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Promotion by Others through Social Networks

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Abstract

Although self-promotion may be the most direct way people self-present, it carries social costs. We propose a novel phenomenon—promotion by others—wherein social networks may afford similar advantages with fewer costs. We utilized egocentric network analysis to examine relationships between social connections and perceived promoter potential (i.e., likelihood a friend will tell others about successes; PPP) and relationship dynamics. Participants enumerated friends and reported perceptions these friends would promote them, were valuable, and the extent to which they wanted these friends to know about successes. PPP was positively related to (a) network connectedness, (b) relational value, and (c) desire to know about success. We discuss benefits of promotion by others and individual differences related to engagement in this process.

Keywords

self-promotion; self-presentation; promotion by others; self-enhancement

Most dating profiles do not highlight recent weight gain; most job interviewees do not start a conversation with a litany of personal weaknesses. Instead, people highlight their best features and characteristics. On social media, people promote positive aspects of their lives (e.g., van Dijck, 2013) and presumably, hide negative features. Even when people are catching up with close friends or talking with family at dinner, it might feel strange to begin a conversation by mentioning a personal failure or struggle. People may be more likely to broach the struggles of daily life with friends or family but even in these conversations, people like sharing information about good things in their lives (Gable & Reis, 2010; Lambert et al., 2013; Langston, 1994). This self-promotion offers significant benefits for people: it makes them feel like they look good to others (i.e., self-presentational benefits) and it makes them feel more positively about themselves (i.e., self-enhancement benefits).

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When others respond well to self-promotion, it can lead to relational closeness (Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Reis et al., 2010).

But self-promotion comes with interpersonal costs. Although individuals who self-promote may be initially well-liked, over time, liking of these people decreases (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997; Paulhus, 1998; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008; cf. Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003). Certainly ad nauseum self-promotion might carry relationship costs. Self-promoters may be seen as dishonest, leading to less trust and acceptance from others (Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1995). Over time, excessive self-promotion leads romantic partners to feel less satisfied (Lavner, Lamkin, Miller, Campbell, & Karney, 2016; Wurst et al., 2017) and subordinates to less positively evaluate their leaders (Ong, Roberts, Arthur, Woodman, & Akehurst, 2016). The relationship between self-promotion and interpersonal costs may also be one of missed opportunities. For example, individuals who chronically self-promote (e.g., a key characteristic of narcissism) do not necessarily lose friends over time, but instead gain friends at a lower rate than their less narcissistic peers (Czarna, Leifeld, mieja, Dufner, & Salovey, 2016).

An Alternative to Self-Promotion

Promotion by others.

What if there were alternative ways by which good information about the self spreads throughout networks? In the present manuscript, we introduce the idea of *promotion by others*. Consider a simple network involving John, Anthony, and Susan, all graduate students in the same program. At a conference, Anthony observes John deliver a strong research presentation. Upon their return to campus, Anthony tells Susan about John's successful presentation. Susan learns about the success from Anthony (promotion by others) instead of John (self-promotion). John has gains for himself in terms of self-presentation—Susan thinks more highly of him—and in terms of self-enhancement—Susan congratulating him on his presentation might increase his state self-esteem. But the process by which he gets there is different. To begin understanding promotion by others we present preliminary findings surrounding perceptions of this process in naturally occurring friendships.

Perceived promoter potential.

We use the term *perceived promoter potential* to represent the extent to which an individual believes their close friends will promote them (i.e., insight into the promotion by others process). People could develop knowledge of whether their friends are likely to promote them and in turn, this knowledge should affect their relationships, including how much they value relationships with promoters and how much they want promoters to know about promotable information. In the present manuscript, we introduce the idea of promotion by others by testing three assumptions about perceptions of promotion of others. First, we ask about feasibility—is promoter potential related to connections among an individual's friends? Second, we consider whether perceived promoter potential influences relationship quality—do people value their relationships with potential promoters? Finally, we consider whether promoter potential might direct where people want positive information about the

self to go—do people want promoters to know promotable material? These basic questions lay a foundation for understanding the process of promotion by others.

Social connections as the foundation for promoter potential.

If someone is to be a promoter, we assume they must have some shared social connections with the target of promotion—they must be able to tell others. From a social network perspective, this idea maps onto network degree centrality—the extent to which network members are connected to other network members (see Wasserman & Faust, 2009). Namely, in order for promoters to facilitate a spread of information they should be highly central—connected with many other shared connections. We focus on shared connections because these are what allow for *promotion by others* rather than mere capitalization. If Anthony tells Susan—who's in the same department as John—about John's success, John's broader social network may see him more positively. On the other hand, if Anthony tells his rugby team—whom John has never met—it is not as likely to offer John as many benefits. Thus, shared connections between social network members provide a structure for potential promotion by others. When more people in a social network know about a success, more people can reflect positively on and interact positively with the target of the promotion. In this way, the connections each person has to others in a social network represent a possible information highway for the spread of information. As Figure 1 shows, an individual should perceive greater promoter potential in network members who are connected to others also known by the individual. (Figure 1 about here).

