with a shy individual—rather than imagine being part of hypothetical scenario. In addition, the scenario wording may have influenced participants' perceptions of the shy target. Specifically, the target implied that shyness was negative and debilitating through wording in the acknowledgement

condition (i.e., “it’s kind of been an issue for me”), and the target also used language that could have been seen as forced and awkward when implying future corrective action (i.e., “I’m going to force myself to go to more parties”). Fortunately, these wording limitations were easily addressed in Study 3.

Finally, based on research that individuals tend to like others who share personal information (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969), a third limitation concerns a possible alternative explanation for the effectiveness of acknowledgement as a self-presentation strategy. That is, it was not clear if acknowledging shyness was effective simply because the target made a personal disclosure or if, as previous research on stigmas suggests (Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979), it had a direct effect on the discomfort often present in interactions with shy individuals. To address this limitation, a non-shy self-disclosure was added to Study 3 to compare it with strategy of acknowledging shyness.

Study 3

In an effort to replicate the findings of Study 2 in a more realistic setting as well as to address its limitations, Study 3 examined self-presentation strategies using a videotaped interaction. Specifically, participants were shown a standardized, videotaped interaction of an actor portraying a shy person who employed the same self-presentation strategies as in Study 2 (i.e., no strategy, acknowledgement, future corrective action, and assured liking). Importantly, to rule out self-disclosure as a potential confound of acknowledgement, an additional control condition (i.e., a personal self-disclosure unrelated to shyness) was included. Based on previous research as well as on the results of Studies 1 and 2, we expected that the strategies of acknowledgement, future corrective action, and assured liking would have increasingly favorable effects on participants' perceptions of shy individuals. Moreover, consistent with stigma research

(Hastorf et al., 1979), it was also hypothesized that acknowledging shyness would be more effective at improving perceptions than would merely disclosing information unrelated to shyness.

Method

Participants. The sample included 149 undergraduate students (104 women, 45 men) who ranged in age from 18 to 33 ($M = 19.98$, $SD = 1.63$) and were predominately White/European American (73.8%). In the present study, participants were primarily recruited through convenience sampling. Specifically, extra credit opportunities were announced in psychology classes for participation in a brief (10-min) study on “first impressions.” Additional participants were obtained through a campus-wide event offering free food for participation.

Design and procedure. Participants watched a 30-sec video clip in which a female target exhibited overt shy behaviors (e.g., nervousness, having difficulty making eye contact, speaking softly) while interacting with an off-camera acquaintance in a hallway. After watching the video clip, participants rated the target on several items that assessed overall impression, likeability, and social anxiety.

Participants were first brought into an AV-equipped classroom in groups of 10 or fewer. One of three student researchers then explained that participants would be taking part in a study about first impressions and would be asked to watch one of several interactions between two casual acquaintances. Following the video, they would complete a questionnaire that asked for their honest opinions of the person shown in the interaction. After participants completed a consent form and were reminded to pay close attention to the video clip (because it would only last for 30 s), participants watched a video with the following dialogue:

[Shy target enters hallway and recognizes an acquaintance. Throughout the interaction, the shy target exhibits overt shy behaviors (i.e., nervousness, difficulty making eye contact, speaking softly).]

Acquaintance [heard off screen]: Hey! Weren't you in one of my classes last semester?

Target: Umm. Yeah, hi.

Acquaintance: How's your semester going?

Target: Umm. Pretty well.

Acquaintance: Yeah? It's your senior year, right? Have you been really busy?

Target: Umm. Sort of.

Acquaintance: What have you been doing outside of class? Have you been going out much?

Target: Umm. Not really... [ONE OF FIVE STRATEGY STATEMENTS INCLUDED HERE] I have to get to my next class, so...

Acquaintance: Ok, well, I'll see you later.

The reply that lead to the conclusion of the interaction varied according to the strategy that the shy target enacted. In the *Control* condition (i.e., the *No Acknowledgement* condition) the target did not add anything extra to the conversation. In the *Acknowledgement* condition the target said, "I guess I'm kinda shy..." In the *Self-Disclosure* condition the target said, "I uhh... I just broke up with my boyfriend..." Importantly, Hastorf et al. (1979) found this particular relationship-related self-disclosure to be neutral in valence (i.e., neither positive nor negative). In the *Future Corrective Action* condition the target said, "I guess I'm kinda shy; I'm trying to work on it..." Finally, in the *Assured Liking* condition the shy target responded by saying, "I guess I'm kinda shy; sometimes people think I don't like them, but I really do."

