On the Manipulative Behavior of Low Machiavellians: Feigning Incompetence to "Sandbag" an Opponent

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Three decades of research has revealed that people scoring high in Machiavellianism (high Machs) are manipulative and domineering. However, the domineering style of high Machs may preclude them from using manipulations that require a display of weakness. The authors examined whether Machiavellianism moderates the use of sandbagging—a manipulative strategy in which people display low ability to induce an opponent to reduce effort or lower his or her guard. In Experiment 1, participants ($N = 198$) reported that they would reduce effort in response to a disadvantaged opponent and anticipated that their opponent would behave similarly if they were disadvantaged. In Experiment 2 ($N = 66$), low Machs in competition sandbagged their opponent when they were uncertain that they could otherwise beat him. High Machs, in contrast, preferred a show of strength to a show of weakness, displaying high ability even when sandbagging might have been an advantageous strategy.

Who is likely to be more manipulative, high Machs (people scoring high in Machiavellianism) or low Machs (people scoring low in Machiavellianism)? Three decades of research suggest that the answer is obvious: high Machs. High Machs are more likely than low Machs to believe that others are manipulatable, to practice manipulation on others, and to succeed in their manipulations (for reviews, see Fehr, Samson, & Paulhus, 1992; Geis, 1978; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Indeed, the name *Machiavelli* has become synonymous with guile, deceit, and manipulation.

The term *Machiavellian* originates from the name of Niccolo Machiavelli, the author of the 1513 treatise, *The Prince*. Machiavelli proposed that others should be regarded as vicious, lazy, and untrustworthy and that a ruler should use cruelty, exploitation, and deceit to maintain power. More recently, Christie (1970) proposed that the Machiavellian worldview had three distinct themes. The first theme involves using manipulative strategies such as deceit and flattery in interpersonal relations. The second theme involves a cynical perception of others as weak and untrustworthy. The third theme involves an indifference toward conventional morality in thought and action (Fehr et al., 1992).

High Machs appear decidedly more manipulative than low Machs. In experimental settings that condoned manipulating a fellow participant, high Machs have practiced a larger number and greater variety of manipulative behaviors than have low Machs (Geis, Christie, & Nelson, 1970). They also tend to be more persuasive in bargaining and in mock courtroom situations (Christie & Geis, 1970b; Huber & Neale, 1986; Sheppard & Vidmar, 1980). In their self-reports, high Machs tend to disclose using strategies such as manipulating others' emotions and persuading others to do what the high Mach wants while still believing that the idea originated with them (Falbo, 1977).

Does this mean that high Machs are manipulative and low Machs are not or that high Machs are always more manipulative than low Machs? We believe the answer is no and argue that, in some settings, low Machs can be just as manipulative as high Machs. However, the manipulation tactics that high and low Machs prefer may differ. We focus specifically on a deceptive, manipulative strategy used in competitive settings called *sandbagging* and propose that low Machs are more inclined than high Machs to sandbag an opponent. Before explaining why, we first define what sandbagging is and what it is not.

Sandbagging

Sandbagging involves displaying oneself as an unworthy foe for the purpose of undermining or sandbagging an opponent's effort or inducing an opponent to let down his or her guard. The goal of the sandbagger is to lull an opponent into a false sense of security that victory is inevitable or complete. Anecdotal examples of sandbagging are abundant and are illustrated by the example in which a sprinter feigns a limp on her way to the starting blocks in the hopes of tricking an opponent into responding less quickly to the starter's gun. Sandbagging is also evident among wrestling playmates where the one who is losing may claim injury, pain, or "uncle" in an attempt to lull the other into letting down his or her guard.

As we define the strategy, winning, perhaps even surviving, depends on persuading an adversary to underestimate the sandbagger's ability or strength. This is typically accomplished by the sandbagger displaying him or herself as defeated, injured or

ill, or as relatively incompetent, unprepared, unable, or otherwise ill equipped to provide the opponent with much competition. By inducing the opponent to reduce effort or lower his or her guard, the sandbagger can pounce on the opening, thereby increasing the likelihood of winning or otherwise coming out on top. Sandbagging, of course, need not require displaying a blatantly negative self-image. It simply requires looking weaker or less able than one really is. It is, for example, a display of less competence, not necessarily incompetence.

Sandbagging is not exclusively a human phenomenon. In the animal kingdom, some species of birds will feign injury (typically a broken wing) in an attempt to draw a potential predator away from their nests. Perhaps the ultimate display of weakness or inability is found among spiders and possums who, on occasion, will feign dead in the hope that a predator will lose interest and move on to more animate or appetizing prey (Owen, 1980). In these illustrations, the organism's very survival or the survival of its offspring depends on influencing a predator to believe something other than the truth, resulting in a reduction of effort or a redirection of those efforts elsewhere.

There are other situations that are distinct from sandbagging in which individuals might portray themselves as relatively weak or unable. For example, people might present themselves as incapable to solicit aid or assistance from powerful others (i.e., supplication; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980). Alternatively, people may strategically fail on an initial performance task to lower audience expectations and thereby create lower, more obtainable standards (Baumgardner & Brownlee, 1987; Weary & Williams, 1990). People may also present themselves less positively to achieve (or escape) some outcome controlled by the target such as getting a job or avoiding an onerous task (Braginsky, Braginsky, & Ring, 1969; Kowalski & Leary, 1990; Stires & Jones, 1969). Finally, people may report that they will perform poorly to brace themselves for the possibility of an undesired outcome (Shepperd, Ouellette, & Fernandez, 1996). Sandbagging, however, differs from these other behaviors in that sandbagging is a strategy used in competition to influence the perceptions and behaviors of an opponent. None of these alternative strategies applies specifically to competition. In addition, sandbagging differs from these other strategies in the goal. The goal of sandbagging is to convince an opponent to reduce effort or to lower his or her guard. By contrast, the goal of supplication is to receive aid from a powerful other; the goal of strategic failure is to lower audience expectations to a reasonable, achievable level; the goal of bracing is to reduce personal disappointment associated with a possible undesired outcome.

Sandbagging is also distinct from self-handicapping (Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990; Jones & Berglas, 1978). Self-handicapping is the preemptive claim or creation of a performance impediment that reduces the likelihood of success on a forthcoming task yet provides a nonability explanation for failure should it occur. With self-handicapping, the task may or may not involve a competition. Moreover, the handicap is not intended to influence an opponent's effort or induce an opponent to lower his or her guard. Instead, the goal of the handicapper is to deflect low ability attributions for an anticipated failure.

Even in competition, people may occasionally present themselves as weak, incompetent, or low in ability for reasons other than influencing another's effort. For example, a country club golfer or tennis player may perform poorly or lose in the weeks prior to a tournament to secure a higher handicap or a less competitive performance bracket. The goal of the country club golfer or tennis player is not to undermine an opponent's effort or induce him or her to lower his or her guard. Rather the goal is to stack the deck in one's favor by obtaining an unfair advantage or an unworthy opponent for competition.

