

## The impact of self-handicapping strategies use on the impression formation

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Self-handicapping is usually defined as any claim, action or choice of performance setting that enhances the opportunity to externalize (or excuse) failure and to internalize (accept credit for) success. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of using different self-handicapping strategies on formation of the impression about the person. We collected data from 365 participants, whose task was to read a story about the person who failed on the task delegated to him/her, and to appraise that person using a set of items. The type of self-handicapping strategy (self-reported internal, self-reported external, behavioural internal, behavioural external, without self-handicapping) was varied between participants.

The results revealed a negative impact of using behavioural self-handicapping on the impression of the actor, especially in the case of behavioural internal self-handicapping. On the other hand, self-reported external self-handicapping emerged as a very efficient strategy for positive self-presentation, while self-reported internal self-handicapping had some positive and some negative effects. Generally, the impact of some self-handicapping strategy was negative to the extent to which the reason for failure was perceived as internal, controllable and stable. The results were discussed in the context of distinction between behavioural and self-reported self-handicapping strategies.

*Key words:* impression management, self-handicapping, impression formation, causal attribution

Self-handicapping is usually defined as any action, claim or choice of performance setting that enhances the opportunity to externalize (or excuse) failure and to internalize (accept credit for) success (Shepperd & Arkin, 1990). Therefore, a self-handicap provides a priori non-threatening causal explanation for potential failure or, in case of success, makes one's performance seem even more impressive. According to Berglas and Jones (1978), the self-handicapper is taking advantage of the discounting and augmenting principles of attribution proposed by Kelley in 1971. According to the discounting principle, when an outcome is associated with more than one plausible cause, the attribution to any one of these causes will be weaker than if the cause stood alone. In contrast, the augmentation principle indicates that the attribution of causality to a given agent is strengthened if the outcome occurred despite of inhibiting influences.

Self-handicapping can be viewed along two different dimensions. Recently, a distinction has been made between two different kinds of self-handicapping: behavioural (or acquired) self-handicapping and self-reported (or claimed) self-handicapping (Leary & Shepperd, 1986). Behavioural self-handicaps refer to situations in which the self-handicap-

per actively constructs impediments that would be expected to reduce the probability of performing well on a task but that provide him with a plausible excuse for the failure. On the other hand, self-reported handicaps refer to situations in which the self-handicapper claims that some handicapping circumstances exist (a claim that may or may not be true), but he does not engage in behaviours that set such a handicap in place (Snyder & Smith, 1982; Snyder, Smith, Augelli, & Ingram, 1985; Snyder & Smith, 1986). Second, handicaps may differ in terms of whether they introduce ability-irrelevant internal attributions or ability-irrelevant external attributions (Shepperd & Arkin, 1990). Taking these two dimensions together, self-handicaps can be classified into four quadrants: self-reported internal, self-reported external, behavioural internal and behavioural external.

There is some disagreement on whether self-handicapping is mainly motivated by the desire for self-protection (to control self-attributions) or by desire to manage impression (to control attributions of other people). According to Berglas and Jones (1978), the basic purpose behind such strategies is the control of actor's self-attributions of competence, i.e. self-handicapping is focused at the actor's own self-concept. On the other hand, some other authors (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982) consider self-handicapping as mainly a self-presentational strategy, i.e. strategy which is designed to reduce the probability that others will make negative attributions of the actor's poor performance. However, it is

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plausible that self-handicapping may at time have one and than another main purpose (Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Hobden & Pliner, 1995).

Although a great deal is understood about the factors influencing self-handicapping and about the forms self-handicaps may take, much less is known about the impression that will be formed about the person who is using some self-handicapping strategy. Because influencing the impression of others is one of the two proposed sources of motivation for self-handicapping, the present research was designed to examine the impression management implications of self-handicapping by assessing observers' attributions about both, actor's ability and their assessment of actor's more personal characteristics.

On the base of Kelley's attribution principles, the presence of handicap is supposed to decrease the probability of attributing failure to the lack of ability, as well as to increase probability of attributing success to the ability of the actor. In other words, when actors use some self-handicapping strategies, observers will assign them with more credits for the successful performance and less blame for a poor performance. In this sense, the use of self-handicapping strategy is supposed to protect the impression of actor's competence.