Dynamics of promoter potential.

As people develop perceptions of which friends might promote them, these perceptions likely affect their relationship quality. As Figure 2 illustrates, we suggest two relationship dynamics that should be associated with perceived promoter potential. (Figure 2 about here). First, perceived promoters should come to be more valued relationship partners. Following a balance theory perspective, promoters may increase positive relationships with others (Cartwright & Harary, 1956; Davis, 1963; Heider, 1946, 1958). These positive perceptions can further spread to people who receive the promoted information. If Anthony says nice things about John, Susan is likely to perceive he likes John. In turn, Susan may develop positive—or more positive—feelings about John. Moreover, people typically feel closer to others who help them meet specific goals (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010; Orehek & Forest, 2016) and the same might be true for help with general motivations (i.e., self-presentation, self-enhancement). Some evidence suggests people feel closer to others who maximize their personal experiences of success (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable et al., 2004), suggesting they may also feel closer to others who share positive information.

Second, if social connections represent a possible information highway, people who value promotion by others should have an awareness of where information should be directed (either intentionally or incidentally) in order to maximally spread throughout a network. That is, people should want others more likely to spread this information to know about it. Importantly, evidence of this desire for others to know should be found above and beyond effects of closeness to promoters.

Individual Differences in Promotion Strategies

Not all people self-promote to the same degree (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; John & Robins, 1994; McCain & Campbell, in press). Sensitivity to the benefits and costs of self-promotion could be related to this variability (Lynch & vanDellen, 2018). Self-promotion is often a vehicle for self-enhancement and self-presentation (Aloise-Young, 1993; Brown, 1986; Horvath & Morf, 2010; Paulhus, 1998; Robins & Beer, 2001; Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994). But as noted above, it is costly. Some people may be cautious about self-promoting in case their claims are inaccurate (i.e., individuals with low self-esteem; Blaine & Crocker, 1993; J. D. Campbell & Lavalley, 1993; Schütz & Tice, 1997; Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, & Gause, 1994) whereas others may be concerned about appearing boastful (i.e., cultural modesty; Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Kurman 2001a, 2001b; Kurman & Sriram, 2002). In contrast, some people (e.g., people higher in narcissism) are sensitive to gaining immediate status and self-esteem (Foster & Trimm, 2008), which may focus their attention on the benefits of self-promotion.

Individual differences in self-enhancement have been linked to differences in preferences for direct versus indirect self-enhancement. Broadly speaking, indirect self-enhancement occurs when the agent of the enhancement is not the same person as the target of the enhancement. For example, basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980) requires a close other to have accomplished something that allows for the target to get a boost in self-esteem through their association with a successful person. Similarly, partner enhancement (Brown & Han, 2012) occurs when one reflects on the positive attributes of one's partner in order to feel better about the self. These forms of indirect self-enhancement differ from promotion by others in key ways. First, indirect self-enhancement is usually discussed in regard to the success of another. However, in promotion by others, the target and the successful person are the self (e.g., John's presentation), yet someone else is still the agent (e.g., Anthony spreading the news). The second important difference is that the target may receive the boost completely passively (e.g., the self doesn't have to be involved in the enhancement). Considering our previous example, John may not even realize Anthony has attended the presentation let alone will tell others of John's successful performance.

Despite these differences from currently discussed routes of indirect self-enhancement, they offer a beginning place to consider who might be most sensitive to or prefer to enhance (or present) through promotion by others. Fortunately, extensive research indicates individual differences are related to preferences for direct versus indirect self-promotion. People higher in narcissism and self-esteem tend to engage in self-promotion and other direct self-enhancement strategies (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Bosson, Brown, R. P., Zeigler-Hill, & Swann, 2003; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Campbell et al., 2002; Carpenter, 2012; Grijalva & Zhang, 2016; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991). For example, people higher in self-esteem take the risk of drawing attention to the self (Baumeister et al., 1989) and narcissism is positively associated with endorsement of grandiose statements (e.g., "I am a special agent of God") as well as observer ratings of grandiose characteristics (e.g., "egotistical"; Raskin et al., 1991). People lower in self-esteem tend to prefer indirect forms of self-promotion that do not require bragging or drawing attention to the self (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Brown

& Han, 2012; Horvath & Morf, 2010; Raskin et al., 1991; vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011, Wood et al., 1994). For example, people with lower self-esteem often reflect on the positive qualities of their relationship partners (Brown & Han, 2012). That said, grandiose narcissism and self-esteem do not work identically in terms of self-enhancement. Narcissism is associated self-enhancement in more agentic, socially aggressive domains, but not in more communal domains; the self-enhancement associated with self-esteem is spread across both agentic and communal domains (for a recent nomological analysis comparing both traits along these dimensions see Hyatt, Sleep, Lamkin, Maples-Keller, Sedikides, Campbell, & Miller, 2017).

