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What is This?

Pushing in the Dark: Causes and Consequences of Limited Self-Awareness for Interpersonal Assertiveness

Daniel R. Ames[1] and Abbie S. Wazlawek[1]

Abstract

Do people know when they are seen as pressing too hard, yielding too readily, or having the right touch? And does awareness matter? We examined these questions in four studies. Study 1 used dyadic negotiations to reveal a modest link between targets' self-views and counterparts' views of targets' assertiveness, showing that those seen as under- and over-assertive were likely to see themselves as appropriately assertive. Surprisingly, many people seen as appropriately assertive by counterparts mistakenly thought they were seen as having been over-assertive, a novel effect we call the *line crossing illusion*. We speculated that counterparts' orchestrated displays of discomfort might be partly responsible—behaviors we termed *strategic umbrage*. Study 2 revealed evidence for widespread *strategic umbrage* in real-world negotiations and Study 3 linked these behaviors to the *line crossing illusion* in a controlled negotiation. Study 4 showed that this illusion predicted outcomes in a multi-round negotiation.

One of the great challenges of social life is being appropriately assertive. Our interests and objectives are rarely perfectly aligned with the people we interact and work with, repeatedly making us confront a basic question: How hard should we push to get our way? Press too hard and social costs mount as relationships begin to fray. Give in too readily and instrumental losses accumulate and desired outcomes fade from view. Even though this challenge of asserting oneself appropriately is pervasive, and even though the stakes for relationships and well-being are high, people often strike the wrong balance, at least in the eyes of others (e.g., Ames & Flynn, 2007). But an important question remains largely unanswered: Do they know? Are people generally aware of when they are seen as a jerk or a pushover, a bully or a doormat—and do they know when they are seen as having the right touch?

Just as asserting oneself appropriately is a great challenge of social life, so too is self-awareness. Our focus here is on the intersection of these two basic challenges. We draw on the scholarship of self-awareness and meta-perceptions to set our initial expectations that people tend to be (at most) modestly aware of how their assertiveness comes across to the people around them. We also follow our results in an unexpected direction, pursuing evidence that people may often be strategically misled by their counterparts about how their behavior is seen. In addition, our findings highlight the consequences mistaken meta-perceptions can have on subsequent interactions. When people seek unnecessary relational repairs, they may ironically forge deals that forego value for both parties. In the end, we argue that many people are "pushing in the dark" when it comes to interpersonal assertiveness—and that, sometimes, their counterparts are the ones turning out the lights.

Assertiveness

In even the most loving romances, the most functional teams, and the most satisfying work relationships, differences are inevitable, with individuals facing the choice of how hard to push for their own interests. Following past work on folk perceptions (Ames & Flynn, 2007), we call this dimension of responses to interpersonal conflict *assertiveness*: the degree to which a person is seen as standing up, speaking out, and pressing for their interests.

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Assertiveness, and responses to conflict more generally, has been linked to a range of consequences including relationship satisfaction (e.g., Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), group functioning (e.g., Jehn & Mannix, 2001), leadership effectiveness (e.g., Ames, 2009), and subjective well-being (e.g., De Dreu, van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004). Assertiveness appears to have curvilinear effects: up to a point, pushing harder can bring rewards, but beyond a certain level, increasing assertiveness can entail mounting social costs, implying an inverted-U shape with some middle range of assertiveness often seen as optimal (Ames, 2008). Research also suggests that people are frequently seen by others as falling on one side or the other of the optimal range (Ames & Flynn, 2007). However, past work does not clarify whether people typically recognize whether and when they are seen by those around them as having crossed the line into being too assertive or as having given in too readily.[1] Nonetheless, we can turn to scholarship on self-awareness for some general guidance.

Self-Awareness

Over the past several decades, researchers have made great inroads in understanding self-awareness (e.g., Vazire & Wilson, 2012). The correspondence between targets' self-views and others' views of targets has often been characterized as modest—as has the relationship between meta-perceptions (what a target thinks others think of them) and others' views. In a recent review, Vazire and Carlson (2010) observed that "self-knowledge exists but leaves something to be desired" (p. 611), a conclusion that coheres with Kenny and DePaulo's (1993) earlier work on meta-accuracy: "the glass of self-knowledge is half-full . . . and half-empty" (p. 614).

What inhibits higher levels of self-other convergence? Three factors bear noting. The first concerns decoding others' views. For someone to detect if a conversation partner finds him obnoxious, for example, his counterpart would need to display valid evidence of her reaction to his behavior (e.g., a curled lip indicating disgust), he would need to attend to that fleeting signal, looking past non-diagnostic cues (e.g., a feigned smile), and then draw the correct inference (e.g., that the lip curl was a sign of repulsion at his jokes). This process of encoding, transmission, and decoding is fraught with the potential for missed or misread signals (e.g., Carlson & Kenny, 2012).

If a counterpart's signals are hard to read, two other mechanisms may fill the void: self-enhancement and projection. On a wide range of attributes, people tend to self-enhance (e.g., Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008) and even report having performed more positive behaviors and fewer negative behaviors than objective coding suggests (e.g., Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998). Relatively unskilled people often vastly overestimate their abilities in domains ranging from logical reasoning to emotional intelligence (e.g., Dunning, 2011) and the vast majority of people see themselves as above average on a host of dimensions (e.g., Alicke & Govorun, 2005).

Elsewhere, scholars of meta-perceptions (e.g., Kenny & DePaulo, 1993) have argued that people generally project their self-views onto others: A target tends to assume others see her as she sees herself. In combination, these effects can produce a situation where people tend to rate themselves (overly) positively in a particular domain and (mistakenly) assume others see them equally positively. Taken together, then, the challenge of decoding noisy signals shows why self-awareness might be limited and the mechanisms of self-enhancement and projection show that errors in meta-perceptions may often fall in the direction of flattering self-views.

Initial Expectations

Drawing on this prior work, we proceeded with two initial expectations regarding self-awareness and assertiveness. First, a *modest link* effect: We expected significant but only modest links between targets' self-views and counterparts' views of their assertiveness and between target's meta-perceptions and counterparts' views. Second, a *moderate self-view* effect: In line with self-enhancement processes, those seen by counterparts as under- or over-assertive would show a tendency to see themselves as appropriately assertive and assume their counterparts would see them likewise.