After the video, participants were given a questionnaire that included a set of three dependent variables as well as several filler items. Each item required participants to rate the degree to which they felt that certain statements were characteristic of the shy target using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). The same 5-item index ($\alpha = .77$) used in Study 2 (i.e., motivation to make a good impression, interest in the conversation, overall impression, warmth, and friendliness) was used to measure participants' overall impression of the shy interaction partner, and the same single item was used to assess the likeability of the target. An additional six items ($\alpha = .73$) were included as an exploratory measure of the shy target's perceived level of social anxiety. These statements (some of which were reverse-scored) include: "The person shown is probably socially anxious," "The individual has good social skills," "I think that the individual is an outgoing person," "I think this person is insecure," "The individual seems shy," and "This person is probably confident." Finally, 13 items were included as filler to maintain the validity of the cover story and were not included in analysis.

The questionnaire also included demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) as well as a suspicion check item disguised as an evaluation of the study (i.e., "If you had to guess, what do you think the experimenters are studying and what do you think they expect to find?"); none of the participants correctly identified the purpose of the study or the manipulated variables. Finally, a measure of participants' shyness (i.e., Cheek & Buss, 1981) was included to rule out the potential moderating effects on shyness on perceptions of others. After participants completed their questionnaire they were thanked for their contribution and debriefed.

Results

As with Study 2, several planned *t*-tests were used to assess the relative effectiveness of self-presentation strategies for improving perceptions of shy individuals. Consistent with Study 1, participants' level of shyness did not moderate perceptions of the shy target. Also consistent with Studies 1 and 2, participant gender was not associated with the dependent variables and thus gender is not discussed further.

Manipulation check. Twenty-three participants (15.7% of the sample) in the 4 experimental groups failed the manipulation check. However, the pattern of results is the same between those who failed and passed the manipulation check (except where noted)¹, and thus all participants' data were included in the following analyses.

Effectiveness of acknowledging shyness. As predicted and as shown in Table 3, shy individuals made a better overall impressions when they acknowledged ($M = 2.53$) their shyness than when they did not ($M = 2.11$), $t(58) = -2.08$, $p = .021$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .54$. Unlike in Study 2, however, acknowledgement did not affect perceptions of the shy targets' likeability, $t < 1$, *ns*.

In an attempt to determine whether the effectiveness of acknowledgement was due to the target specifically disclosing shyness and not simply due to the shy target revealing personal information, we included a non-shy disclosure in Study 3. The results confirmed that shy individuals made a better overall impression when they acknowledged ($M = 2.53$) their shyness

¹ Importantly, 24 additional participants failed to correctly identify the absence of a strategy in the baseline condition but were still included in the analysis. It is likely that this failure is because participants falsely recalled the presence of a strategy due to a multiple-choice list from which they responded. Specifically, they may have failed to select the correct answer ("None of the above") because they interpreted the word disclosure in the manipulation check question as more than a verbal disclosure that the researchers had intended (i.e., although the shy individual did not verbally indicate they were shy, some participants in the no strategy condition may have chosen the disclosed shyness option because they target displayed shy behaviors).

than when they simply disclosed other personal information about themselves ($M = 2.16$), $t(57) = -1.84$, $p = .035$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .50$. As with Hastorf et al. (1979), targets who acknowledged their shyness were not perceived as more likeable than those who disclosed information unrelated to shyness, $t < 1$, *ns*.

Recall that we also included an exploratory measure of social anxiety. Interestingly, shy targets were perceived as more socially anxious when they acknowledged their shyness ($M = 6.34$) than when they disclosed personal information unrelated to shyness ($M = 5.91$), $t(57) = -2.11$, $p = .02$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .54$.

Effectiveness of implying future corrective action. As hypothesized, the analyses revealed an improvement in perceptions of shy individuals due to an implication of future corrective action as well. As shown in Table 3, shy targets made a better overall impression if they implied future corrective action ($M = 2.65$), than if they made no acknowledgement of their shyness ($M = 2.11$), $t(78) = -2.45$, $p = .009$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .63$. Shy targets were also liked more when they implied future corrective action ($M = 4.07$) than when they made no acknowledgement of their shyness ($M = 3.43$), $t(58) = -1.96$, $p = .028$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .51$.