The theoretical foundation of humility also suggests possible associations with self-promotion. Individuals higher in humility do not necessarily self-deprecate, instead demonstrating relatively low self-focus (Tangney, 2005). Thus, although they may be proud of their accomplishments, they may not feel the need to tell others about those accomplishments. Moreover, people higher in humility are open-minded and information-seeking (Tangney, 2005); they may not self-promote as much as others because they are hoping to spend social time learning about others. Moreover, because highly humble people are aware of the competencies and values of others (Halling, Kunz, & Rowe, 1994; Tangney, 2005), they may be more attuned to others promoting on their behalf. In sum, individuals lower in narcissism and self-esteem or higher in humility are least likely to self-promote and thus have the most to gain from promotion by others. As a result, they should be most aware of this process and should be more sensitive to promotion by others in evaluating their relationships.¹

The Present Study

We explore perceptions of promoters using an egocentric social network approach. In egocentric social network analyses (SNA), participants generate a list of people they know and indicate the social connections between named people. Participants can also rate features of each network member. Because we were interested in dynamics related to promotion by others, for each network member we asked participants to indicate to what extent they thought their friend might tell others positive information about the self, how much they valued their friend, and how much they wanted their friend to know about their success. Using these ratings, we tested three primary hypotheses that inform whether promotion by others may be an additional route to self-promotion. First, we tested a *feasibility* hypothesis: in a social network, people who are more connected (i.e., central) should be perceived as potential promoters. Second, we tested a *relational value* hypothesis: people who are perceived as promoters are valued. Third, we tested a *maximization* hypothesis: people should want potential promoters to know about their successes. In the context of these hypotheses, we considered whether observed associations might be moderated by individual differences mapping onto self-promotion tendencies. We expected

¹We focus here on the fact that individual differences predict some of the variability in *tendencies* to self-promote. Although individual differences may also be related to motivation and ability to self-promote (an important avenue for future work on promotion by others), these questions are beyond the scope of our preliminary research presented in this manuscript.

individuals less likely to self-promote (i.e., lower narcissism and self-esteem; higher humility) to demonstrate greater magnitude of the associations.

Method

We tested our hypotheses using an egocentric social network analysis (SNA). In egocentric SNA, participants name and answer questions about their network members but network members do not have to come from the same bounded network. Thus, egocentric networks reflect the broad relationships people have in everyday life. Our social network data nested network members (level 1) within egos (participants; level 2). To increase statistical power to observe cross-level interaction effects, we asked participants to name and evaluate 30 friends (Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998), a network size considered feasible for egocentric SNA (McCarty, Killworth, & Rennell, 2007).² Moreover, asking for 30 network members allows for a broad range of individuals who are both close and not close to the ego to be named. Additionally, because of our interest in interaction effects, we collected network data from over 300 participants (allowing a buffer for potential attrition) to provide statistical power ($\beta > .80$) for medium cross-level interaction effects (Mathieu, Aguinis, Culpepper, & Chen, 2012).

Participants

Participants ($N = 318$) self-selected to participate in exchange for course credit for an undergraduate psychology course. Seven participants were excluded from analyses because they missed one or more attention filter questions. Of the remaining 311, ($M_{age} = 18.95$, $SD_{age} = 1.26$) most participants were women (79.1%) and Caucasian (73.3%, 9.3% Asian, 10.3% Black, 2.3% Hispanic, 1.9% other, 2.9% did not report). The social network software did not save data for some participants ($N = 9$), decreasing the sample size for analyses using the network data.

Procedures

All participants were seated at semi-private cubicles containing a desktop computer. First, participants completed individual difference measures (randomized order). Then participants generated social networks using EgoNet software (2011-03-08; McCarty, 2011). Participants named and rated 30 network members (full instructions and items in supplemental materials).