These predictions seem to stand in at least partial contrast to leading accounts of assertiveness and competitive behavior. Many models of conflict put motivations at center stage in accounting for who pushes hard and why (cf. Carnevale & De Dreu, 2006). For instance, dual concern theory (e.g., Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) and social value orientations (e.g., Messick & McClintock, 1968; Van Lange, 1999) trace differences in assertiveness to preferences for different outcomes. In this view, self-awareness for assertiveness may well be high. Highly assertive people may recognize that others see them as pushing too hard—they may just care more about winning than making others feel good. Likewise, very unassertive people may know that others see them as giving in too easily, but nonetheless choose to act that way because they think it yields the outcomes they desire or avoids results they abhor.

To be clear, we are not arguing that motivations do not matter. Nor are we suggesting that highly assertive or highly unassertive people always lack awareness. Rather, we think that contemporary models of assertive conflict behavior imply a greater degree of self-awareness than is suggested by the general literature on meta-perceptions. An important goal for the present research is to characterize the balance of species: We believe that oblivious jerks may be as common as knowing ones and that unwitting pushovers may be as widespread as self-conscious ones. Our results will clarify whether this is the case.

Approach and Plan of Study

We tested our ideas in the context of dyadic negotiations for two reasons. First, dyadic negotiations are an important domain in their own right, with high stakes for individuals in terms of well-being and material outcomes. Second, such negotiations are a relatively controlled context that can serve as a window onto interpersonal assertiveness, allowing us to capture dynamics that we believe generalize to social life more broadly.

Our research revolves around categorical distinctions in self- and counterpart perceptions of under-, over-, and appropriate assertiveness—categories that our pilot research and past work (Ames & Flynn, 2007) suggest people find intuitive and meaningful. As a result, many of our analyses are typological, such as comparing groups where targets correctly perceive their counterparts' categorization of their assertiveness (e.g., targets who know they are seen as appropriate) and groups where self-perceptions or meta-perceptions diverge from counterpart perceptions (e.g., targets who think they are seen as over-assertive when they are actually seen as appropriate).

We report results from four studies. Study 1 examined self-awareness with dyads in a negotiation, generally supporting our expectations about *modest link* and *moderate self-view* effects. However, an unexpected effect emerged, which we termed the *line crossing illusion*, referring to a sizable share of people who were seen by counterparts as appropriate but who nonetheless thought they had come across as too assertive (i.e., they were under the illusion that they had "crossed the line" in their counterpart's eyes). We speculated that this meta-perception error might be caused in part by a counterpart's displays of what we call *strategic umbrage* (e.g., exaggerated offense at a request). Study 2 sought evidence that *strategic umbrage* emerged in real-world negotiations and Study 3 captured the effect in a controlled setting. Study 4 used a multi-round negotiation to gauge whether the *line crossing illusion* had an impact on individual and joint outcomes.

In the end, our results paint a new picture of self-perceptions, meta-perceptions, and interpersonal assertiveness that is more than simply incomplete awareness. We show evidence that people seen as getting assertiveness wrong often think they have gotten it right and that people seen as getting assertiveness right often think they have gotten it wrong. Taken together, our findings shed new light on when and why people are often "pushing in the dark" in conflicts—as well as why it matters.

Study 1

Study 1 captured counterpart, self-, and meta-perception judgments of negotiator assertiveness. We predicted that self- and meta-perception ratings would show only modest correlations with counterpart ratings. We also expected that those seen as under- or over-assertive would show a tendency to rate themselves as appropriately assertive.

Participants and Method

Participants included 338 master's of business administration (MBA) students enrolled in negotiation courses at a U.S. business school. One hundred forty-five (42.9%) were female. Average age was 28.4 years ($SD = 2.7$). One hundred eighty-six (55.0%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 84 (24.9%) as Asian or Asian American, 25 (7.4%) as Latino or Hispanic, and 12 (3.6%) as African American.

In the course's second session, students were randomly paired, completing a role-play negotiation revolving around price. For pedagogical reasons, participants were randomly assigned to one of two negotiations (one involving the sale of a factory, the other involving licensing fees for a graphic novel) which featured a buyer and a seller pursuing a deal for which there was a positive bargaining zone (i.e., the buyer was willing to pay more than the least the seller would accept). The vast majority of pairs (154 of 169) reached a settlement. Participants were given approximately 20 min to review their materials and negotiate.

Before learning more details about the case, participants separately completed online surveys, aware that their responses would not be shared with their counterpart in an identifiable way. Participants rated their own assertiveness on a 5-point scale, including "very under-assertive," "somewhat under-assertive," "appropriately assertive," "somewhat over-assertive," and "very over-assertive." Participants rated their counterpart on the same scale. After this, participants were asked to "think about how your partner saw your behavior" and recorded this meta-perception on the same scale. Based on past work about the folk notion of assertiveness (Ames & Flynn, 2007) and our experience with students learning negotiations, we expected that these distinctions between pushing too hard, not enough, or the right amount in a negotiation would be natural ones for our participants to make.

Results

As expected, target self-ratings and counterpart ratings of targets' assertiveness were modestly positively correlated as were meta-perceptions and counterpart ratings (Table 1). As in past work (e.g., Kenny & DePaulo, 1993), meta-perceptions were more closely associated with self-perceptions than counterpart perceptions (comparison $z = 5.74$, $p < .01$).[2] Comparing mean ratings, self-perceptions and counterpart perceptions of assertiveness did not differ, though meta-perceptions were significantly higher than the other two (Table 1).

To better understand how categories of perception (e.g., under-assertive or over-assertive) related between targets and counterparts, we used the perceived assertiveness scale to identify three kinds of judgment: under-assertive, appropriately assertive, and over-assertive. Conceptually, this

Table 1. Correlations Between Self-, Counterpart, and Meta-Perception Ratings of Assertiveness, Study 1.