Contrary to predictions and to the results of Study 2, the results of Study 3 suggested that an implication of future corrective action for individuals' shyness is equally effective as is merely acknowledging one's shyness. That is, when compared to simple acknowledgement, future corrective action did not affect overall impressions of shy targets, $t < 1$, *ns*; or their likeability, $t < 1$, *ns*.

Effectiveness of assured liking. Increased positive impressions of shy individuals were also seen when shy targets assured liking as compared to making no acknowledgement of

shyness at all. As illustrated in Table 3, the shy target made a better overall impression if she used the strategy of assured liking ($M = 3.13$) than if she made no acknowledgement of shyness ($M = 2.11$), $t(58) = -4.68$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = 1.21$. The shy target was also rated as more likable when she used the assured liking strategy ($M = 4.20$) than when she made no acknowledgement shyness ($M = 3.43$), $t(58) = -2.08$, $p = .021$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .54$.

As predicted, the results also indicate further improvement in perceptions of the shy target when she assured liking as compared to simply acknowledging her own shyness. That is, as shown in Table 3, the shy target made better overall impressions when she used the strategy of assured liking ($M = 3.13$) rather than the simple acknowledgement strategy ($M = 2.53$), $t(58) = -2.70$, $p = .005$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .70$. However, assured liking did not affect perceptions of shy targets' likeability, $t < 1$, *ns*, compared to acknowledgement alone.²

In contrast to Study 2, there was a difference in effectiveness between future corrective action and assured liking. Specifically, there was improvement in the overall impressions of the shy target when she assured liking ($M = 3.13$) rather than implied future corrective action ($M = 2.65$), $t(58) = -1.96$, $p = .028$ (one-tailed), Cohen's $d = .51$. However, assured liking of the interaction partner did not affect perceptions of shy targets' likeability, $t < 1$, *ns*, when compared to implying future corrective action for her shyness.

Discussion

2 Because the pattern of results for the shy target's likeability between the strategies of acknowledgment and assured liking differed between participants who correctly and incorrectly answered the manipulation check, the data from participants who failed the manipulation check were removed for this comparison. As such, the shy target was liked somewhat more when she assured liking ($M = 4.36$) than when she only acknowledged shyness ($M = 3.65$), $t(43) = .532$, $p = .051$.

Consistent with predictions, Study 3 replicated some of the results of Study 2 while addressing a number of its limitations. In general, the results of Study 3 support the contention that shy individuals can improve how others perceive them by using simple self-presentation strategies. Consistent with results from Study 2, the present findings suggest that the strategies of acknowledging shyness and indicating a willingness to undertake future corrective action are beneficial in improving overall impressions when compared to using no strategy at all. Similarly, the results revealed a further improvement in overall impression when the strategy of assured liking was used. Contrary to Study 2, however, future corrective action was found to be no more effective than merely acknowledging shyness. Moreover, although improved likeability was consistent across strategies in Study 2, in the present study an increase in likeability was found only when comparing the strategies of future corrective action or assured liking of an interaction partner with no strategy use.

Beyond replicating portions of past research, the results of Study 3 also created the foundation for a potentially important distinction between using an acknowledgement strategy and making a self-disclosure. That is, acknowledging shyness improved overall impressions more than did disclosing personal information that was unrelated to shyness. However, no difference was found between the two strategies regarding perceived likeability. As such, we were cannot completely disregard self-disclosure as a possible explanation for the effectiveness of acknowledgment. In addition, the result that participants perceived the shy target as more socially anxious when acknowledging shyness than when disclosing other information was unexpected. Nevertheless, this increase in perceived social anxiety may actually suggest an improvement in the accuracy of perceptions (i.e., shy individuals are indeed socially anxious in interactions; Hebl et al., 2000) and could lead to more understanding interactions regardless. In

essence, the results of Study 3 suggest that acknowledgement of shyness still enhances perceptions more than unrelated self-disclosures, but there exists a need for further clarifying research that explores a variety of other self disclosures.