Darrel Royal, the former football coach of the University of Texas Longhorns, provides still another variation. Under his coaching, the Longhorns were a perennial top-10 team that repeatedly won the college football national championship. Yet prior to virtually every football game, regardless of the opponent, Coach Royal would report to newspapers how poorly his team was doing, how his players were plagued by injuries, and how formidable the opposing team was. For some games, these reports seemed reasonable. For games in which the Longhorns were heavily favored, however, the reports were comical. It seems unlikely, especially in these latter cases, that Coach Royal made these claims to influence the opponent's efforts. Instead, the reports likely represented an attempt to generate fan interest in what would likely be a one-sided game or to provide a preemptive excuse should the game be closer than expected.

Finally, some displays of weakness or low ability in performance settings are not designed to persuade an opponent to reduce effort. Rather the goal is to acquire money or resources and is illustrated by pool and card "sharks" who lose initial games until the "mark" wagers serious money, at which point the shark displays his or her true ability. The initial display of weakness is often termed *hustling* and has been portrayed in several popular movies, including *The Hustler* (Rossen, 1961), *The Color of Money* (Scorsese, 1986), and *White Men Can't Jump* (Shelter, Miller, & Lester, 1992). Hustling and sandbagging are similar in that both involve displays of relative weakness or low ability and can be regarded as attempts to persuade another to let down his or her guard. However, hustling is distinct from sandbagging in the prerequisite conditions. With hustling, the hustler's ability is superior to that of the opponent, and the ultimate outcome of the competition is known (at least to the hustler). As we discuss more fully later, with sandbagging, the sandbagger is not superior in ability and the outcome is decidedly uncertain.

Competition and Uncertainty as Situational Antecedents

Although there are likely several situational factors that influence the decision to sandbag, two seem preeminent. First, people should only sandbag in situations where they are competing with another person or persons for a desired outcome. If there is no competition, then there is little to be gained from convincing another to reduce effort or lower his or her guard. For example, if two people are vying for an award, and anyone who meets the criteria will receive the reward, then there is no need to sandbag. The outcome of one does not affect the outcome of the other; both people can win. On the other hand, if there can be only one recipient of the award—only one winner—then sandbagging may be a wise strategy.

The second factor that will likely influence the decision to sandbag is the expected outcome of the performance. If people anticipate outperforming their opponent, then there is no reason

to display oneself as disadvantaged. Indeed, displaying oneself as disadvantaged may be a disservice because it creates an image of incompetence or weakness in the eyes of the audience. However, if the outcome of the comparison or competition is uncertain, that is, if people are uncertain that they can outperform their opponent, then sandbagging may be a reasonable strategy; displaying weakness or low ability may induce an opponent to reduce his or her preparation or effort. In sum, we anticipated sandbagging primarily when people are competing and are uncertain of the outcome of the competition.

Machiavellianism and Sandbagging

Given the evidence from research and high Machs' popular reputation for being manipulative and deceitful, one might anticipate that they would be more prone than low Machs to sandbag an opponent. After all, faking incompetence to disarm a rival seems, well, Machiavellian. However, there is strong reason to predict otherwise. As a personality trait, Machiavellianism most closely resembles the trait of dominance (Gurtman, 1992). High Machs are domineering, not submissive (Paulhus & Martin, 1987; Wiggins & Broughton, 1985). They tend to control and emerge as leaders in small groups (Bochner, di Salvo, & Jonas, 1975; Geis, Krupat, & Berger, 1970; Okanes & Stinson, 1974; Rim, 1966) and are concerned with prestige (Effler, 1983). In interpersonal settings, high Machs seem to have a distinct way of handling other people—they tend to be domineering, anticipate betrayal, and attempt to strike first (for reviews, see Geis, 1978; Wilson et al., 1996). Perhaps it is not surprising that law students score particularly high in Machiavellianism (Wertheim, Widom, & Wortzel, 1978).

The strong and domineering self-perception and accordant style of high Machs make them believe that they are the "king of the jungle." These characteristics also are likely to dissuade high Machs from sandbagging. Sandbagging, from an evolutionary standpoint, is clearly a strategy for the weak. It requires taking a submissive posture to convince an opponent that one is no match. The king of the jungle would seem an unlikely candidate for such a display even when submissiveness is situationally appropriate or could be advantageous. Thus, we predicted that high Machs would be unlikely to sandbag, because their domineering stance is too rigid to allow for more submissive responses. If anything, high Machs seem to be inclined toward intimidation or strong-arm tactics (a strategy in its own right).[1]

The Present Research

The present research addressed seven questions. The first four were investigated in Experiment 1 and examined (a) whether people would respond to an apparently disadvantaged or incapable opponent by reducing effort, (b) whether people anticipate that an opponent will behave likewise by withholding effort when they appear disadvantaged, (c) whether the nature of an opponent's disadvantage influences how people respond, and (d) whether people perceive that an opponent is influenced by the nature of their disadvantage. The remaining three questions were investigated in Experiment 2. These examined (e) whether people would actively display themselves as disadvantaged or

incapable to undermine an opponent's effort, (f) the conditions that would produce a display of weakness or low ability, and (g) whether low Machs are more prone than high Machs to sandbag an opponent.

Experiment 1

Participants in Experiment 1 read two sets of scenarios describing a sports competition between themselves and an opponent. In the first set of scenarios, participants learned that their performance circumstances placed them at an advantage or disadvantage relative to their opponent. In the second set of scenarios, participants learned that their opponent's performance circumstances placed him or her at an advantage or disadvantage. Because of its preliminary, exploratory nature, Experiment 1 did not manipulate competition. We likewise did not manipulate outcome expectations in Experiment 1, choosing instead to keep outcome expectations uniformly uncertain. The primary dependent measure for the first set of scenarios was participants' estimates of how hard their opponent would play in the competition. The primary dependent measure for the second set of scenarios was participants' reports of how hard they would play against their opponent in the competition. For the first set of scenarios, we predicted that participants who enjoyed an advantage would be more likely than participants who were disadvantaged to estimate that their opponent would exert high effort. For the second set of scenarios, we predicted that participants would report that they would exert less effort when their opponent appeared disadvantaged than when their opponent appeared advantaged.

In addition to manipulating whether the participant (or the opponent) was advantaged or disadvantaged, in both sets of scenarios we included an exploratory manipulation of whether the advantage or disadvantage was reported or displayed. We presumed that participants would be more responsive to displayed disclosures, which are easily verifiable, than to reported disclosures, which are difficult to verify and may be entirely fabricated. We recognized, however, that the scenario nature of Experiment 1 might lead participants to evaluate both displays and reports at face value, which would cause them to appraise the two types of disclosures equally. Thus we made no predictions regarding participants' reports of how much effort they would exert (or their estimates of how much effort their opponent would exert) in response to a disclosure that was displayed versus reported.