	M	SD	1	2
1. Target's self-perceptions	2.94$_a$	0.68	—	
2. Counterpart perceptions of target	2.98$_a$	0.61	.215**	—
3. Meta-perceptions	3.24$_b$	0.79	.606**	.247**

Note. Different subscripts on means indicate a significant difference based on a repeated-measures *t* test (*p* < .01). * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01

three-level scheme is simple but preserves the primary distinctions between appropriate, under-, and over-assertiveness that are common in everyday perceptions (cf. Ames & Flynn, 2007). Empirically, collapsing our 5-point scale to this three-level scheme entailed little loss in variance and eliminated cells with limited statistic power (across the self-ratings, meta-perception ratings, and counterpart ratings, less than 3% of cases featured the endpoint ratings of 1 or 5 on the 5-point scale).

The top panel of Figure 1 shows how self-perceptions and counterpart perceptions cohered. As suggested by our *moderate self-view* prediction, of those seen as under-assertive by counterparts, 67% saw themselves as appropriate or over-assertive. Of those seen as over-assertive, 64% saw themselves as appropriate or under-assertive. Overall, targets and counterparts shared the same category for their ratings 51% of the time.

We pursued a similar approach to the meta-perception results (bottom of Figure 1). Of those seen as under-assertive by counterparts, 71% thought they were seen as appropriate or over-assertive. Of those seen as over-assertive, 30% thought they were seen as appropriate or under-assertive. Overall, meta-perceptions and informant views shared the same category 45% of the time.

Discussion

Study 1 supported our initial expectations, revealing a *modest link* between self-views and counterpart views and between meta-perceptions and counterpart views, as well as evidence of *moderate self-views*—that is, many people who got assertiveness wrong in their counterpart's eyes saw themselves as getting it right. Study 1 also revealed an unexpected pattern of results, which we address in the section that follows.

Exploring an Unexpected Effect

Compared with the self-views of participants in Study 1 (top of Figure 1), meta-perceptions shifted dramatically in the direction of believing that counterparts saw them as over-assertive (bottom of Figure 1). Whereas 19% of people rated themselves as over-assertive, more than twice as many (41%)

thought their counterpart saw them as over-assertive. One particular effect drew our attention: A significant share (38%) of people who were seen by their counterparts as appropriately assertive incorrectly thought their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. They displayed what counterparts saw as the right level of assertiveness but they assumed their counterpart saw them as getting it wrong—specifically, as pushing too hard. We call this the *line crossing illusion*, when people mistakenly believe they have "crossed the line" into being over-assertive in a counterpart's eyes, when the counterpart actually views them as appropriately assertive. By chance alone, we might expect some people to err in their meta-perceptions, but the direction of these errors was far from random. The *line crossing illusion* was twice as common as mistaken meta-perceptions in the other direction, whereby people who were seen as appropriately assertive mistakenly thought they came across as under-assertive (17% of those seen as appropriately assertive; comparison $\chi^2 = 9.32$, *p* < .01).

The unexpected prevalence of the *line crossing illusion* in Study 1 is at odds with the pair of mechanisms we invoked earlier. Self-enhancement and projection would presumably produce an overwhelming share of people seeing themselves as appropriately assertive and assuming their counterparts would see them the same way. Subsequent review of negotiation episodes and the scholarly literature on emotional displays in negotiations (e.g., Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2010) led us to suspect that the *line crossing illusion* was not necessarily a product of "top down" motivated cognition, as in a typical self-enhancement effect. Rather, it may often be a product of "bottom up" inferences based on a counterpart's behavior. Specifically, people often attend to their counterpart's purposeful verbal and nonverbal displays aimed at convincing them that they were asking for far too much or offering far too little. We call these acts *strategic umbrage*, reflecting the small-scale drama enacted by a negotiator in an attempt to convince their counterpart that her requests are burdensome, extreme, or unreasonable and, thus, should be reduced in scope. These strategic signals may involve sometimes comically exaggerated displays of distress, offense, frustration, or disappointment as well as sometimes colorful verbal characterizations (such as "You've got to be kidding" and "You're killing me"). *Strategic umbrage* acts go beyond simply not accepting a counterpart's proposal; they are a kind of editorial commentary meant to cultivate a particular image of the offer-recipient's attitudes about the offer and offer-maker.