Measures

Promoter potential.—Promoter potential represents the extent to which network members are perceived as likely to spread positive information about the participant throughout the social network. We operationalized this construct with a single item, “If this person knew about your goal success (whether you told them or they found out), how much would he/she tell other people you both know?” Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 5 (*extremely likely*) for each network member.

²All participants were able to name 30 people and none asked during the research session if they could name fewer than 30 people.

Connectedness.—We calculated degree centrality of each network member as an operationalization of connectedness. Degree centrality was generated by the EgoNet program based on participants' report of their closeness (1[*they have never met*] to 5[*very close*]). Based on past research with egocentric SNA (McCarty, 2002; Meisel, Clifton, MacKillop, & Goodie, 2015), a tie was created between two network members when the relationship was rated as moderately or very close. The more ties a network member has, the higher their connectedness.

Desire network members' knowledge—We conceptualized participant's desire for a network member to know about success using the item "How much do you want this person to know about your success?" Participants responded from 1(*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) for each network member.

Relational value.—To assess valuation of each network member, we created a composite by averaging scores on three items ($\alpha = 0.93$) from the network member survey measuring closeness, value of each friend, and sadness over losing the friend. Note that by asking participants to name 30 alters, networks should have contained variability in how close participants were to each network member. Indeed using the relational value metric, on average, participants reported being fairly close to their network members ($n = 9000$, $M = 3.57$) but we also observed good variability (closeness ratings ranged along the entire 1-5 scale, $SD = 1.13$). Further note that this measure of relational value captures how close participants (i.e., egos) felt to each alter, which is distinct from connectedness (i.e., closeness between alters).

Individual differences.—Scale characteristics and correlations among individual difference and network variables are presented in Table 1. (Table 1 about here).

Trait self-esteem. We used the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) to assess trait self-esteem. Participants indicated agreement with each item (e.g., "I feel I am a person of worth") on a five-point scale (1 = *not at all like me*, 5 = *very much like me*). As necessary, items were reverse scored so higher scale averages indicate higher self-esteem.

Narcissism. We used the Brief Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-13; Gentile et al., 2013) to measure narcissism. Participants viewed pairs of statements and indicated with which statement they most agreed (e.g., "I find it easy to manipulate people" or "I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people"). Items were scored and summed so higher scores indicated greater narcissism.

Humility. We used the seven item Humility Scale (Powers, Nam, Rowatt, & Hill, 2007) to measure humility. Participants viewed seven trait pairs on opposite ends of a 100-point slider scale. Participants indicated where they fell between the two traits (e.g., arrogant to humble). All items were scored such that higher numbers indicated higher humility and then the seven items were averaged to create a single humility score for each person. Self-report measures of humility should be interpreted with some caution (e.g., Powers et al., 2007); however, there is evidence that this measure is positively related to implicit humility as well as friend ratings of an individual's humility (Rowatt et al., 2006).

Additional measures.: Additional measures (see supplemental materials for a full list) were assessed as part of the larger data collection but are not reported in the current manuscript.

Results

We tested our hypotheses using a series of regression analyses within multilevel models where network members were nested in each participant. Prior to analyses, level 1 independent variables (i.e., characteristics of network members) were ego-mean centered (i.e., group-mean centered) and level 2 independent variables were standardized. These procedures reduce multicollinearity and allow for interpretation of cross-level interaction effects (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013). To decompose significant interactions, individual difference variables were re-centered one standard deviation above and below the mean to represent higher and lower levels respectively (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Analyses were conducted in SPSS version 23. We estimated the model using the Mixed command in which we used a restricted maximum likelihood method and a compound symmetry covariance structure to test the fixed effects of ego and network level variables. Restricted maximum likelihood allows for unbiased variance estimates and corrects the degrees of freedom in estimating regression parameters (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Compound symmetry structure estimates the covariance based on the raw data and is a parsimonious structure.

Feasibility Hypothesis: Network connectedness predicts perceptions of promoter potential.

Perceptions of promoter potential were positively associated with connectedness, $b=0.07$, $SE=0.004$, $t(8699)=18.48$, $p<.0001$, 95%CI (0.06,0.07). The more connected a network member is, the more promoter potential that person is perceived to have.

Relational Hypothesis: People value social network members with high promoter potential

Perceptions of promoter potential predicted relational value, $b=0.48$, $SE=0.01$, $t(8699)=58.72$, $p<.0001$, 95%CI (0.46,0.50). Participants placed greater relational value on those they perceived as likely to spread positive information.

Maximization Hypothesis: People want social network members with high promoter potential to know about success.