However, these attribution principles do not provide the explanation of how the use of self-handicapping strategies will affect the impression about personal characteristics of the self-handicapper. One theory that could assist in understanding of how the use of self-handicapping strategies can affect assessment of other characteristics of the actor is Weiner's (1995) attribution theory of social conduct, which describes interconnections among causal attributions, responsibility judgements, anger, sympathy and a variety of social responses.

According to this theory, dimension of causal controllability is of crucial importance in the process of interpersonal motivation. If the cause of a negative event is perceived as controllable, then that person is perceived responsible for the outcome. Responsibility for a negative outcome, in turn, gives rise to anger, which, in turn, gives rises to negative responses. On the other hand, if the cause of the negative event is perceived as uncontrollable, the person will not be held accountable or personally responsible for it. The lack of responsibility elicits sympathy and, in turn, a prosocial reaction. These two possible sequences can be shown in the following way:

- failure  $\Rightarrow$  controllable cause  $\Rightarrow$  person is judged as responsible  $\Rightarrow$  anger
- failure  $\Rightarrow$  uncontrollable cause  $\Rightarrow$  person is judged as not responsible  $\Rightarrow$  sympathy

Besides controllability, responsibility inferences are also related to perception of locus of causality, where internal locus of causality is associated with higher assigned responsibility (Weiner, Struthers, & Allred, 1998). Finally, in addition to controllability and locus of causality, the dimension

of stability can also be important, due to its influence on beliefs about future success and failure, which can be represented as follows:

- failure  $\Rightarrow$  unstable cause  $\Rightarrow$  high (er) expectancy of future success
- failure  $\Rightarrow$  stable cause  $\Rightarrow$  low expectancy of future success

Keeping in mind the described theoretical considerations, we can make the general presumption that the use of self-handicapping is a risky strategy, which can maybe protect the perception of actor's competence in the eyes of the observer, but can result in the negative assessment of actor's personal characteristics to the extent to which a handicap is perceived as controllable by the actor, internal and stable in time.

## METHOD

### *Participants and procedure*

A sample of 365 (175 male and 190 female) employees of a business corporation (all University graduates) participated in the study on the voluntary basis. The materials (consisting of one, randomly chosen scenario and the scales for the assessment of impression formation) were sent via electronic mail to all the employees with the university degree in one company. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to examine how impressions about other people in the work situation are formed, with the short explanation of the importance of studies in this domain.

Participants were offered the opportunity to be informed about the results of research if they were interested in the findings. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were guaranteed complete confidentiality and anonymity. No personal information (except gender) was supposed to be written on the materials, and completed materials could have been sent back to the author via internal mail, which guarantees complete anonymity.

### *Instruments*

*Scenarios.* Five scenarios for the manipulation of the use of different self-handicapping strategies were created. In all of the scenarios, the actor in the story failed on the task delegated to him. The scenarios were written to be relevant to the sample. The type of self-handicapping strategy used by actor was different in each scenario: self-reported internal self-handicapping (claiming physical symptoms), self-reported external self-handicapping (claiming task difficulty), behavioural internal self-handicapping (refusing the opportunity for education), behavioural external self-handicapping (accepting invitation for the business dinner and not

having enough rest night before an important task), and, finally, the situation without self-handicapping. To ensure that manipulations of different types of self-handicapping strategies were valid, we conducted a pre-test with 23 psychologist and psychology students. The results of the pre-test confirmed the suitability of the designed scenarios for the manipulation of self-handicapping strategies.