To be clear, we do not claim that *strategic umbrage* is the only possible source of the *line crossing illusion*. However, it may be a meaningful mechanism operating in negotiation contexts. The larger theoretical account for this effect fits with prior work on strategic interaction and social cognition more generally. In brief, we see it as a matter of the production and consumption of strategic displays. From the
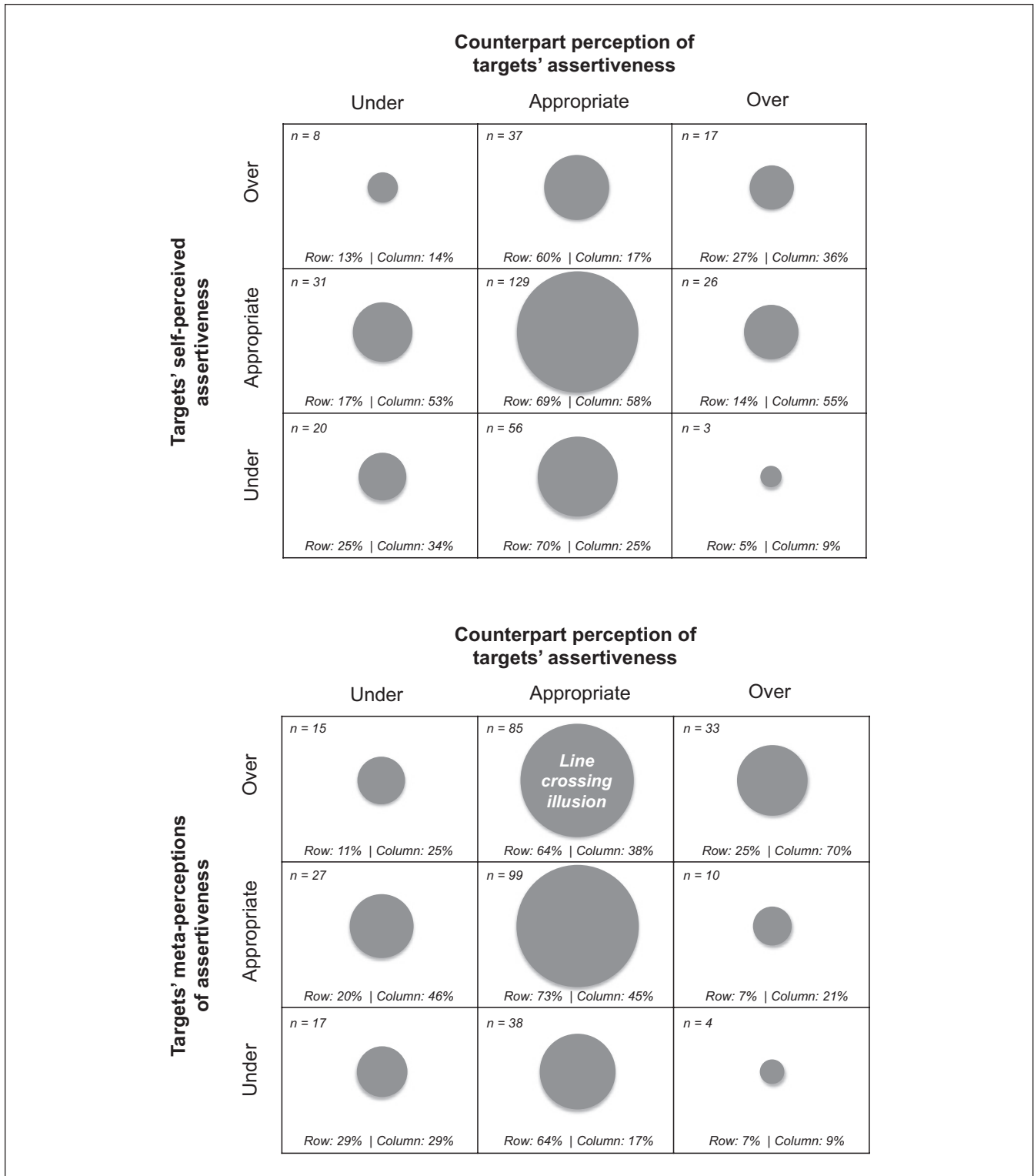
**Counterpart perception of
targets' assertiveness**

	Under	Appropriate	Over
Over	*n = 8*	*n = 37*	*n = 17*
	Row: 13% | Column: 14%	*Row: 60% | Column: 17%*	*Row: 27% | Column: 36%*
Appropriate	*n = 31*	*n = 129*	*n = 26*
	Row: 17% | Column: 53%	*Row: 69% | Column: 58%*	*Row: 14% | Column: 55%*
Under	*n = 20*	*n = 56*	*n = 3*
	Row: 25% | Column: 34%	*Row: 70% | Column: 25%*	*Row: 5% | Column: 9%*

Targets' self-perceived assertiveness

**Counterpart perception of
targets' assertiveness**

	Under	Appropriate	Over
Over	*n = 15*	*n = 85* — *Line crossing illusion*	*n = 33*
	Row: 11% | Column: 25%	*Row: 64% | Column: 38%*	*Row: 25% | Column: 70%*
Appropriate	*n = 27*	*n = 99*	*n = 10*
	Row: 20% | Column: 46%	*Row: 73% | Column: 45%*	*Row: 7% | Column: 21%*
Under	*n = 17*	*n = 38*	*n = 4*
	Row: 29% | Column: 29%	*Row: 64% | Column: 17%*	*Row: 7% | Column: 9%*

Targets' meta-perceptions of assertiveness

Figure 1. Self- and counterparts' perceptions of assertiveness, Study 1.
Note. Circle size reflects number of cases in cell.

consumption point of view, actors are interested in gauging whether their behavior is effective (e.g., Bandura, 1991) and how they are faring in the eyes of others (e.g., Carlson &

Kenny, 2012). While they may often rely on pre-existing and more general representations about themselves and others, they also look to cues afforded by the immediate interaction.

People typically take others' behavior and reactions at face value, assuming they are offered in good faith and correspond to underlying attitudes (variously characterized as the truth bias, for example, McCornack & Parks, 1986, and the correspondence bias, for example, DePaulo, 1992). More specifically, negotiators often draw on counterpart displays to gauge counterpart attitudes and their own course of action (e.g., Van Kleef et al., 2010). In short, negotiators may be eager and sometimes credulous consumers of counterpart displays.

Switching to the production of displays, we recognize that a likely asymmetry in signals exists: People may overtly resist unattractive offers but rarely do they spontaneously encourage a counterpart to be less accommodating, even when they would readily agree to less generous terms (cf. Larrick & Wu, 2007). Beyond this asymmetry, negotiators may selectively cultivate or exaggerate displays of disappointment, imposition, or offense—beyond simply not accepting a proposal—in an effort to shape counterpart perceptions and elicit accommodation. While it is possible that both sides in a negotiation would employ such displays and therefore fully discount their counterpart's displays, we expect that the vividness of such behavior, and perceivers' general tendency to take counterparts' behavior at face value, will result in a situation such that even a substantial share of negotiators seen by a counterpart as appropriately assertive will mistakenly assume they have pushed too hard in their counterpart's eyes. That is, the *line crossing illusion* will be common and more frequent than the opposite meta-perception error (when those seen as appropriately assertive mistakenly believe they have come across as under-assertive).

Our first step in gauging whether *strategic umbrage* causes *line crossing illusions* was to examine whether these behaviors occur with some frequency in natural settings and are not a peculiar feature of Study 1's sample (MBA students) or context (a dyadic role-play in a negotiation course). Thus, in Study 2, we asked several hundred U.S. adults to report on their most recent actual negotiation. We sought to replicate the shift we observed in Study 1 between self-ratings and meta-perceptions, such that many people would see themselves as having been appropriately assertive but would think that their counterparts saw them as being over-assertive. We also expected to find that *strategic umbrage* was at least as common as other typical negotiation tactics, such as talking up or down the value of the object being negotiated. Lastly, we tested for a link between reports of counterpart *strategic umbrage* and participants' meta-perceptions that their counterparts thought they were over-assertive.