We regressed desire for network members to know about success on perceptions of promoter potential. Perceptions of promoter potential were positively associated with desire for network members to know about success, $b=0.52$, $SE=0.01$, $t(8699)=61.03$, $p<.0001$, 95%CI (0.50,0.53). Because this association may be explained by feelings of closeness to network members (i.e., people want close others to know about their successes), we repeated this analysis while controlling for relational value. The association between promoter potential and desire for network members to know about success remained significant, $b=0.21$, $SE=0.01$, $t(8698)=25.48$, $p<.0001$, 95%CI (0.19,0.22). This finding suggests although closeness does play a role, wanting promoters to know about one's success is about more than simply wanting closer friends to know about accomplishments.

Individual differences in relying on promotion by others.

To examine the potential functions of promotion by others, we evaluated each of the above effects with regard to individual differences known to vary with preferences for indirect (vs. direct) self-enhancement. As Tables 2–4 show, we found consistent evidence of moderation by narcissism and humility with inconsistent results for trait self-esteem. (Tables 2–4 about here). Table 5 shows the slopes representing the relationship between perceived promoter potential and each other construct at these relatively high and low levels. Because we ego-mean centered the data, the presence of interactions suggests variability in how people respond to differences within their network. Steeper slopes correspond to stronger connections between an independent and dependent variable.

Narcissism consistently moderated our associations of interest (all t values $> |3.06|$, all $ps < .01$). In all cases involving narcissism, the slopes were steeper for those individuals lower in narcissism (slopes for lower levels ranged from .08 to .55; slopes for higher levels ranged from .06 to .48). Humility also consistently moderated our associations (all $ts > 2.39$, all $ps < .05$). All slopes involving humility were steeper for individuals higher in humility (slopes for higher levels ranged from .08 to .57; slopes for lower levels ranged from $-.03$ to .46). Interactions involving self-esteem were less consistent. Self-esteem did not moderate the association between perceived promoter potential and network connectedness (feasibility hypothesis; $t = -0.85$, $p > .10$). Self-esteem marginally moderated the association between perceived promoter potential and relational value (relational hypothesis; $t = 1.80$, $p < .10$). In this case, the association was stronger for individuals higher ($b = .50$; vs. lower, $b = .47$) in self-esteem. Finally, self-esteem significantly moderated the association between perceived promoter potential and desire for network members to know about success (maximization hypothesis; $t = 4.11$, $p < .0001$). Again, the association was stronger for individuals higher ($b = .55$; vs. lower, $b = .48$) in self-esteem. (Table 5 about here).

Discussion

Using egocentric network analysis, we evaluated assumptions related to a novel process—promotion by others. Supporting our feasibility hypothesis, participants identified people who were more connected in their network as potential promoters. Consistent with the relational hypothesis, they also more strongly valued people to the extent they perceived them as promoters. Furthermore, people generally expressed wanting friends to know about their success to the extent they perceived those friends might tell others (i.e., the maximization hypothesis).

Data from this study also shed light on how individual differences might be related to promotion by others. Across the relationships observed, individual differences frequently moderated their magnitude. People lower in narcissism or higher in humility demonstrated stronger relationships between perceptions of promoter potential and a) promoter connectedness within the network, b) feelings of closeness, and c) wanting friends to know about their success. That is, they were more sensitive to a perceived promoter's network connections—their perceptions of promoter potential were more strongly related to the individuals' centrality in the network. Likewise, people higher in humility (and people lower in narcissism) felt closer to their friends they perceived as promoters to a greater degree than

did people lower in humility (or higher in narcissism). Furthermore, how much these individuals wanted their friends to know about success was more strongly related to how much they perceived that friend to be a promoter. These differences may emerge from a sensitivity to the benefits (e.g., people higher in narcissism more strongly value respect and admiration from others; Campbell, 1999; Campbell & Foster, 2007; Raskin et al., 1991) or to the costs (e.g., for people higher in humility self-promotion may feel inauthentic) of self-promotion. We should note we observed only a modest negative correlation between narcissism and humility ($r = -.38$), suggesting there may be unique reasons these individual differences relate to dynamics of promotion by others.

Self-esteem also moderated some of the relationships. The association between promoter potential and connectedness was not moderated by self-esteem. However, self-esteem did moderate the association between promoter potential and desire for network members to know about success and marginally moderated the association between promoter potential and relational value. Contrary to expectations, in both instances it was individuals *higher* in self-esteem who exhibited stronger relationships, potentially because people lower in self-esteem are cautious in interpersonal evaluations (Blaine & Crocker, 1993; J. D. Campbell & Lavelle, 1993; Schütz & Tice, 1997) and thus may be hesitant to value people based on their own perceptions (i.e., of whether their friends will promote them). As this result was unexpected, we find it interesting for future research but are hesitant to make strong conclusions about why it emerged. However, the different patterns displayed by self-esteem and narcissism provide further evidence the two constructs affect self-processes in distinct ways (e.g., Brummelman, Thomaes, & Sedikides, 2016; Campbell et al., 2002; Zeigler-Hill, 2006).