Method

Participants. Participants were 198 (79 male and 119 female) Introductory Psychology students at the University of Florida who participated as part of a course requirement.

Procedure. Participants randomly received one of four packets and were instructed that their responses to the items in the packet would be anonymous. Each packet contained four scenarios, and each scenario instructed participants to imagine a competition between themselves and an equally skilled friend or acquaintance. Each scenario was designed

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as a 2 (performance condition: advantaged vs. disadvantaged) × 2 (type of disclosure: displayed vs. reported) between-subjects factorial. In two scenarios, participants read that they were advantaged or disadvantaged; in the other two scenarios, participants read that their opponent was advantaged or disadvantaged. The scenarios were organized such that all participants read one scenario in which they appeared advantaged, one scenario in which they appeared disadvantaged, one scenario in which their opponent appeared advantaged, and one scenario in which their opponent appeared disadvantaged. We varied the order of the scenarios to minimize order effects. In addition, by using a modified counterbalancing procedure, we arranged the scenarios such that all participants read one scenario in which their performance condition (advantaged vs. disadvantaged) was reported and one in which it was displayed as well as one scenario in which their opponent's performance condition was reported and one in which it was displayed.

The first two scenarios involved a game of tennis and a game of darts, and participants were asked to imagine that they were reporting or displaying an advantage or disadvantage to their opponent. In the darts scenario, half of the participants read that their opponent noticed that they are using borrowed darts that were obviously superior to (displayed advantage) or inferior to (displayed disadvantage) the darts of their opponent. The remaining participants read that they told their opponent either that they had some free time this week and thus got in extra practice (reported advantage) or that they were very busy this week and thus had no time to practice (reported disadvantage). In the tennis scenario, half of the participants read that their opponent noticed that the grip on their tennis racquet was obviously new, thus placing them at an advantage (displayed advantage), or was obviously worn, thus placing them at a disadvantage (displayed disadvantage). The remaining participants read that they told their opponent either that they had restrung their racquet, allowing them to play better than ever (reported advantage), or that they had restrung their racquet and needed a few days to become accustomed to the new strings (reported disadvantage). Following each scenario was a single item that asked either "How do you suppose your opponent will respond to this observation?" or "How do you suppose your opponent will respond to your disclosure?" Participants responded on a 9-point scale anchored by 1 (*play less hard than usual*), 5 (*play about the same as usual*), and 9 (*play much harder than usual*).

The second two scenarios involved a game of tennis and a friendly jogging competition in which the participants' opponent reported or displayed an advantage or disadvantage. In the tennis scenario, half of the participants read that their opponent was using a racquet that was superior to (displayed advantage) or inferior to (displayed disadvantaged) the participant's racquet. The remaining participants read that their opponent either claimed to have new contact lenses and could see much better than usual (reported advantage) or claimed to be wearing an old pair of contact lenses that might impair his or her vision (reported disadvantage). In the jogging scenario, half of the participants observed that their opponent was wearing either new running shoes that placed him or her at an advantage (displayed advantage) or old, worn running shoes that placed him or her at a disadvantage (displayed disadvantage). The remaining participants read that their opponent reported that some recent news about a job opportunity was either distracting him or her and that he or she might not give the participant much of a race (reported disadvantage), or had put him or her in a great mood and that he or she was ready to race (reported advantage). The second two scenarios were each followed by five 9-point items, two of which were distractors. Our primary interest was in participants' responses to items that asked (a) how hard they would play against their opponent, (b) how confident they were that they would beat their opponent, and (c) how much energy they would exert toward beating their opponent.

Results

Data from each of the four scenarios were analyzed separately by using a 2 (performance condition: advantage vs. disadvan-

tage) × 2 (type of disclosure: displayed vs. reported) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Regarding the first two scenarios, we predicted that advantaged participants would be more likely than disadvantaged participants to estimate that their opponent would play harder in response to the advantage. The results clearly support this prediction. For both scenarios, participants reported that their opponent would play harder when they were advantaged (for darts, $M = 6.6$; for tennis, $M = 7.2$) than when they were disadvantaged (for darts, $M = 5.5$; for tennis, $M = 5.6$). Statistical analyses revealed that these effects were quite robust (both Fs > 28.00, ps $< .0001$).

Analysis also yielded an unanticipated interaction of performance condition and type of disclosure for the tennis scenario, $F(1, 197) = 7.29$, $p < .01$. Whereas participants in the advantaged condition did not differ in their estimates of their opponent's responses to a displayed ($M = 7.0$) versus reported ($M = 7.5$) advantage, participants in the disadvantage condition believed their opponent would play harder when their disadvantage was displayed ($M = 5.9$) than when it was reported ($M = 5.3$), $t(1, 97) = 2.07$, $p < .05$. This interaction did not qualify the predicted main effect of performance condition.

The second set of scenarios examined whether participants would exert less effort when the opponent appeared disadvantaged than when the opponent appeared advantaged. Again, results from both the tennis and jogging scenario provided strong support for the prediction. For the tennis scenario, participants with a disadvantaged opponent were more likely than participants with an advantaged opponent to report that they (a) would play less hard than usual ($M = 5.2$ vs. 6.9), (b) would exert less energy toward beating their opponent ($M = 5.8$ vs. 7.3), and (c) were confident that they would beat their opponent ($M = 6.7$ vs. 5.7), all Fs > 23.00, ps $< .0001$. Similarly, for the jogging scenario, participants with a disadvantaged opponent were more likely than participants with an advantaged opponent to report that they (a) would run less hard than usual ($M = 5.8$ vs. 6.7), (b) would exert less energy toward beating their opponent ($M = 5.9$ vs. 6.8), and (c) were confident that they would beat their opponent ($M = 6.8$ vs. 4.8), all Fs > 13.00, ps $< .0003$.

The type of disclosure also influenced participants' responses in the jogging scenario but not in the tennis scenario. Specifically, when the opponent's disclosure was reported (as opposed to displayed), participants were more likely to indicate that they (a) would run less hard than usual ($M = 6.0$ vs. 6.5), (b) would exert less energy toward beating their opponent ($M = 6.0$ vs. 6.7), yet (c) were less confident of winning ($M = 5.6$ vs. 6.0), all Fs > 4.00, ps $< .05$. These latter effects were noticeably weaker than the effect of the opponent's performance condition (advantaged vs. disadvantaged). In addition, we suspect that these effects reflect some nuance in the wording of the disclosure (the report sounded like it was less advantageous and more debilitating than the display) rather than a meaningful finding.