Study 2

In Study 2, several hundred U.S. adults reported on their most recent face-to-face negotiation. We gauged whether *strategic umbrage* was common in real-world negotiations and whether it showed any link with meta-perceptions of assertiveness.

Method

Participants. Five hundred six U.S. adults completed an online survey in exchange for payment through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk system. Of these 506, 4 did not recall a negotiation. An additional 43 gave an incorrect answer on at least one of the six attention check questions embedded throughout the survey (e.g., with instructions to pick the right-most option). Nearly all (93%) reported on negotiations within the past 2 years; 84% reported on a negotiation within the past year, 61% within the past 90 days, and 46% within the past 30 days. To ensure some reliability in recall, we excluded reports from 2 years or further in the past. Of the remaining 428 participants, 239 (55.8%) were male. The majority (79.2%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 6% as Hispanic/Latino, 6% as East Asian, and 5% as African American. Nearly all (90.1%) reported having at least some college education; 36% had a bachelor's degree and 12% had a master's or advanced degree. A fifth (20%) identified themselves as "not working," a quarter (25%) as working part-time, and 42% as working full-time. Average age was 31.6 ($SD = 10.9$).

Measures. After providing informed consent, the survey asked participants to

> Think of the last time you negotiated for something with someone else face-to-face, like buying or selling something. This could be in your work life or your personal life. It should be a time when you went back and forth with someone with the potential for agreement on something (like the purchase or sale of something).

Participants were asked to write a few sentences describing the negotiation.

Participants indicated their own assertiveness in the negotiation, their counterpart's assertiveness, and their meta-perception on the same scale used in Study 1.

Next, participants noted the extent to which they engaged in a number of behaviors on a 3-point scale ("not at all," "somewhat," "a great deal"). Some items related to *strategic umbrage*, based on our review of dyadic interactions following Study 1: Tried to make the other party feel like they were asking for too much (or not offering enough), exaggerated my emotional displays (my facial expressions, my body posture, etc.) to make the other party feel like they were asking me for too much (or not offering enough), said things (embellished, bluffed, etc.) to make the other party feel like they were asking for too much (or not offering enough), acted outwardly like I was getting a bad deal during the negotiation, and acted like I was offended, shocked, or irritated by the other party's offers and reasoning.

Other items attempted to capture commonly used negotiation strategies to provide a comparison for behavioral frequencies, including made an offer at some point that included a range, like a range of dollar figures or prices; tried to get a
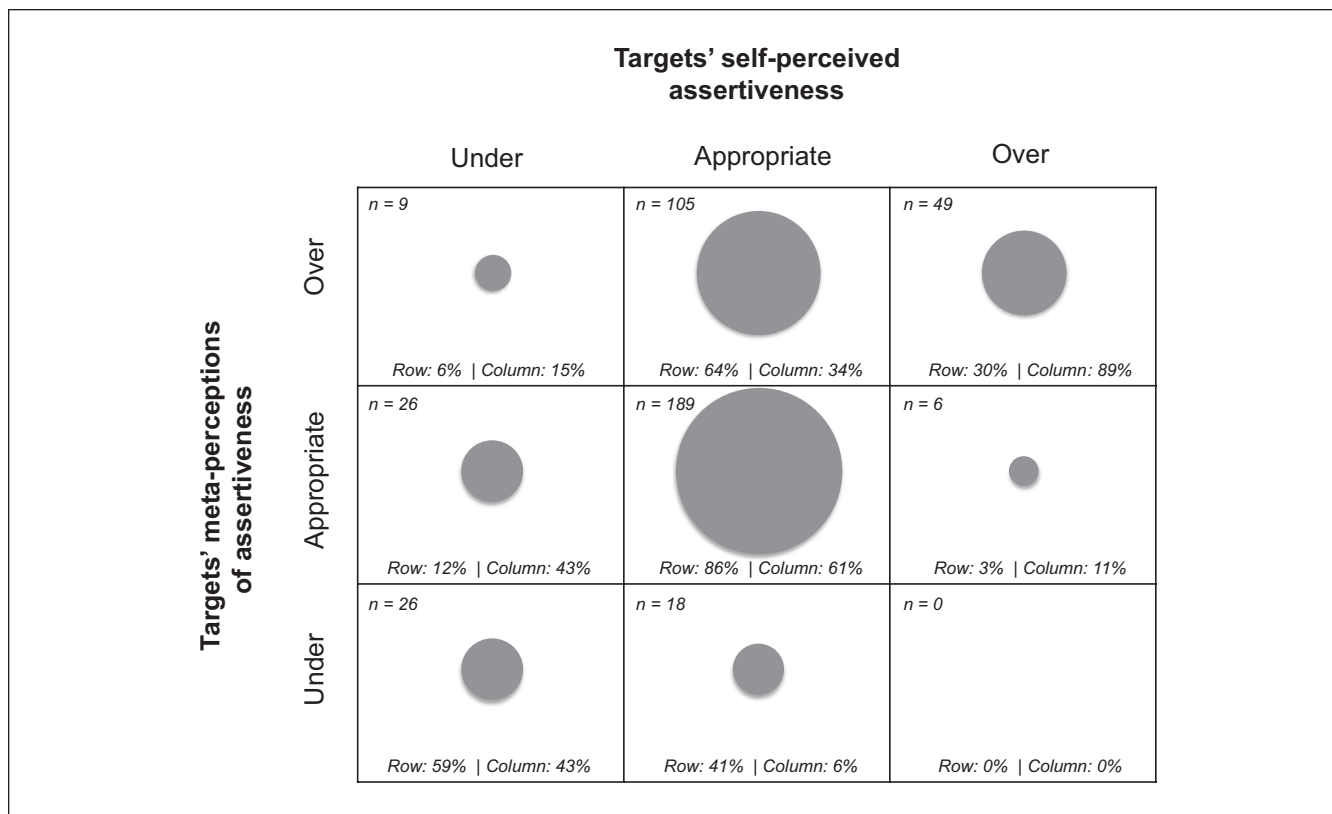
Targets' self-perceived assertiveness

Figure 2. Self- and meta-perceptions of assertiveness, Study 2.
Note. Circle size reflects number of cases in cell.

higher price by talking about how valuable the thing being negotiated was (as a seller) or tried to get a lower price by talking about the shortcomings or flaws of the thing being negotiated (as a buyer); tried to use time to my advantage (e.g., talking about being in a hurry or about not being in a hurry); talked about alternatives as a way of getting an advantage (e.g., talking about other counterparts or options).