One reason people engage in self-promotion may be to feel more positively about themselves (e.g., Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Paulhus, 1998; Robins & Beer, 2001; Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994). However, efforts to improve self-esteem can backfire (Crocker & Park, 2004; Kernis, 2003), and it is thus possible promotion by others is one route that can provide a benefit to self-esteem while mitigating some of the costs of *seeking* self-esteem through self-promotion. John may feel more positively about himself if he learns that Anthony is sharing news of his successful presentation with others. In fact, promotion by others has the added benefit of being a surprise. If Susan congratulates him on his presentation, John is likely to feel positively about himself, and in a different way than if John had told her about his presentation. To be sure, if Susan responded positively to John's disclosure, he would likely feel happy (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2010). But, consider John may also have doubts that Susan's positive response only occurred because she was being polite. To the extent that any doubts about authenticity (which undermine relationship satisfaction; Lemay & Clark, 2008a, 2008b) would emerge for John if he told Susan himself, her congratulating him because *Anthony* promoted John may have even more positive benefits for John. Thus, the benefits to John of promotion by Anthony are both esteem enhancing and relationship strengthening.

It is also important to note that individuals may engage in multiple strategies for satisfying their self-esteem and if one strategy is working they may disengage from other strategies at that time (Tesser, Crepaz, Collins, Cornell, & Beach, 2000). Thus, if promotion by others

does afford self-enhancement, it may be a viable alternative to other direct forms of enhancement. The present research suggests this possibility because the individuals most likely to be aware of and responsive to promoters in their network were individuals who typically engaged in more indirect self-enhancement (e.g., individuals low in narcissism, individuals high in humility). Of course, it is possible that people who do engage in a lot of self-promotion (e.g., people high in narcissism) will pursue additional strategies to supplement their already active self-promotion (e.g., people high in narcissism). However, a different research paradigm that allows respondents to choose to engage in multiple self-enhancement strategies would be necessary to test that possibility.

The implications of these processes for how the self functions is particularly interesting. That is, processes thought to occur within the self (e.g., self-promotion, self-enhancement, self-presentation) may be diffusely spread throughout one's network. In some literatures, researchers discuss the notion of indirect methods of these processes; most notably, indirect self-enhancement occurs when the person enhancing does so using someone else's accomplishments (e.g., associating with successful others, reflecting on positive aspects of one's partner; Brown et al., 1988; Brown & Han, 2012; Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). What we observe in the present study is more passive than even these indirect strategies because the person could play no role in the spread of information. Indeed, in our example, John did nothing other than deliver his presentation. *Anthony* attended the presentation, *Anthony* told Susan about the presentation. Certainly, one could imagine a situation where John might tell Anthony about his success, and such strategic use of networks to increase promotion by others is an important next step for research.

We further speculate the full range of benefits of promotion by others is quite varied, and future research should more directly consider these benefits. First and foremost, we suspect promotion by others facilitates relationships. When others respond positively to people's successes, they feel closer to them (Gable & Reis, 2010; Gable et al., 2004). Sharing another's successes through promotion seems a clear way someone can respond positively to a person's success. Moreover, promotion by others may facilitate relationships with those who receive the promotion. Because promotion by others involves one person (e.g., Anthony) telling another (e.g., Susan) about a third's success (e.g., John's presentation), the process inherently suggests something positive about the relationships between its actors (e.g., Anthony and John's relationship). From a balance theory perspective, if Susan feels positively about Anthony who says something positively about John, Susan should feel closer to John.

Studying networks provides a unique opportunity to understand the spread of information—people other than direct observers or recipients of positive information come to know about a target's success. The present study leaves open many unanswered questions about the inner workings of the networks and promoters themselves. Does a friend have promoter potential because he or she can tell mutual friends or does a friend's willingness to share information with anyone—even unshared connections—increase perceived promoter potential? In the present study, we constrained the question to be about information shared with mutual friends/acquaintances. However, promoters might also share positive information with others who are not known by the target. This spread of information to non-

shared social sources may carry different kinds of benefits. People currently unknown to the target of promotion may eventually meet this target and prior instances of promotion by others may influence the positivity of those meetings. For instance, telling a friend about a student's work might increase the odds of a job opportunity for that student. Or, talking about a colleague's interesting work with one's soccer team over drinks might change future evaluations of that colleague at future social events where both the colleague and teammates are present.