The incongruities between Study 2 and 3 may be explained by the various limitations of the present stimuli, which need to be improved in both time and content. For example, each clip was approximately 30 to 40 s long; as such, it may be appropriate for future research to use lengthier clips in order to give participants more time to be affected by the strategy presented. Second, using an amateur actor to play the part of a shy individual may have created a somewhat inaccurate portrayal of shyness or may have been distracting for some participants; in fact, some participants commented that they could tell the target was an actor. On the other hand, the shy role may have been so intensely acted that it created a ceiling effect, which could potentially have masked the effects of the self-presentation strategies. Therefore, better preparation and training of the target in the future would likely strengthen the results of the present study. Finally, because Study 3 only asked participants to react to one particular shy person (i.e., a 20-year-old White female), it is limited by lack of stimulus sampling (Wells & Windschitl, 1999). That is, we cannot definitively say whether these strategies work for individuals who differ from the stimulus used in the present study. As a result, future research should pool a more diverse stimuli sample.

General Discussion

The present study sought to gain a better understanding of the strategies that shy individuals can use in managing others' impressions of them. As a whole, our results provide evidence that acknowledging shyness, implying future corrective action, and assuring liking can be effective in reducing the negative misperceptions of shy individuals. Across all three studies,

shy individuals were perceived more positively when they used one of the three strategies compared to when no strategy was used. Moreover, assuring interaction partners that they were liked despite the targets' overt shy behaviors was revealed to be an even further effective self-presentation strategy.

Our results also suggest that strategies for improving perceptions of stigmas (e.g., Hebl & Kleck, 2002) can be generalized to the area of shyness. However, the finding that acknowledging shyness resulted in an increase in participants' perceptions of shy individuals' social anxiety calls into question the assumption that shyness is directly related to overt stigmas. Thus, although stigma research provides a logical starting point, it is important for shyness to continue to be studied separately from other forms of social stigmas and other threats to positive interactions. Whereas the effectiveness of future corrective action has already shown to be effective in excuse-making research (Pontari et al., 2002), our findings provide a more specific view of how future corrective action can influence perceptions of shy individuals.

Beyond extending strategies from stigma and excuse-making research, the present results also provide evidence that basic principles of attraction (e.g., that individuals like others who indicate reciprocal liking; Curtis & Miller, 1986) can be applied to shy individuals. Essentially, our results suggest that when shy individuals indicate reciprocal liking for their interaction partners, they may actively decrease the underlying tension caused by their misperceived lack of interest in the conversation. As a result, our findings represent the first direct demonstration of the effectiveness of assured liking in enhancing perceptions of shy individuals. Moreover, despite contradicting evidence about which strategy—future corrective action or assured liking—is the *most* effective, it remains clear that each strategy (i.e., acknowledgement, future corrective

action, and assured liking) can be effective to some degree in improving perceptions of shy individuals.

Although these strategies had noteworthy effects on perceptions of shy people, the present studies had several inherent limitations. First, the sample was not diverse in age, education level, or ethnicity and was also unbalanced in gender—thus restricting the extent to which our findings generalize. Second, the present study may also be limited by the portion of participants (i.e., 15.7%) who failed the manipulation check. This slight inconsistency in the ability to recall the manipulated variable suggests that—for at least some participants—the strategies were not salient enough, and salience appears to be a particularly important component of improving impression formation (Ambady & Skowronski, 2008). Therefore, increased salience for the shy target's self-presentation strategy may help to further distinguish acknowledgement and self-disclosure in future research. On the other hand, this limitation does offer some explanation for the discrepancies found between Study 2 and Study 3.

An additional limitation can be found in the structure of the interactions in Studies 2 and 3, which were not organized in such a way that the shy target had the best possible chance to improve perceptions. That is, the shy target did not acknowledge her shyness until the end of the conversation, and past research suggests that acknowledgement at the beginning of a conversation is perceived more positively compared to acknowledgement at the end of a conversation (Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). Therefore, it is possible that perceptions of the shy target may have been even more positive and the effects clearer had the various self-presentation strategies been used at the beginning of the hypothetical conversation; as such, future research should seek to empirically test this possibility.