Participants then used the same scale to indicate whether their counterpart engaged in any of these behaviors, including *strategic umbrage* and the other negotiation strategies.

While a recall design such as this captures real-world experiences, identification and recall of episodes likely entails biases and should be treated with some skepticism. Participants may be prone to recall negotiations that had extreme outcomes, flatter themselves, or featured surprising events. However, we are unaware of a bias that would substantially distort the relative prevalence of own or counterpart *strategic umbrage* compared with other negotiation strategies.

Results

We began by examining self-perceptions and meta-perceptions of assertiveness. While we did not have counterpart reports of perceptions, these results allowed us to gauge how frequently people who saw themselves as appropriately assertive thought that their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. If few people did so in the wake of real-world negotiations, it would suggest that *line crossing illusions* may not be common. As shown in Figure 2, 34% of those who saw themselves as appropriately assertive thought their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. Indeed, the second most-populated cell in our grid (after those who thought they acted appropriately and were seen as appropriate) featured these participants. A much smaller share of people (6%) who saw themselves as appropriate thought they were seen as under-assertive. In short, a reasonable share of negotiators were not engaging in a conventional meta-perception error of self-enhancement and projection: A third of those who saw themselves as appropriate thought their counterparts felt they had crossed the line.

We next turned to behavioral frequencies, finding that *strategic umbrage* was relatively common. As shown in Figure 3, frequencies varied from 29% of participants reporting that they had acted offended, shocked, and irritated by their counterparts' offers either "somewhat" or "a great deal" to 67% reporting that they had tried to make the other party feel as if they were asking for too much or not offering enough. Reported prevalence for counterpart *strategic umbrage* was equally high. Across the *strategic umbrage* behaviors, 82% of
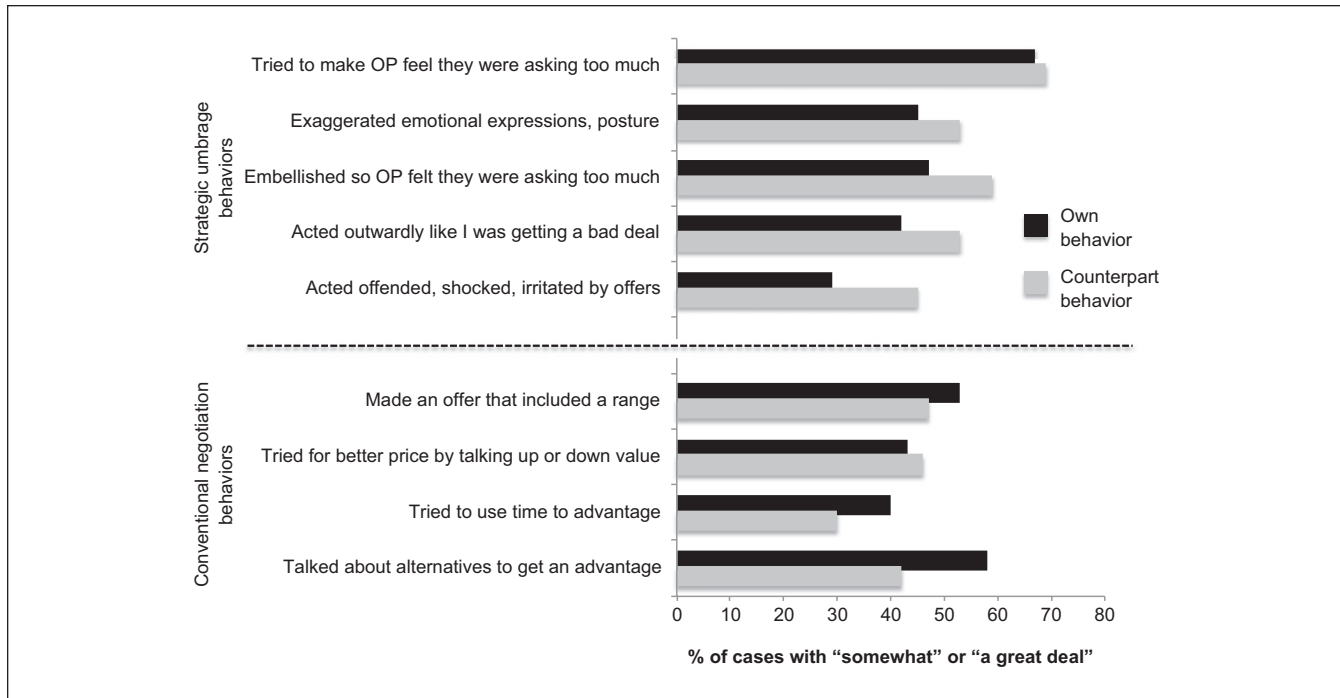
Figure 3. Frequency of *strategic umbrage* behaviors, Study 2.
Note. OP = other party.

respondents reported engaging in at least one of them at least somewhat; 81% said their counterparts did so.

The conventional negotiation tactics we measured occurred with roughly similar frequencies, ranging from 40% of participants reporting that they tried to use time to their advantage to 58% reporting that they invoked alternatives (Figure 3). Across these conventional tactics, 87% of respondents reported engaging at least one; 78% said their counterparts did so.