Discussion

Experiment 1 revealed that, when people are personally disadvantaged, they anticipate that an opponent will reduce his or

her effort. Experiment 1 also revealed that people report that they would behave similarly, reducing their efforts in response to a disadvantaged opponent. Finally, Experiment 1 revealed no consistent effect of the nature of the disclosure. In general, participants reported that an opponent would respond with less effort to a disadvantage regardless of whether the disclosure was self-reported or displayed. In a similar vein, participants reported that they also would exert less effort when their opponent was disadvantaged than when the opponent was advantaged regardless of the nature of the disclosure. Perhaps responses to a disclosed disadvantage or weakness are less influenced by the nature of the disclosure (displayed vs. reported) than by its apparent veracity. People will presumably respond to any disclosed disadvantage or weakness with less effort provided the disclosure is viewed as genuine. If, however, the disclosure is viewed as dishonest, then it is unlikely to elicit lower effort and may in fact produce greater caution or redoubled effort from the target of the sandbagging attempt. In short, we believe (and found) that reported disadvantages are not automatically regarded with greater suspicion than disclosed disadvantages. However, to the extent that they are viewed suspiciously, reported disadvantages will likely produce no reduction in effort.

In sum, people appear to match their efforts to their competition, increasing their efforts when an opponent appears strong and decreasing their efforts when an opponent appears weak. Moreover, people anticipate that an opponent will respond similarly, increasing or decreasing his or her effort depending on whether they appear strong or weak. Of course, showing that people expect an opponent to exert less effort in response to a disadvantage is a far cry from showing that people will actively sandbag an opponent. Experiment 2 examined whether people will present themselves as disadvantaged or incapable to manipulate an opponent's effort.

Experiment 2

As noted earlier, sandbagging is a strategy for the weak that requires taking a submissive posture to disarm an opponent. We predicted that the strong, domineering style of high Machs should make them loathe to sandbag even when submissiveness is situationally appropriate or might be advantageous. If anything, high Machs might lean toward exaggerating their strength to bluff their opponent into giving up. Low Machs, on the other hand, should have no difficulty with sandbagging if the situation is right. Study 2 examined these hypotheses.

On the basis of an initial test, participants were made to feel either certain or uncertain about success relative to their coparticipant on an upcoming performance in which they were or were not competing with their coparticipant. Prior to the performance, participants selected 3 of 10 practice test scores to show to their coparticipant. We predicted that the decision to sandbag an opponent would depend on the situation and would also vary as function of individual differences in Machiavellianism. Specifically, we hypothesized that low Machs would display themselves as less capable by choosing their worst practice scores when competing with their coparticipant and when uncertain of their ability to perform well relative to their coparticipant. We also expected that high Machs, in contrast, would generally always display themselves as strong and choose to

show their better practice scores regardless of condition but perhaps particularly when the outcome of a competition was uncertain.

Method

Participants. Participants were 69 male Introductory Psychology students at the University of Florida who participated individually as part of a course requirement. All participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (competition vs. no competition) × 2 (success vs. uncertain outcome expectation) between-subjects factorial design. Data from 3 participants were omitted because they were suspicious of the procedures or failed to follow instructions. This resulted in a final sample of 66 participants. In all cases the experimenter was female and the confederate was male.

Procedure. On arriving for the experiment, each participant was greeted by the experimenter. As the participant and experimenter waited for a tardy confederate, the participant completed a measure of Machiavellianism (the MACH IV scale; Christie & Geis, 1970a). The MACH IV consists of twenty 9-point Likert-type items anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 9 (*strongly agree*). The MACH IV demonstrates adequate internal consistency and correlates negatively ($r = -.70$ to $-.80$) with the Trustworthiness subscale of the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale (Fehr et al., 1992; Wrightsman, 1964, 1974).

When the confederate arrived, the experimenter explained that he would need to stay after the experiment to complete the questionnaire. The experimenter then explained that the psychology department was working in conjunction with the College of Education to examine the effect of psychological factors (e.g., motivation, commitment, expectations, interest, confidence) on analytical reasoning. The experimenter explained that participants would take three tests of analytical reasoning: a baseline test, a practice test consisting of 10 trials, and a final test. The experimenter described analytical reasoning as highly predictive of college grade point average and success in a variety of careers. The experimenter also noted that success on the tests was partly determined by ability but largely determined by effort.

After participants signed a consent form, the experimenter described the baseline test. The baseline test involved generating as many new words as possible by using the letters from a nine-letter word provided by the experimenter. Participants learned that they would have 5 min to take the test and that their score was based on the number and length of words they generated. Specifically, a two-letter word was worth 2 points, a three-letter word, 3 points, a four-letter word, 6 points, a five-letter word, 9 points, a six-letter word, 12 points, a seven-letter word, 15 points, an eight-letter word, 18 points, and a nine-letter word, 21 points. Finally, participants were reminded that test performance was determined both by ability and by how hard participants tried; they then received 5 min to perform the test.

Success versus uncertain outcome expectation. The purpose of the baseline test was to manipulate expectations about the final test. Half of the participants were led to expect that they would perform well relative to the confederate on the final test (success expectation), whereas half of the participants were made to feel uncertain about how they would perform relative to the confederate on the final test (uncertain expectation). Specifically, in the success expectation condition, participants received a relatively easy 9-letter word (*seaworthy*) with many solutions. In addition, the confederate showed considerable distress during the baseline test by sighing loudly, running his fingers through his hair in frustration, and noisily erasing several answers (see Shepperd & Arkin, 1991). Finally, as the experimenter collected the tests and inquired about the difficulty, the confederate expressed disappointment in his performance and his dislike for such tests. In the uncertain expectation condition, participants received a difficult word (*eggshell*) with a limited number of solutions. In addition, the confederate stated after the

first test period that the baseline test was relatively easy and that he was good at these sorts of things.[2]

After collecting the baseline tests, the experimenter spent a few moments scoring them in an area of the room that was blocked from participants' view. The experimenter then explained that the second test involved ten 1-min practice trials that ranged from easy to very difficult and that were designed to sharpen cognitive skills. After walking through a practice trial, the experimenter explained that the participant and confederate would take the test in separate rooms to ensure experimental control. Ostensibly on the basis of the luck of the draw (which the participant always won), the participant was permitted to remain in the room and the confederate was escorted to a second room, in which a second experimenter would presumably administer the practice trials.

At this point, the confederate's role ended. As the experimenter left to escort the confederate from the room, she gave the participant a folder containing the participant's and confederate's scored baseline tests and a short questionnaire that consisted of manipulation check items. The experimenter told the participant that he could examine his baseline test but that he also needed to complete the questionnaire. The experimenter added that the confederate would have a chance to see the baseline tests at the end of the experiment. The baseline test in the folder that presumably belonged to the confederate had actually been secretly selected by the experimenter from of group of baseline tests completed by the confederate prior to the experiment. The confederate's score was designed to manipulate further the participant's performance expectation. In the success expectation condition, the confederate's score was 40 points lower than the participant's score. In the uncertain expectation condition, the confederate's score was 5 points higher than the participants' score. After enough time had elapsed for the participant to examine the baseline tests and complete the manipulation check questionnaire, the experimenter returned and administered the ten 1-min practice trials.