*Measures.* Impression formation was assessed on 12 bipolar scales, which are typically used in the studies in this domain. The bipolar scales were *selfish - unselfish*, *likable - dislikeable*, *introverted - extraverted*, *insecure - self-confident*, *lazy - hardworking*, *intelligent - unintelligent*, *nervous - relaxed*, *competent - incompetent*, *popular - unpopular*, *tolerant - intolerant*, *honest - dishonest* and *ambitious - unambitious* (Forgas, 1992). For all the dependent measures, 7-point scales were used, ranging from -3 to 3. In addition, in order to get information about the perception of different situations on Weiner's causal dimensions, the participants were asked to rate to what extent was the cause of the failure something that reflected an aspect of the employee (-3=completely internal locus) or of the situation (3=completely external locus), to what extent was it uncontrollable or controllable by the employee (from -3=completely uncontrollable to 3= completely controllable), and to what extent was it unstable or stable in time (from -3=completely unstable to 3= completely stable).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of all the employees contacted, about 30% participated in the study. There was no significant difference in the number of participants in different self-handicapping situations ( $\chi^2(4, N = 365) = 0.466; p > .05$ ).

To create a smaller set of nonredundant dependent measures, we performed a principal-components factor analysis of assessments on 12 bipolar impression formation scales, with Varimax rotation of all factors specified to Eigenvalues  $> 1.0$ . The analysis yielded three factors. The first factor accounted for 23.8% of the variance. It had the highest loadings on the unselfish, likable, tolerant, and honest scales and was labelled *Agreeableness* due to its similarity with one the factors in the five factor model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1990). Furthermore, this factor also had significant loadings on the competent, hardworking, intelligent, and popular scales. The second factor accounted for 19.1% of the variance and had the highest loadings on the intelligent, competent, hardworking, and ambitious scales. It was labelled *Adequacy*, since this factor covers the traits that are closely related to work behaviour, and which are desirable in the work environment of the participants in our study. The third factor accounted for 18.9% of the variance and was labelled *Adaptation*, marked by the relaxed, extraverted, self-confident, and popular scales. The label for this factor came from the relation with emotional stability of the

Table 1  
Agreeableness, Adequacy, and Adaptation in different self-handicapping situations

SITUATION	Agreeableness		Adequacy		Adaptation		N
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Behavioral external handicap	-0.12	0.951	-0.38	0.814	0.81	0.722	71
Behavioral internal handicap	-0.84	0.752	-0.48	0.871	0.21	0.772	78
Control situation	0.05	0.903	0.80	0.750	-0.93	0.807	72
Self-reported external handicap	0.50	0.936	0.27	1.036	0.35	0.981	71
Self-reported internal handicap	0.48	0.808	-0.16	0.937	-0.44	0.670	73

actor on one hand, and acceptance from the other people, on the another hand. Judgements on the 12 scales were combined into these new variables - Agreeableness, Adequacy and Adaptation - and most of the further analyses were carried out on these measures. Means and standard deviations on these three factors for different self-handicapping situations are shown in Table 1.

### *The impact of different self-handicapping strategies on impression of the actor*

The series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to test the hypothesis about the differences between different self-handicapping situations on each of the three factors (Table 2). The self-handicapping situation had a significant effect on judgements on each of the three scales, Agreeableness ( $F(4,360) = 29.91; p < .01$ ), Adequacy ( $F(4,360) = 25.64; p < .01$ ), and Adaptation ( $F(4,360) = 53.44; p < .01$ ).

On the Agreeableness factor, Scheffé's test ( $p < .05$ ) revealed that observers formed the most positive impression of actors in situations of self-reported handicapping, compared to situations of behavioural self-handicapping and control situation (situation without self-handicapping) - Figure 1. The actor in the situation of behavioural internal self-handicapping was rated the least favourably ( $M = -0.84$ ), i.e. more negative than actors in all other situations. The ratings of the

Table 2

Results of ANOVAs with self-handicapping situations as independent variables and assessments on Agreeableness, Adequacy, and Adaptation factors as dependent variables

Main effect	df	F
Agreeableness	4/360	29.91***
Adequacy	4/360	25.64***
Adaptation	4/360	53.44***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

actor in the situation of behavioural external self-handicapping ( $M = -0.12$ ) did not differ significantly from the control situation ( $M = 0.05$ ), but were less favourable than the ratings of the actors in situations of self-reported external ( $M = 0.50$ ) and self-reported internal ( $M = 0.48$ ) self-handicapping. Thus, the use of self-reported handicaps seems to have positive influence on observer's impression of the actor's personal characteristics covered by Agreeableness factor. Actor in the situation of behavioural external self-handicapping did not differ from control situation on Agreeableness factor, while the actor in the situation of behavioural internal self-handicapping was rated less favourably than the actor in the non-self-handicapping conditions.