Having found that a meaningful share of people who thought they were appropriately assertive believed that their counterparts thought they were over-assertive, and having found that *strategic umbrage* was reasonably common, we gauged whether these dimensions were related. We compared two groups of people to address this question: Both groups viewed themselves as appropriately assertive, with one believing their counterparts saw them as appropriately assertive whereas the other group believed their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. (Because we do not have counterpart reports, we do not know that this later group was wrong in their meta-perceptions, but we do know that their meta-perception departed from their self-view in the direction of assuming they were seen as having crossed the line.) Of those who saw themselves as appropriate and thought their counterparts did likewise, 66% rated their counterparts as at least "somewhat" on at least one of the five *strategic umbrage* behaviors (average across the five items of 1.47). Of those who saw themselves as appropriate but thought their counterparts saw them as over-assertive, 95% said their

counterparts did one or more *strategic umbrage* behaviors—with an average across items of 1.95, significantly higher than the former group, $t(288) = 7.57$, $p < .01$. More generally, across all respondents, composite ratings of counterpart *strategic umbrage* were positively correlated with meta-perceptions, $r(422) = .26$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

Study 2 yielded three key points. First, as in Study 1, we found that a significant share of people who saw themselves as appropriately assertive assumed their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. Second, based on reports of real-world negotiations, we found that *strategic umbrage* was common in both self-reports and reports of counterpart behavior. Third, we found that these two dimensions were linked: Participants who thought their counterparts saw them as over-assertive reported higher levels of counterpart *strategic umbrage* than those who thought their counterparts saw them as appropriately assertive.

Study 3

Study 2 suggested that *strategic umbrage* occurs with some frequency in real-world negotiations and that it may shape meta-perceptions, perhaps leading to *line crossing illusions*. However, Study 2 did not capture counterpart views, leaving us unable to compare negotiators' meta-perceptions with counterparts' actual judgments. Study 3 employed a

controlled environment to capture both sides of a negotiation, returning to the paradigm from Study 1. In this study, along with self-, counterpart, and meta-perceptions of assertiveness, participants reported their own *strategic umbrage*. Third-party observers provided a measure of *strategic umbrage* as well. We expected to replicate the finding that *line crossing illusions* occurred with considerable frequency. We also expected that counterpart *strategic umbrage* would be associated with *line crossing illusions*.

Participants and Method

Participants included 172 MBA students enrolled in negotiations courses at a U.S. business school (none of whom were featured in Study 1). Just under 40% (39.3) were female. Average age was 28.1 years ($SD = 2.0$). Just over half (58.9%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 20.2% as Asian or Asian American, 11.0% as Latino or Hispanic, and 4.3% as African American.

Study 3 extended the design from Study 1. As before, students were randomly paired and assigned to one of two single-issue negotiations. Pairs were grouped so that a buyer and seller negotiated a first case while two other participants observed. The initial observers then prepared and conducted a second negotiation (in a context with no connection to the first role-play) with the original negotiators observing. In both cases, observers and negotiators were yoked: Observers received the same materials that negotiators received but did not communicate with them (e.g., the seller in the first case was observed by someone who received the same materials as the seller).

After each negotiation, negotiators and observers completed surveys. As in Study 1, negotiators rated their own and their counterpart's assertiveness on a 5-point scale, as well as meta-perceptions of assertiveness. In addition, as in Study 2, negotiators rated items related to *strategic umbrage* on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("not at all/never") to 7 ("a great deal/always"), from a stem beginning "To extent did you . . ."; items included try to make your counterpart feel like they were asking for too much (or not offering enough); exaggerate your emotional displays (your facial reactions, your body posture, etc.) to make your counterpart feel like they were asking you for too much (or not offering enough); say things (embellish, bluff, etc.) to make your counterpart feel like they were asking for too much (or not offering enough); act outwardly like you were getting a bad deal during the negotiation; act like you were offended, shocked, or irritated by your counterpart's offers and reasoning. Each observer rated these same items for their yoked target (e.g., "To what extent did your target try to make his or her counterpart feel like they were asking for too much?").

Results

Study 3 replicated key findings from Study 1. As shown in Table 2, targets' self-ratings and counterparts' ratings of

Table 2. Correlations Between Self-, Counterpart, and Meta-Perception Ratings of Assertiveness, Study 3.

	M	SD	1	2
1. Target's self-perceptions	2.93ₐ	0.72	—	
2. Counterpart perceptions of target	2.99ₐ	0.62	.208**	—
3. Meta-perceptions	3.27_b	0.85	.713**	.198**

Note. Different subscripts on means indicate a significant difference based on a repeated-measures *t* test ($p < .01$). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

target assertiveness were positively but modestly correlated as were meta-perceptions and counterpart ratings. Self-perceptions were strongly correlated with meta-perceptions (as in Study 1, meta-perceptions were more strongly correlated with self-ratings than counterpart ratings, $z = 6.25$, $p < .01$). The pattern of means closely paralleled what we found in Study 1 as well: Self-ratings and counterpart ratings did not significantly differ from one another though meta-perception ratings were significantly higher than both of these (see Table 2).

The pattern of cases (Figure 4) closely resembled that from Study 1 (Figure 1), showing several noteworthy patterns. First, self-views and meta-perceptions were no more than modestly related to counterpart perceptions (a *modest link* effect). Second, a large share—about 40%—of those seen as under-assertive or over-assertive saw themselves as appropriately assertive (a *moderate self-view* effect). Third, as in Study 1, meta-perceptions shifted dramatically from self-ratings in the direction of over-assertiveness. Fourth, the *line crossing illusion* emerged with considerable frequency. Of those seen by counterparts as appropriately assertive, 43% thought they were seen as over-assertive. As in Study 1, among those seen as appropriately assertive, this *line crossing illusion* was significantly more common than the opposite meta-perception error of assuming one was seen as under-assertive (43% vs. 12%, $\chi^2 = 10.08$, $p < .01$).

We examined whether *strategic umbrage* could be a cause of these *line crossing illusions*. First, we considered how frequently participants showed *strategic umbrage* behaviors. As shown in Table 3, participants reported a good deal of such behavior, ranging from 36% saying they acted offended at the scale mid-point or higher (4 or greater on the 7-point scale) to 92% saying they tried to make their counterpart feel like they were asking for too much. These items were all positively correlated with one another and were aggregated into a five-item self-report *strategic umbrage* scale ($\alpha = .75$).