The practice trials were based on a test developed by Mednick (1962; see also McFarlin & Blascovich, 1984). Each trial appeared on a separate sheet of paper and comprised 5 items. The first four items consisted of a series of three words that were followed by a blank (e.g., *sick, urchin, men, _____* and the final item consisted of a numbered sequence that was followed by a blank (e.g., 2, 4, 6, 8, _____). The participant was instructed to "find the word that the 3 words have in association and find the number that follows the sequence." Thus, for the first example above, the answer was *sea*, and the answer to the second example above was 10. The practice trials were designed to provide participants with a broad range of practice scores. Two of the trials were very easy, whereas eight of the trials ranged from moderately difficult to very difficult.

After the final practice trial, the experimenter collected the participant's response sheets, scored them, and returned them to the participant. The experimenter then described the final test as a brainstorming task in which participants were to generate 30 nonredundant uses for an object as quickly as possible.

Competition manipulation. To manipulate competition, the experimenter next explained that participants would or would not be competing on the final test. In the competition condition, the participant learned that he and the confederate had been randomly assigned to take the test in competition with one another and that their scores would be compared to see who performed better. The experimenter further explained that each pair of participants in this condition would generate uses for an object randomly selected by a computer. Thus, although the participant could compare his performance with that of the confederate, he would not be able to compare his performance with other participants in the research. The experimenter explained that the participant and confederate were competing with each other and no one else. Indeed, participants learned that the sole purpose of the final test was to see who (the participant or the confederate) could generate 30 uses first. The purpose of the unique wording of these instructions was to convince the partici-

pant that his performance on the final test had no absolute meaning; it had meaning relative only to the performance (i.e., better than or worse than) of the confederate. In the *no-competition* condition, the participant learned that he and the confederate would be brainstorming on different words randomly selected by the computer. The experimenter added that, because the words were different and might differ in difficulty, any comparison of performance on the final test would be impossible.

Finally, the experimenter explained one final procedure that was ostensibly designed to examine how the confederate would use information that was supplied to him. Specifically, the experimenter read the following instructions:

> Everyone who stays in this room is assigned to the blind condition; everyone who goes to the second room is assigned to the open condition. As a result, you will be required to show three of your practice trial scores to your coparticipant. However, you will not be allowed to see any of your coparticipant's practice trial scores. This is analogous to seeing the previous week's game film of an opposing football team. Most football teams watch game films of their opponents prior to a game to analyze their offense and defense. In this experiment, it is as though your coparticipant will get to see a film of your team, but you won't get to see a film of his team. However, you do get to select which "films" your coparticipant sees. That is, of the 10 practice trials you just completed, you get to pick which 3 results you want your coparticipant to see. As far as the experiment is concerned, it doesn't matter which 3 you choose. We only care that you choose 3 practice trials, any 3, for your coparticipant to see.

The experimenter added that the confederate would see only the three scores selected and would not see the actual trials or know the difficulty of the trials selected. The two would then take the final test. Finally, the experimenter stated that, for control purposes, she was not permitted to see which scores were selected. Instead, the participant was to place his selections in an envelope and place the envelope in a wall pocket outside the second experiment room, which was down the hall. When the experimenter was comfortable that the participant understood these instructions, she handed the participant another questionnaire with instructions to complete it prior to selecting the three practice trials for the confederate. She then excused herself from the room and stated that she wanted to give the participant time to complete the questionnaire, make his selections, and walk the selections down the hall. After the participant had had ample time to complete the questionnaire and select trials for the confederate, the experimenter returned and administered a final questionnaire. She then thoroughly debriefed the participant and thanked him for participating (there was no final test). No participant expressed suspicion about having to select practice trials for the confederate to view.

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, data were analyzed by using a 2 (high vs. low Machiavellianism) × 2 (competition vs. no competition) × 2 (success vs. uncertain outcome expectation) between-subjects unequal-*n* ANOVA. Participants were classi-

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[2] Although the manipulation of uncertainty may seem extreme and likely to induce feelings of impending failure rather than uncertainty, pilot testing revealed that these procedures were necessary to induce uncertainty. Moreover, the results from the manipulation check items (reported in the *Results* section) revealed that participants in the uncertain condition believed that they and their coparticipant would perform similarly on the final test and not that they would perform worse on the final test.

fied as high or low in Machiavellianism by performing a median split on responses on the MACH IV Scale.[3] The mean score on the Machiavellian scale was 102.9 (SD = 9.5, range = 92 to 135) for high Machs and 79.6 (SD = 8.2, range = 57 to 90) for low Machs.

Checks on the manipulations. The manipulations of performance expectation and competition were quite successful. Regarding the performance expectation manipulation, participants responded to two items. The first read, "I anticipate I will perform well on the upcoming test," and the second read, "I anticipate my coparticipant will perform well on the upcoming test." Participants responded to these and other manipulation check items by using a 9-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 9 (*strongly agree*). A repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant effect of item, $F(1, 58)$ = 6.55, $p < .05$, which was qualified by a significant Performance Expectation $\times$ Item interaction, $F(1, 58)$ = 6.44, $p < .05$. Planned contrasts revealed that participants in the success expectation condition estimated that they would perform better (M = 7.0) than their coparticipant (M = 6.0) on the upcoming test, $t(1, 65)$ = 3.68, $p < .01$. By contrast, uncertain expectation participants estimated that they (M = 6.8) and their coparticipant (M = 6.8) would perform similarly on the upcoming test ($t < 1$). There were no main effects or interactions involving Machiavellianism (all $Fs < 1$).

Regarding the competition manipulation, the results revealed that participants in the competition condition (M = 8.5) indicated stronger agreement than did participants in the no-competition condition (M = 3.1) that their performance on the final test would be compared with the performance of their coparticipant, $F(1, 58)$ = 94.11, $p < .0001$. In addition, participants in the competition condition (M = 7.2) agreed more than did participants in the no-competition condition (M = 5.3) that they felt competitive with their coparticipant, $F(1, 58)$ = 11.84, $p < .001$. Of note, this second item also yielded a significant effect of performance expectation. Specifically, uncertain participants (M = 7.0) agreed more than did success expectation participants (M = 5.5) that they felt competitive with their coparticipant, $F(1, 58)$ = 7.98, $p < .01$. We suspect this difference is nothing more than an indication that success participants viewed the confederate as less of a challenge than did uncertain participants. Again, there were no main effects or interactions involving Machiavellianism (all $Fs < 1$). Moreover, zero-order correlations revealed that Machiavellianism did not correlate with either the competition (r = -.02) or comparison (r = -.01) items.

Finally, we analyzed performance on the baseline and practice tests. There was no difference across conditions in the score participants received on the baseline test, except success expectation participants, who had an easier test, scored better (M = 66.6) than did uncertain expectation participants, who had a difficult test (M = 34.8), $F(1, 58)$ = 75.50, $p < .0001$. In addition, there was no difference across conditions in performance on the practice trials (model $F < 1$). Across conditions, participants solved an average of 22.7 of the 50 practice trial items correctly. Once again, there were no main effects or interactions involving Machiavellianism (all $Fs < 1$).