According to Scheffé's test ( $p < .05$ ), on the Adequacy factor the actor in the control situation was evaluated most positively compared to actors in all other situations ( $M = 0.80$ ). The non-handicapping situation is followed by the self-reported self-handicapping situations; no difference between self-reported internal ( $M = -0.16$ ) and self-reported external ( $M = 0.27$ ) self-handicapping was found. However, the actor in the situation of the self-reported external self-handicapping was evaluated more positively than the actors in the behavioural self-handicapping situations ( $M = -0.38$  for behavioural external and  $M = -0.48$  for behavioural internal self-handicapping), while the situation of self-reported internal self-handicapping did not differ significantly from the behavioural self-handicapping situations. Thus, the use of behavioural self-handicapping strategies had a clear negative impact on the evaluations on the Adequacy factor. Also, it could be said that to some extent using of self-reported self-handicapping strategies fosters more negative evaluations on the Adequacy factor. However, if we compare the ratings on particular items, it can be said that such results primarily emerge from the differences in evaluation on ambitious – un-ambitious ( $F(4,360) = 14.3; p < .01$ ) and lazy-hardworking scales ( $F(4,360) = 65.7; p < .01$ ), where the actor in the control situation was rated more favourable than the actors in all other situations. On the other hand, the evaluations on the scales related to intelligence and competence of the actor are the same as in the control situation

(for self-reported internal self-handicapping), or even significantly higher (self-reported external self-handicapping), as shown in Figure 2.

The comparison of different situations on the intelligent – unintelligent and competent – incompetent scale is particularly important, since the idea of self-handicapping strategies is to decrease probability of attributing failure to the lack of ability, i.e. to protect the impression of actor's competence (Berglas & Jones, 1978). In our study, only the self-reported external self-handicapping was efficient in terms of Kelley's discounting principle. In other words, only in this situation was the actor assessed as more competent than the actor in non-handicapping conditions. It is possible that, on the basis of the written scenario, the observer forms the general impression of the actor which, in turn, impacts the evaluations on each particular scale. So, it could be that the appraisal of the competence of the actor was affected by the general impression of the actor, without taking into account the alternative explanation for the failure. Namely, particular characteristics of the person are perceived as parts of the whole, and not as independent and separate characteristics. The way the scale was organized could have contributed to such results, since the ratings of competence and intelligence were a part of the impression formation scale.

A second possible explanation for such results was given by Rhodewalt et al. (1995). Their findings also indicated that observers are not always willing to discount self-handicapper's poor performance. In their study, participants have objectively evaluated the same performance as less favourable if it came from a self-handicapper than if it came from a non-handicapper. Furthermore, the lower evaluations of performance were associated with lower evaluations of actor's ability. Based on such results, the authors suggested an additional pathway by which self-handicapping has a negative consequence on the impression of the actor. According to them, it is possible that, in situations when the definition of the outcome is ambiguous, self-handicapping forms the part of the context in which the performance of a person is evaluated, which, in turn, has the impact on the attributions

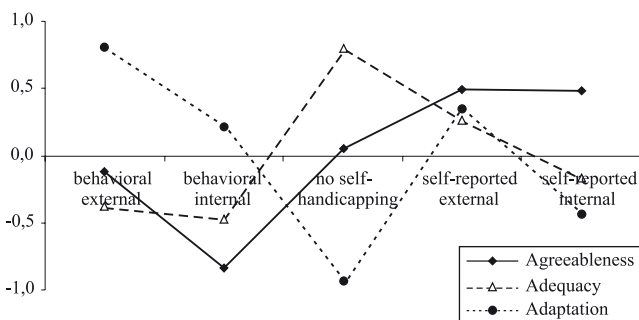


Figure 1. Comparison of different self-handicapping situations on impression measures