Even though social networks *can* provide opportunities for promotion by others there is still the question if they *will*. For instance, if Anthony did not know Susan—or did not know her well—he likely would not have told her about John's presentation. Even if Anthony did know Susan well, there may be many reasons he might not think to tell Susan about John's presentation, including his own personality (e.g., low agreeableness) and situational factors (e.g., perceived threat to Susan from John's success). The benefits of promoting others likely influence the extent to which a person spreads positive information about others. For example, if the positive information in question is self-relevant, a person may not spread the information because it threatens the self to highlight one's own shortcomings (Nielsen & Shapiro, 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). Other traits of the promoter, including agreeableness, extraversion, and narcissism may make a person more or less likely to share information about other's successes.

Future research should investigate the characteristics and motivations of the promoters themselves. One possibility is that promotion by others is simply a manifestation of the levels of extraversion among the members of one's social network. This idea would be supported by our data in that individuals who are highly connected were perceived as potential promoters and extraversion is related to being highly connected (e.g., Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002; Lee, Dean, & Jung, 2008). Moreover, individuals who are highly extraverted tend to be highly sociable (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1987), and have greater (a) positive affect (Lucas & Fujita, 2000), (b) empathy (Hekmat, Khajavi, & Mehryar, 1974) and (c) emotional intelligence (Atta, Ather, & Bano, 2013). However, we are skeptical that promotion by others is only about extraversion. Among other things, highly extraverted people are more assertive and dominant (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007; Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009; Grant, Gino, & Hofman, 2011; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Thus, we suspect that extraversion alone may not determine whether an individual is likely to be a promoter.

The extent to which a person spreads positive information is probably also influenced by the perceived benefits of sharing the information with others. Although we have focused only on whether promoters may spread information about an individual, promoting others is likely reciprocal, with individuals often serving as promoters and being promoted themselves. Because of this reciprocity, promoting others may be considered an exchange process (Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958). Indeed, one reason people may promote others is because they expect a friend to return the favor. In this way, people may be able to coordinate their promotion to maximize collective benefits and minimize collective costs. Of course, some promoters may come to be seen as less trustworthy or unbiased, especially to the extent that promoting others is also self-promoting (e.g., faculty promoting their students' work).

Our current study is limited by the bounds of an egocentric network: we only asked participants for perceptions of their own acquaintances not additional people unknown to the participant. These questions could be further informed by the use of a bounded or socio-centric network in future research. Additionally, our study utilizes self-report. These measures help provide a foundation for understanding individual differences in social networks but would benefit from additional work using behavioral measures or perceptions of the process from the perspective of other people within the network.

In short, although we have explored only preliminary questions related to promotion by others, we argue the idea of promotion by others through social networks opens up a host of new questions that can better inform how people maintain self-esteem and offer support to each other in dynamic, interpersonal ways. We hope this study will help spur additional research effort into self-enhancement and self-promotion as they are embedded in social networks.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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Figure 1.

Illustrating promoter potential in John's hypothetical social network

Note: John knows all members in both networks shown above. John should perceive Anthony to have more promoter potential in the network on the left because Anthony is more connected to shared network members on the left than on the right.

Figure 2.

Illustrating closeness and promoter potential in John's hypothetical network

Note: Even when Anthony has the same number of connections, he might vary in how much others (i.e., John) perceive him as a promoter. In the top panel, Anthony is perceived as a high promoter and is expected to tell shared connections with John about John's success. As a result, John should feel closer to Anthony and want Anthony to know about his successes. In the bottom panel, John does not perceive Anthony as a promoter, and therefore should neither feel particularly close to Anthony nor want Anthony to know about his successes.

Table 1.

Correlations between Individual Difference and Network Characteristic Variables

Measure	α	$M(SD)$	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-esteem	0.90	3.83(0.75)	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Narcissism	0.70	3.89(2.69)	.19**	—	—	—	—	—
3. Humility	0.74	72.29(11.99)	.15**	-.38**	—	—	—	—
4. Connectedness	—	4.76(4.38)	.08**	.06**	-.04**	—	—	—
5. Promoter Potential	—	2.92(1.32)	.07**	.10**	-.03*	.23**	—	—
6. Relational Value	0.93	3.57(1.13)	.07**	.02 ^t	.05**	.34**	.51**	—
7. Success	—	3.38(1.23)	.03**	.11**	.01	.24**	.60**	.68**

^t
 $p < .10$ *
 $p < .05$ **
 $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Note. ‘Success’ represents wanting network members to know about successes. Self-esteem, narcissism, and humility are ego level individual differences (level 2). Connectedness, promoter potential, relational value, and success are network member level characteristics (level 1).