In sum, the manipulations were quite successful and there appear to have been no unexpected or undesired differences
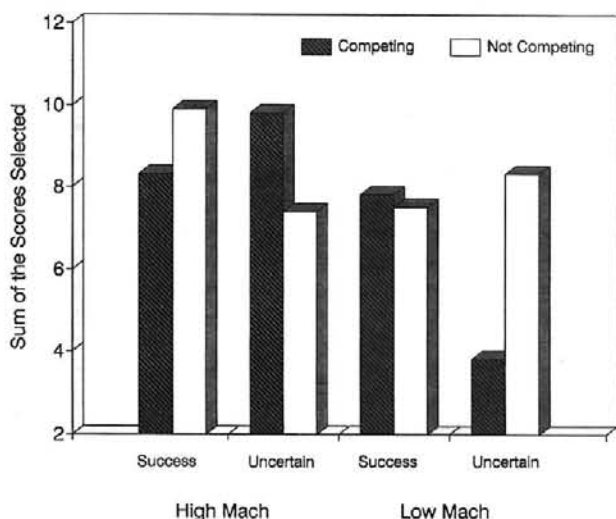

Figure 1. The sum of the three scores shown to the confederate. Mach = Machiavellian.

across conditions in performance on the baseline or practice test. We now turn to our primary dependent measure.

Score selection. We predicted that high Machs would avoid displaying themselves as incapable and would opt instead to present themselves favorably by showing high practice trial scores in all situations. We likewise predicted that low Machs would generally prefer to present themselves favorably by presenting their high scores. However, we also predicted that, among low Machs, the decision of which scores to display to the confederate would depend on their performance expectation and whether they were competing with the confederate. Specifically, we anticipated that low Machs who were uncertain of the outcome of the forthcoming performance and who were competing with the confederate would choose lower scores to show the confederate than would high Machs and low Machs in the other conditions.

Figure 1 displays the means of the sum of the three scores selected by high and low Machs in the experimental conditions. The pattern of means are just as predicted. Statistical analysis showed a significant Outcome Certainty $\times$ Competition $\times$ Machiavellian interaction for the sum of the scores selected, $F(1, 58)$ = 6.13, $p < .02$. More important, a series of orthogo-

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[3] The use of median splits is not without limitations. Most notably, median splits sacrifice information for simplicity (for excellent discussions, see Cohen, 1990; Pedhazur, 1982). On the other hand, maintaining the continuous nature of noncategorical data and then analyzing the data by using multiple regression has its own limitations. Specifically, multiple regression with continuous predictors does not easily lend itself to tests of specific, predicted patterns of means when interaction or synergistic effects are predicted. The most effective way to test predicted interactive or synergistic patterns of means is by using contrast analyses (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Given the specific nature of our predictions, we concluded that median splits coupled with contrast analyses (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991) would permit the most direct test of our hypotheses.

nal contrasts revealed the predicted differences between cells. Specifically, the sum of the scores selected by low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition was significantly lower than the sum selected by low Machs in the uncertain–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 2.71$, $p < .01$, in the success–competition condition, $t(58) = 2.42$, $p < .05$, and in the success–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 2.09$, $p < .05$. Finally, the sum of the scores selected by low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition was significantly lower than the sum selected by high Machs in the same condition, $t(58) = 3.40$, $p < .01$. As is also evident in Figure 1, high Machs in the uncertain–competition condition did not differ from other high Machs in the scores they selected to display (all $ts < 1$).

Analysis of the sum of the three scores revealed that low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition selected lower scores for their coparticipant to see than did high Machs and low Machs in the other experimental conditions. This analysis, however, did not reveal the extent to which low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition displayed themselves as incapable. It is possible that these participants displayed their average scores rather than their worst scores.

To address this possibility, we computed the average of the 10 scores participants achieved on the practice trials. We then multiplied this average by three and subtracted it from the sum of the three scores participants selected to show the confederate. The difference represents the extent to which the score participants selected varied from the average of what they could have selected. It provides evidence of the degree to which participants presented themselves favorably or unfavorably to the confederate. If the sum of a participant's selected scores exceeded the average (multiplied by three) of the 10 practice trials, then the participant was presenting himself favorably to the confederate. If the sum of a participant's selected scores fell below the average (multiplied by three) of the 10 practice trials, then the participant was sandbagging his opponent. By using this approach, we determined that 32% of participants sandbagged their opponent.

Figure 2 presents the mean difference of the selected and average scores for high and low Machs by condition. The results are striking. With one exception, participants across conditions selected scores to show their confederate that presented themselves favorably—scores that were notably higher than the average score they received on the 10 practice trials. The exception was among low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition. These participants chose to display themselves unfavorably, selecting scores that were lower than their average score.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant Outcome Certainty × Competition × Machiavellian interaction, $F(1, 58) = 7.29$, $p < .01$. A series of orthogonal contrasts confirmed the differences apparent in Figure 2. Specifically, the average difference among low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition was significantly lower than the average difference among low Machs in the uncertain–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 3.37$, $p < .01$, the success–competition condition, $t(58) = 3.51$, $p < .001$, and the success–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 3.01$, $p < .01$. Finally, the average difference among low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition was significantly lower than the average difference among high Machs in the same condition, $t(58) = 3.76$, $p < .001$. Among high Machs, those in the uncer-
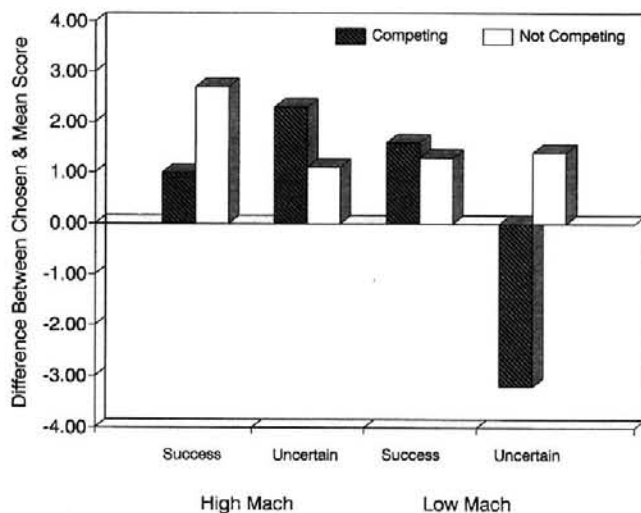

Figure 2. The difference between the sum of the three scores participants chose and the average (times 3) of the scores they could have chosen. Mach ≈ Machiavellian.

tain–competition condition did not differ from other high Mach participants in the difference between the sum of the selected scores and the average of all scores (all $ts < 1$).[4]

Ancillary findings. Responses to several ancillary items included on the second and third questionnaire deserve mention either because they eliminate alternative explanations or because they help clarify the findings. First, regardless of condition, participants felt that the experimenter would not see the practice test scores selected for the confederate (Grand $M = 7.9$, model $F < 1$). This finding is consistent with the instructions participants received and reveals that the score selections were not chosen to manipulate the impressions of the experimenter. Second, there was no difference across conditions in the extent to which participants agreed with an item that appeared on the second questionnaire that asked whether the trials a participant selects can influence another's efforts (Grand $M = 7.2$, model $F < 1$). Thus, the results were not due to some participants, presumably lows Machs, having a better understanding of the effect of displaying lower scores on the confederate's effort.