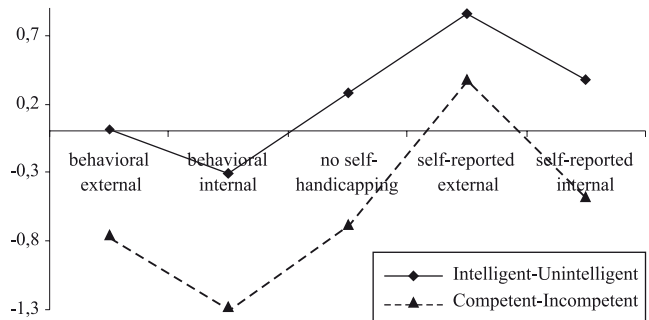


Figure 2. Comparison of different self-handicapping situations on Competent-Incompetent and Intelligent-Unintelligent scales

about the ability. On the other hand, in studies confirming the discounting principle (Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; Smith & Strube, 1991), the outcome was an unambiguous success of failure, e.g. a grade on an exam.

In terms of the level of ambiguity of achieved results, our study was to some extent similar to the study of Rhodewalt et al. (1995). Namely, in the scenarios it was written that “desired results were not achieved”, but it was not strictly defined to what extent were they unsuccessful. That is why the explanation given by the mentioned authors could serve for the interpretation of results in this study. The fact that only the actors in self-reported external self-handicapping conditions were assessed as competent is not incongruent with this explanation. Namely, in that situation, the self-handicapper claimed the existence of “circumstances that are adverse for the company”, which creates the context in which it is not easy to achieve success, so the subsequent failure can be perceived as smaller than it would be perceived otherwise, and the actor is perceived as more competent than the actors in other situations.

On Adaptation factor, Scheffé’s test ( $p < .05$ ) revealed that most positively evaluated was the actor in the situation of behavioural external self-handicapping ( $M = 0.81$ ). It was followed by self-reported external ( $M = 0.35$ ) and behavioural internal self-handicapping ( $M = 0.21$ ), which did not differ significantly. Actor in the situation of self-reported internal self-handicapping was rated significantly less favourably ( $M = -0.44$ ), and finally, the actor in non-handicapping situation received the lowest ratings ( $M = -0.93$ ). In sum, the actors who used some self-handicapping strategy received higher ratings on the Adaptation factor, and this trend was particularly emphasized for behavioural external and self-reported external self-handicapping situations.

In sum, the actor who failed without using self-handicapping strategies was perceived as hard-working, ambitious but relatively incompetent person, fairly nervous, introverted and insecure. This actor was neither liked, nor disliked by the observer, i.e. he was perceived as relatively neutral on Agreeableness scales.

The actors who used behavioural self-handicapping strategies were perceived equally (in)competent as non-handicapping people, but on the most of other scales these actors were perceived quite opposite from the actor in the control situation. Thus, the actors using behavioural self-handicapping were seen as lazy and un-ambitious (especially the situation of behavioural internal self-handicapping), but relaxed and self-confident. Furthermore, using of behavioural internal self-handicapping had large negative impact on the evaluations on the Agreeableness factor (unselfish, likable, tolerant, honest), while the situation of behavioural external self-handicapping did not differ significantly from the control situation on these scales.

Since self-reported internal self-handicapping actually means the use of symptoms and personal weaknesses for self-handicapping purpose, it was not unexpected that the

actor in this situation was perceived as relatively insecure and nervous. Further, this actor was perceived similarly (in)competent as the actor in the control situation, and also as less ambitious and hard-working, but at the same time as more popular, extroverted and tolerant person than the non-handicapping actor.

Finally, only for the actor in self-reported external self-handicapping conditions the evaluations on all three factors were positioned on the positive part of the scales. This actor was perceived as more competent than a non-handicapping actor, and was also seen as secure, relaxed and extraverted person. In addition, the observers liked this actor more than the actor in the control situation, and he was also perceived more favourably on different personality characteristics. The only scales where the actors in self-reported external self-handicapping conditions received less favourable evaluation than the actor in the control situation were the lazy – hardworking and ambitious – un-ambitious scales. However, the differences that emerge between control situation and all other situations on these two scales could also be partly explained with the operationalization of the control situation, which was not completely neutral. Namely, the actor in the control situation was described as someone who “devoted all his time to the preparation for the presentation”, which implies hard-working and ambitious person. It is possible that with different operationalization of the control situation this difference in favour of control situation would not emerge.