As indicated by our less than unequivocal results, some work remains before there is a full understanding of how shy individuals can create the most positive impressions possible. In the future, clarifying interpretations of the present findings may be found additional stigma management strategies. For example, the results of Study 1 as well as previous research (Hebl & Kleck, 2002) suggest that the controllability of a stigmatized trait plays a large role in impression formation. Specifically, Hebl and Kleck's (2002) research using physically disabled confederates revealed that participants were more likely to hire job applicants who acknowledged an uncontrollable stigma (i.e., physical disability) compared to those who acknowledged a controllable one (i.e., obesity). In addition, applicants who were liked the most were those who acknowledged a stigma that was typically perceived as uncontrollable; by contrast, applicants who had stigmas typically perceived as controllable were actually liked much less when they acknowledged than when they did not acknowledge. In short, Hebl and Kleck's (2002) research suggests that the effectiveness of acknowledgement depends not so much on the type of stigma but on the controllability of the stigma. Importantly, Study 1 revealed that most people view shyness as a controllable trait. Therefore, for acknowledgement to be maximally effective, strategic manipulations would need to emphasize the uncontrollability of shyness; otherwise, there may be a boomerang effect for acknowledgement, resulting in even worse perceptions of shy individuals.

Future research should also seek to incorporate an experimental manipulation that targets the use of positive non-verbal cues in an interaction. Study 1 suggested that non-verbal positive actions such as nodding and smiling also have the potential to improve perceptions (consistent with Leary and Buckley, 2000) of shy individuals. Therefore, the use of visual stimuli (i.e., prerecorded video interactions such as those in Study 3) would be well suited for comparing the

impressions made of individuals who simply display overt shy behaviors (e.g., have difficulty making eye contact) and individuals who attempt to make their interaction better by smiling and nodding.

Not only does the current study offer future theoretical implications, but it also leads to numerous practical applications. Recall, for example, that misperceptions of shy individuals often lead to awkward interactions that result in obstacles to developing new relationships (Hebl et al., 2000). The current study provides a practical response to this argument, and with the aid of the strategies evaluated in the present investigation, shy individuals may be better able to reduce negative impressions. As a result, they may then better equipped to reduce their anxiety and build relationships. An improved ability to build social relationships can further be extended to building professional relationships, thus providing shy individuals with more opportunities to improve their quality of both their personal and professional lives.

Importantly, it is our hope that future research is conducted to examine the effectiveness of these strategies from the perspective of the shy individual as well. That is, although our results provide clear support for the effectiveness of self-presentation strategies on others' perceptions of shy individuals, future research should determine the extent to which shy individuals are willing to implement these strategies in their everyday interactions and to explore the extent to which use of these strategies reduces anxiety. This extension of current research would have the potential of providing a more direct practical application to the lives of shy individuals.

In sum, the present study suggests simple ways to improve perceptions of the large portion of the population afflicted with shyness. These tactics become especially important when considering that even though shy individuals do not actually have, for example, lower IQs

(Gough & Thorne, 1986; Paulhus & Morgan, 1997), shyness in general may lead to lower self-esteem and may cause loneliness (Jones & Carpenter, 1986). If simple strategies such as acknowledgement, future corrective action, and assured liking can improve the interactions of shy individuals, as our findings suggest, there is great promise for the improved life satisfaction of those plagued by shyness. Although the therapists who spend countless hours to help shy individuals overcome this trait and the makers of awkward-moment-repelling iPhone applications may not be pleased with the progress of such research, combating shyness in simple, effective ways is indeed possible.

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Table 1

Perceived relative effectiveness of strategies in Study 1

Self-Presentation Strategy	Perceived Effectiveness
Future Corrective Action	3.71 _a
Acknowledgement by Other	3.69 _a
Other-Oriented Statement	3.34 _b
Self-acknowledgement	3.27 _b
Self-Focused Statement	3.22 _c
Nodding	3.12 _c
Smiling	3.04 _c
Claimed Uncontrollability	2.67 _d
Low Effort	2.20 _e

Note. Means with differing subscripts are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2

Average ratings of shy target's overall impression and likeability by condition in Study 2

	Self-Presentation Condition			
	No Strategy	Acknowledgement	Future Corrective Action	Assured Liking
Overall Impression	2.49 _a	3.07 _b	3.71 _c	3.98 _c
Likeability	3.23 _a	3.66 _b	4.12 _c	4.09 _c

Note. Means with differing subscripts within rows are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 3

Average ratings of shy target's overall impression and likeability by condition in Study 3

	Self-Presentation Condition			
	No Strategy	Acknowledgement	Future Corrective Action	Assured Liking
Overall Impression	2.11 _a	2.53 _b	2.65 _b	3.13 _c
Likeability	3.43 _a	3.90 _a	4.07 _b	4.20 _b

Note. Means with differing subscripts within rows are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level.