Third, low Machs ($M = 7.8$) agreed more than high Machs ($M = 6.8$) that performance on the brainstorming test would be influenced by how hard a person tries, $F(1, 58) = 5.46$, $p < .05$. However, this belief was not significantly correlated with the sum of the scores selected ($r = -.11$) or the difference between the sum and the average score ($r = -.20$). Fourth, low

[4] We also analyzed the extent to which participants displayed their very best scores by dividing the sum of the three scores they selected by the sum of the top three scores they received on the 10 trials. The pattern of means was identical to the pattern displayed in Figure 1. Likewise, results from the statistical analyses paralleled those for the primary dependent measures, with low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition selecting from their worst scores ($M = 31\%$) and all other participants selecting from their best scores (Ms ranged from 67% to 84%).

Machs (M = 7.5) admitted more than high Machs (M = 6.5) to wanting to outperform the confederate on the brainstorming test, $F(1, 58) = 5.02$, $p < .05$. Moreover, the degree to which participants wanted to outperform the confederate correlated with the sum of the scores selected ($r = -.24$, $p < .06$) and the difference between the sum and the average score ($r = -.31$, $p < .02$). These findings raise the possibility that the effects we found may be attributable to a difference between high and low Machs in the degree to which they valued outperforming the confederate.

To probe this possibility we entered responses to this item (after centering it; see Aiken & West, 1993) as a covariate in separate regression analyses for the two dependent measures by using procedures recommended by Hull, Tedlie, and Lehn (1992). If the effects we found for the two primary dependent measures were due to differences in how much participants wanted to outperform the confederate, then presumably the significant Machiavellian × Performance Expectation × Competition interaction term would no longer be significant when the covariate was included in the model.

Analyses revealed that including the covariate in the model produced no appreciable reduction in the significant Machiavellian × Performance Expectation × Competition interaction term for either of the dependent measures. Specifically, for the sum of the scores selected, the interaction remained significant when the covariate was included in the model, $F(1, 54) = 6.28$, $p < .02$. Likewise, for the difference between the sum and the average score, the interaction remained significant when the covariate was entered into the model, $F(1, 54) = 5.76$, $p < .02$. Thus our findings for the primary dependent measures were not attributable to differences in how much participants wanted to outperform the confederate.

Finally, an item appearing on the third questionnaire revealed that participants were well aware of the impact on the confederate of the trials they personally selected to show. Specifically, participants estimated what effect the trials they had just selected to show the confederate would have on the effort he exerted on the final task. This item was anchored by 1 (*will lessen the effort exerted*) and 9 (*will increase the effort exerted*). Table 1 presents the cell means for this item. This pattern of results is quite similar to the pattern for the primary dependent measure. Moreover, the results of the statistical analyses paralleled the results from the primary dependent measure. Specifically, low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition were more likely to report that the scores they selected would lead

to a decrease in the confederate's effort than were low Machs in the uncertain–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 2.53$, $p < .05$, the success–competition condition, $t(58) = 3.72$, $p < .001$, and the success–no-competition condition, $t(58) = 1.85$, $p < .07$. Low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition were also more likely than high Machs in the same condition to report that the scores they had selected would lead to a decrease in the confederate's effort, $t(58) = 2.71$, $p < .01$. Among high Machs, participants in the uncertain–competition condition did not differ from participants in the other conditions in their reports of the effect of the trials they selected to show the confederate (all ps > .12).

We used the covariate procedures described earlier to examine whether the behavioral response of sandbagging was mediated by responses to this item. When responses to this item were entered as a covariate, the previously significant Machiavellian × Performance Expectation × Competition interaction was no longer significant for either the sum of the scores selected or for the difference between the sum and the average score (both Fs < 1). In short, participants who selected their worst trials to show the confederate believed that their selection would elicit less effort from the confederate. Moreover, this belief mediated the choice of trials selected for display to the confederate.

Discussion

Presenting oneself as incompetent to another is a rare event. Experiment 2 revealed that, under most conditions, people prefer to put their best foot forward and present themselves as having high ability. Nevertheless, some participants in Experiment 2 were willing to present themselves as low in ability under certain conditions. Specifically, low Machs chose from their worst practice test trials to show their coparticipant when they were competing with their coparticipant on the final test and when they were uncertain of the outcome of the competition. By so doing, they could induce their coparticipant into expending less effort on the final task, thereby increasing their own chance of performing better. Indeed, in the uncertain–competition condition, displaying oneself as having low ability seemed a wise strategy. Yet, high Machs refrained from using this strategy and opted instead to display themselves as high in ability by choosing to show their coparticipant their better practice trial scores. As noted earlier, we believe that their high level of dominance lead high Machs to prefer a show a strength to a show of weakness.

Table 1
Mean Estimated Effect of Trial Selection on the Confederate's Effort

| | High Machs | | | | Low Machs | | | |
| | Success | | Uncertain | | Success | | Uncertain | |
Competition condition	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Competition	4.4	1.81	6.1	2.53	7.0	2.11	3.3	3.41
No competition	7.0	1.58	5.1	1.35	5.3	1.25	5.8	1.99

Note. Scores could range from 1 (*will lessen effort exerted*) to 9 (*will increase effort exerted*). Mach = Machiavellian.

Consequently, high-Mach participants were disinclined to show their lowest scores (implying low ability) even when such a display would presumably be the more effective strategy.

We predicted that high Machs would not only refrain from sandbagging in the uncertain–competition condition, but would even try to intimidate their coparticipant by showing their highest scores. Such a show is a manipulation in its own right, akin to bluffing in a card game. Although the results were in the predicted direction, high Machs in the uncertain–competition condition did not present themselves as significantly more able than did high Machs in the other conditions. However, what is not immediately apparent in Figures 1 and 2 is that there was a ceiling effect in the displays of high Machs. Specifically, all high-Mach participants tended to show their better scores regardless of condition. Although this was most true for high Machs in the uncertain–competition condition, who showed an average 84% of their highest scores (see footnote 3 for the computation), this was also true for high Machs in the uncertain–no-competition condition ($M = 71\%$), the success–competition condition ($M = 67\%$), and the success–no-competition condition ($M = 81\%$). The results seem to suggest that high Machs lean toward putting their best foot forward regardless of the circumstances.