These findings suggest that the efficacy of using self-handicapping strategies for self-presentational purposes could be primarily limited to the self-reported self-handicapping, rather than behavioural self-handicapping strategies, which is congruent with both, some theoretical considerations and some earlier findings in this domain (Leary & Shepperd, 1986; Hirt, Deppe, & Gordon, 1991). For example, in research of Rhodewalt et al. (1995) the target person was rated less favourably on different personality characteristics (friendly, pleasant, egoistic, mean, etc.) when the self-handicap was low intended effort compared to self-handicap claiming anxiety or medical impairment. Furthermore, the objectively same performance was rated more negatively when it came from a self-handicapper claiming low intended effort.

Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) had observers view a videotape in which the target either did or did not go to the movie rather than studying for an exam. So, they examined the impact of behavioural internal self-handicapping. The findings showed that attributions regarding the ability were positively influenced by the presence of a self-handicap, but the self-handicapper was perceived as less motivated, less concerned about his performance and as a less desirable study partner. According to these results, using of behavioural internal self-handicapping has a mixed impact: it protects the perception of actor’s abilities, but leads to more negative attributions about personal characteristics.

Cox and Giuliano (1999) examined reactions of the observers to self-handicapping behaviour as a function of the type of strategy employed (behavioural or self-reported self-handicapping) and the consequences that followed for the actor. The findings showed that participants reacted most favourably when self-reported self-handicappers received positive consequences and when behavioural self-handicappers received negative consequences. In addition, the participants showed more respect for the actor using self-reported self-handicapping, comparing to the actor using behavioural self-handicapping.

Finally, Crant (1996) explored the impact of using self-reported external self-handicapping in organizational context, which was operationalized equally as in our study (claiming task difficulty). Observers blamed the actors less, and they formed more positive impression of them in situation when the actors offered self-handicaps than in situations when they did not.

*Comparison of different self-handicapping situations on Weiner's causal dimensions*

In order to examine whether the different self-handicapping situations vary along Weiner's causal dimensions (locus of causality, controllability, stability) we performed a set of one-way ANOVAs (Table 3). The significant effects emerged on the two dimensions: locus of causality ( $F(4,360) = 22.16; p < .01$ ) and controllability ( $F(4,360) = 8.13; p < .01$ ); but there was no difference between these situations on the stability dimension ( $F(4,360) = 1.19; p > .05$ ). The post-hoc analysis with Sheffé's test was conducted.

Regarding the locus of causality, failure in the situations of behavioural external ( $M = -0.18$ ) and self-reported external ( $M = 0.37$ ) self-handicapping was viewed as more external compared to the situations of behavioural internal ( $M = -1.45$ ), self-reported internal self-handicapping ( $M = -0.92$ ), as well as control situation ( $M = -1.00$ ). For controllability, failure in the situation of behavioural internal self-handicapping ( $M = 1.35$ ) was perceived as more controllable than in situation of self-reported external ( $M = 0.15$ ) and self-reported internal ( $M = 0.51$ ) self-handicapping. Furthermore, the situation of behavioural external self-handicapping

(0.96) was perceived as more controllable than self-reported external self-handicapping situation. Finally, the non-handicapping situation ( $M = 0.88$ ) was perceived as more controllable than self-reported external self-handicapping situation.

*Prediction of evaluations on impression measures on the base of Weiner's causal dimensions*

In order to examine the possibility to predict the impression that will be formed about the person on the basis of Weiner's causal dimensions, which could be helpful in getting a more general conclusion about the impact of different self-handicapping strategies on the impression of the actor, we conducted regression analyses. Independent variables were Weiner's causal dimensions and dependent variables were results on Agreeableness, Adequacy and Adaptation factors. The results are shown in Table 4.

All three causal dimensions appeared as significant predictors for the evaluations on the Agreeableness factor ( $F(3,361) = 20.92; R^2 = .14; p < .01$ ). Locus of causality explains 5.77% of the variance, controllability 7.27%, and stability 1.77% of the variance. In sum, participants gave higher ratings on the Agreeableness factor, i.e. the actor was perceived as more likable, honest, tolerant and un-selfish when the cause of failure was perceived as more external, less controllable and less stable in time.