Correlations among level 2 individual differences are based on an N of 303. Correlations among level 1 or across levels 1 and 2 are based on Ns between 8790 and 9000.

Table 2.

Main Effects and Interactions Associated with Potential Individual Difference Moderators of the Relationship between Perceived Promoter Potential and Network Connectedness

Trait	Main Effect of Trait	Main Effect of Connectedness	Interaction Between Connectedness and Trait
	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t
Self-Esteem	0.10(0.04 [0.02,0.18]) <i>t</i> (291) = 2.34 *	0.065(0.004 [0.06,0.07]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 18.35 ****	−0.003(0.004 [−0.01,0.004]) <i>t</i> (8495) = −0.85
Narcissism	0.13(0.04 [−0.05,0.21]) <i>t</i> (291) = 3.19 **	0.067(0.004 [0.06,0.07]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 18.35 ****	−0.01(0.004 [−0.02,−0.004]) <i>t</i> (8495) = −3.19 **
Humility	−0.03(0.04 [−0.11,0.05]) <i>t</i> (291) = −0.78	0.07(0.004 [0.06,0.07]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 18.38 ****	0.01(0.004 [0.001,0.02]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 2.39 *

^t
p < .10

*
p < .05

**
p < .01

p < .001

p < .0001

Table 3.

Main Effects and Interactions Associated with Potential Individual Difference Moderators of the Associations between Promoter Potential and Relational Value

Trait	Main Effect of Trait	Main Effect of Promoter Potential (PP)	Interaction Between PP and Trait
	<i>B (SE [95% CI])^t</i>	<i>B (SE [95% CI])^t</i>	<i>B (SE [95% CI])^t</i>
Self-Esteem	0.07(0.03 [0.01,0.13]) $t(291) = 2.46^*$	0.48(0.01 [0.46,0.50]) $t(8495) = 58.13^{****}$	0.01(0.01 [-0.001,0.03]) $t(8495) = 1.80^t$
Narcissism	0.02(0.03 [-0.04,0.08]) $t(291) = 0.77$	0.48(0.01[0.46,0.50]) $t(8495) = 58.17^{****}$	-0.03(0.01[-0.04,-0.01]) $t(8495) = -3.06^{**}$
Humility	0.05(0.03 [-0.01,0.11]) $t(291) = 1.73^t$	0.48(0.01 [0.47,0.50]) $t(8495) = 58.30^{****}$	0.04(0.01 [0.03,0.06]) $t(8495) = 5.50^{****}$

^t
 $p < .10$

*
 $p < .05$

**
 $p < .01$

 $p < .001$

 $p < .0001$

Table 4.

Main Effects and Interactions Associated with Potential Individual Difference Moderators of the Association between Promoter Potential and Desire for Network Members to Know about Success

Trait	Main Effect of Trait	Main Effect of Promoter Potential (PP)	Interaction Between PP and Trait
	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t	<i>B</i> (SE [95% CI]) ^t
Self-Esteem	0.04(0.04 [-0.04, 0.11]) <i>t</i> (291) = 0.94	0.52(0.01 [0.50,0.53]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 60.47 ****	0.03(0.01 [0.02,0.05]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 4.11 ****
Narcissism	0.13(0.04 [0.06,0.21]) <i>t</i> (291) = 3.59 ****	0.52(0.01 [0.49,0.53]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 60.51 ****	-0.04(0.01 [-0.05,-0.02]) <i>t</i> (8495) = -4.39 ****
Humility	0.01(0.04 [-0.06, 0.09]) <i>t</i> (291) = 0.29	0.52(0.01 [0.50,0.53]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 60.67 ****	0.06(0.01 [0.04,0.07]) <i>t</i> (8495) = 6.89 ****

^t
p < .10

*
p < .05

**
p < .01

p < .001

p < .0001

Table 5.

Slopes for each Association by Low and High Levels of Tested Individual Differences.

	Self-esteem		Narcissism		Humility	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
b between connectedness and PPP	.10	.06	.08	.06	-.03	.08
b between PPP and closeness	.47	.50	.51	.46	.44	.53
b between PPP and desire to know ^a	.48	.55	.55	.48	.46	.57

Notes: PPP = perceived promoter potential. All slopes differ from 0, $p < .0001$. Aside from the slopes for PPP and (a) connectedness and (b) closeness across self-esteem, the slopes within each individual difference are statistically different, $p < .05$.

^aInteractions maintained significance when controlling for relational value (all $bs > |.02|$, all $ts > |3.18|$, all $ps < .001$).