General Discussion

Our goal in this research was to examine the manipulative behavior of low Machs by focusing specifically on an interpersonal influence strategy called sandbagging. Collectively, the results from two studies reveal the following. First, people report that they will match their efforts to their competition and will reduce their efforts when they perceive an opponent as disadvantaged. Second, people anticipate that an opponent will respond similarly and reduce his or her effort when they are disadvantaged. Third, the results of Experiment 1 suggest that people are largely uninfluenced by the nature of the disclosure and perceive displayed and reported disclosures as equally authentic. Fourth, people generally believe that their opponent will be just as responsive to a reported disadvantage as to a disclosed disadvantage. Apparently, participants accepted self-reported disclosures as just as truthful as displayed disclosures.

Fifth, sandbagging is a strategy for low Machs. However, low Machs sandbag only if the conditions are right. Specifically, low Machs sandbagged their coparticipant by presenting themselves as low in ability when they and their coparticipant were competing and when the outcome of the competition was uncertain. High Machs, by contrast, refrained from presenting themselves as low in ability even when such a display might have been advantageous. Instead, high Machs presented themselves as high in ability regardless of the situation. The behavior of low Machs suggests that they can be just as manipulative as high Machs. However, the tactics that high and low Machs use differ; low Machs prefer a display of weakness, and high Machs prefer a show of strength.

Thus far, we have discussed why high Machs do not sandbag even when the conditions are ripe to do so. Equally interesting is why low Machs do sandbag. We proposed that low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition displayed their lowest scores to lull their opponent into letting down his guard and

exerting less effort on the final test. However, there are two other possible interpretations of the data. First, low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition, believing that they would not beat the confederate on the final test, may have shown their lowest scores to appear as if they did not care about the test or the outcome. Although this interpretation is intriguing, it is unconvincing for two reasons. First, if low Machs in the uncertain condition wanted to show that they did not care, then they would presumably show their lowest scores in both the competition and the no-competition conditions. Yet only low Machs in the uncertain–competition condition presented their lower scores. Second, all participants believed that the experimenter would not know what scores they chose to show the confederate. Likewise, all participants believed that the confederate would not know if the scores they showed represented their worst, their average, or their best scores. Without this knowledge on the part of the experimenter and confederate, low Machs would be hard pressed to convince others that they did not care about the test or the outcome.

A second alternative explanation for the findings is that low Machs in the uncertain–no-competition condition presented their lowest scores because they felt success was unlikely and did not want to give the confederate the satisfaction of beating a close competitor. Although it is possible that people find victory in a close competition more satisfying than victory in a certain competition, we can imagine that a landslide victory could also be quite satisfying. Likewise, we know of no evidence demonstrating that people will intentionally present themselves as low in ability to rob an opponent of satisfaction. Indeed, the self-presentational costs of a low ability display seem excessive if the only reward is the reduction of an opponent's satisfaction. The more convincing explanation is that low-Mach participants presented themselves as low in ability in the uncertain–competition condition to undermine their opponent's effort on the final test.

Reflections on Sandbagging

Because we have introduced and tested a new phenomenon, it seems appropriate that we offer a few closing remarks on sandbagging. We focus on liabilities of sandbagging for the sandbagger and on how sandbagging can be viewed relative to other displays of low ability.

Sand traps for the sandbagger. Although sandbagging can be an advantageous strategy, it is not without costs. Portraying oneself as weak, unskilled, or incompetent can backfire in several ways. First, if the opponent is unconvinced by the display, then the sandbagger may acquire an unwanted image or reputation of being deceitful, a reputation of someone not to be trusted. This is particularly problematic if the reputation is generalized beyond the competition to other interpersonal settings. Second, if the sandbagger loses after a false display of low ability, then the sandbagger is left with a public image of being less competent or able than he or she really is. To the extent that social and financial rewards are tied to a public image of competence independent of the outcome of the competition, the sandbagger may fare worse from displaying weakness than from displaying strength. In addition, self-verification theory suggests that the sandbagger may suffer personal discomfort from having his or

her ability perceived inaccurately (see Swann & Read, 1981). That is, people generally want to be perceived accurately and are distressed when they are not. Finally, should the opponent reduce effort in response to the sandbagging display and still defeat the sandbagger, then the sandbagger suffers doubly. Not only does the sandbagger lose, but she loses to an opponent who was not trying hard. From an attributional standpoint, a low ability attribution is virtually unavoidable (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967).

Sandbagging is also not appropriate for every type of competition. Although a tennis player may claim that he or she is feeling ill, has inadequate equipment, or is a terrible tennis player to undermine an opponent's effort during a match, the claim is dismissed by the opponent the moment the first serve whizzes by. The sandbagger may fool the opponent into letting down his or her guard for one serve but not for any longer. Thus sandbagging is a useful one-time strategy that is best suited for undermining an opponent's preparation for a competition or for contests in which the outcome can be determined by a single move or play.

Displays of low ability reconsidered. The present experiments focused on sandbagging, a strategy in which people in competition present themselves as an unworthy adversary in an attempt to affect an opponent's effort. Of course, sandbagging is but a single illustration of a larger class of behaviors in which people present themselves as less than they really are. Although the specific motivation underlying the various displays of weakness, low ability, or low competence may differ, all are undertaken for one of three broad reasons. First, people may claim they are less able because they anticipate a challenge to a desired or claimed image. That is, they expect or fear that a coveted identity may be contested or called into question. Under this first reason fall behaviors such as bracing for failure (Shepperd, et al., 1996), defensive pessimism (Norem & Cantor, 1986), and precompetition modesty.

Second, people may display themselves as less able because they are trying to help or benefit the target of the claim. For example, a golfer may hit a ball in the woods so that a poor performing partner does not feel so bad. Likewise, an adult may purposely lose a board game against a child to boost the child's confidence or efficacy. People may also underplay their abilities or skills because others will feel threatened by comparison. Third, people may present themselves as less able because they are trying to acquire something from the target of the presentation. Under this third reason fall behaviors such as supplication, in which the goal is sympathy and help (Jones & Pittman, 1982); strategic failure (Baumgardner & Brownlee, 1987), where the goal is lower audience expectations; hustling, where the goal is money or resources; searching for compliments, where the goal is praise or flattery; and, of course, sandbagging, where the goal is to convince an adversary to relax his or her guard.

Coda

We earlier offered examples from the animal kingdom in which species of animals and insects (i.e., birds, spiders, and possums) sandbag a potential predator when their lives or the lives of their offspring are in jeopardy. These examples suggest

that sandbagging can have serious consequences for the sandbagger. Sandbagging can also have serious consequences for the person or group that is the target of the sandbagging. During battle, a combatant traditionally can wave a white flag to convey that it is defeated and wishes to surrender. Typically, the white flag can be taken at face value and the opposing force will cease firing and collect prisoners. However, one occasionally hears stories from war in which the white flag is raised deceptively. When the opposing force ceases firing and lowers its guard to take prisoners, it is ambushed by the combatants who portrayed themselves as defeated. Clearly, sandbagging is not a behavior to be viewed lightly and, in extreme cases, may prove fatal to those who are sandbagged.

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