The only significant predictor of the ratings on Adequacy factor was the locus of causality, which explained 4% of the variance. It means that participants gave higher ratings on this factor and perceived the actor as more competent, ambitious and hard-working when the cause of failure was perceived as more external. Locus of causality was the only significant predictor for the evaluations on the Adaptation factor, explaining 9% of the variance. Participants tended to give higher rating on this factor and to perceive the actor as more confident, relaxed, popular and more extraverted when the locus of causality was perceived as more external.

Table 3

Results of ANOVAs with self-handicapping situations as independent variables and assessment on Weiner's causal dimensions as dependent variables

Main effect	df	F
Locus of causality	4/360	22.16***
Controllability	4/360	8.13***
Stability	4/360	1.19

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 4

Regression analyses with Weiner's causal dimensions as predictor variables, and results on Agreeableness, Adequacy, and Adaptation factors as criteria

Variables	Agreeableness	Adequacy	Adaptation
	$\beta$	$\beta$	$\beta$
Locus of causality	.197**	.194**	.326**
Control-lability	-.233**		
Stability	-.118*		
$R = .38***; R^2 = .14; R = .21***; R^2 = .04; R = .30***; R^2 = .09;$ $F(3,361) = 20.92 \quad F(3,361) = 5.78 \quad F(3,361) = 12.32$			

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

In sum, these findings suggest that the participants will give more favourable ratings for the actor's personality characteristics to the extent to which the cause of the failure is seen as less controllable, more external and less stable in time. Thus, we can presume that the impact of using some self-handicapping strategy on impression of the person will depend on the way in which the cause of failure is perceived on all three Weiner's causal dimensions. These results confirm the explained presumptions based on the Weiner's model of social motivation. (Weiner, 1995; Weiner et al., 1998).

### CONCLUSIONS

According to the definition of self-handicapping, the purpose of this strategy is to protect the positive image of oneself, both private and public. Our results suggest that the efficacy of using self-handicapping strategies for self-presentational purposes is shown only for self-reported external self-handicapping. Self-reported internal self-handicapping also has some positive consequences for the evaluation of the personality characteristics, but we did not manage to confirm its efficacy in terms of protection of the competence of the actor. And finally, the impact of behavioural self-handicapping on the impression about the actor was rather negative.

These results support some theoretical considerations (Leary & Shepperd, 1986; Hirt et al., 1991), which claim that behavioural and self-reported self-handicapping are not interchangeable strategies, but constitute distinctly different self-protective behaviours. Leary and Shepperd (1986) argued that the term self-handicapping is used by different authors to refer to two different phenomena. Thus, they recommended two different terms (behavioural or self-reported self-handicapping) and emphasized the need to precisely define what kind of self-handicapping is studied in the particular case. Namely, as it was already said, in case of behavioural self-handicapping a person constructs handicap that augment non-ability attributions in case of failure. On the other hand, in case of self-reported self-handicapping a person claims illness, anxiety or some other state or symptom that can explain poor performance, and provides attributionally relevant information that discounts ability attributions for possible failure.

Having in mind these differences, Hirt et al. (1991) suggested that these two different types of self-handicapping may differ in terms of primary motives underlying their use. According to them, self-reported handicaps are more likely to have primarily self-presentational function, because they do not have necessarily negative impact on performance. On the other hand, behavioural handicaps are more likely to have primarily self-protective function, since they may decrease chances for success, but they make the process of drawing attributions about performance ambiguous not just for the observer but also for the actor.

Our results give support to the described distinction between behavioural and self-reported handicaps, confirming the efficacy of self-handicapping behaviour for the self-presentational purposes exclusively for self-reported handicaps. In addition, our results suggest that the efficacy of some self-handicapping strategy in terms of self-presentation can, to some extent, be predicted on the basis of its position on Weiner's causal dimensions - generally, a self-handicapping strategy will be more effective to the extent to which the reason for failure was perceived as external, uncontrollable and unstable in time.

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