Observer ratings of targets' *strategic umbrage*—which showed the same rank ordering of frequency and correlated positively with targets' self-ratings—were likewise aggregated into a scale ($\alpha = .83$). We take both self- and observer reports as capturing some part of *strategic umbrage* behaviors.
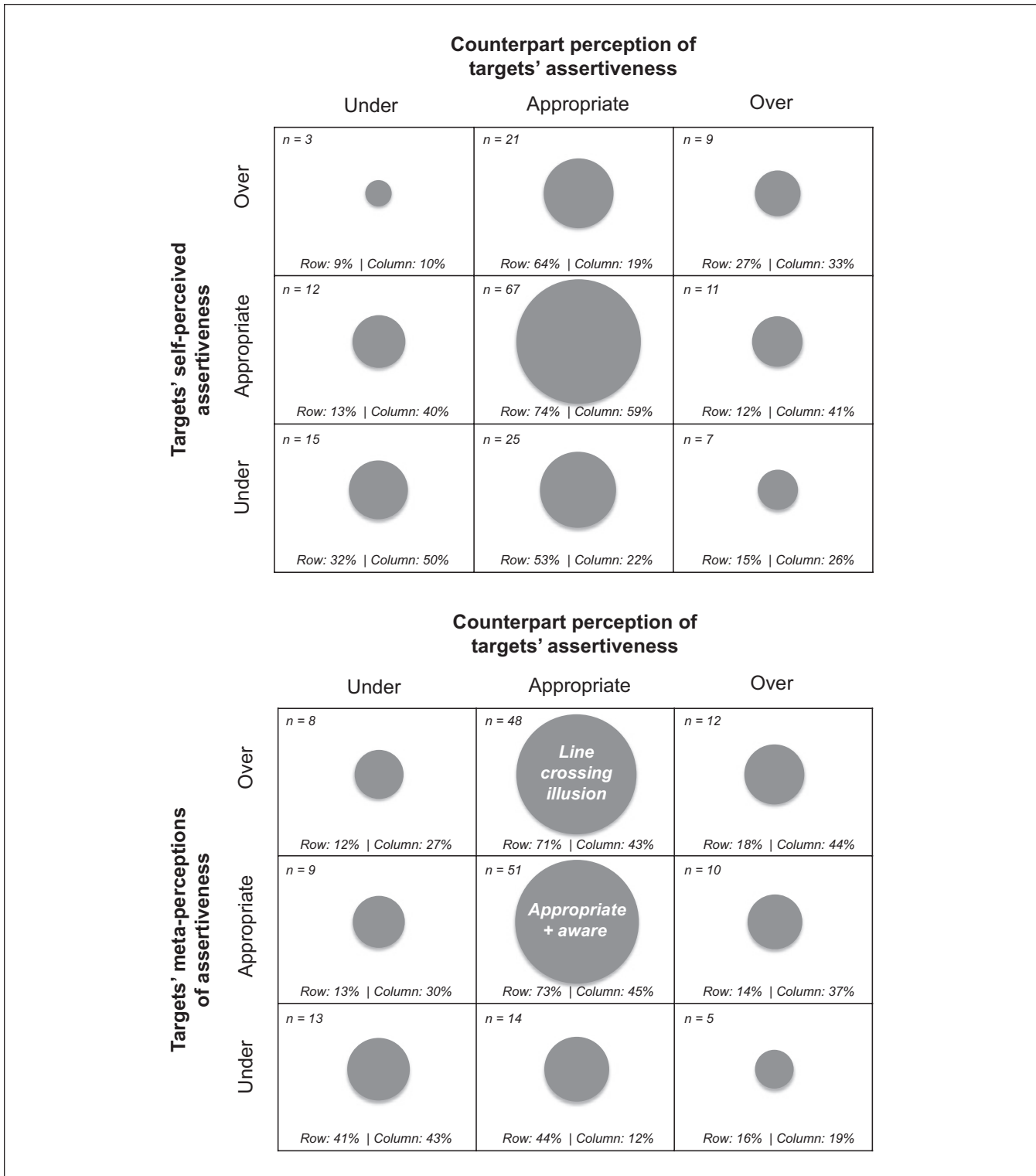
Figure 4. Self- and counterparts' perceptions of assertiveness, Study 3.
Note. Circle size reflects number of cases in cell.

Having found that *strategic umbrage* was common, we turned to whether it was related to *line crossing illusions*. We focused our analyses on comparing two groups: those who

thought their counterparts found their assertiveness appropriate and whose counterparts did indeed find it appropriate ("appropriate + aware" negotiators) and those who thought

Table 3. Correlations Between Self-Reported *Strategic Umbrage* Behaviors, Study 3.

Item	M (SD)	Share at or above scale mid-point	Correlation with item			
			2	3	4	5
1. Asking too much	5.65 (1.03)	92.4	.33**	.27*	.36**	.39**
2. Exaggerated expressions	3.56 (1.58)	46.8		.33**	.46**	.47**
3. Embellished	4.72 (1.46)	79.5			.31**	.25**
4. Bad deal	3.87 (1.62)	50.6				.57**
5. Acted offended	3.28 (1.85)	36.3				—

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

their counterparts found them to be over-assertive when in fact those counterparts found their assertiveness appropriate (i.e., negotiators exhibiting the *line crossing illusion*). This comparison holds constant how counterparts saw negotiators (i.e., as appropriately assertive) and allows us to focus on the relevant difference in meta-perceptions (i.e., whether negotiators thought they were seen as appropriately assertive or over-assertive). We expected that part of this difference would be attributable to *strategic umbrage*.

As expected, counterpart self-reported *strategic umbrage* was greater in the case of *line crossing illusions*—4.17, $SD = 1.09$—than with appropriate + aware negotiators—3.67, $SD = 1.07$; $t(97) = 2.27$, $p = .03$. Likewise, observer-reported *strategic umbrage* for counterparts was greater in the case of *line crossing illusions*—4.07, $SD = 1.34$—than appropriate + aware negotiators—3.39, $SD = 1.23$, $t(95) = 2.59$, $p = .01$.

While our primary interest was in the link between *strategic umbrage* and the *line crossing illusion* in particular, we also tested the link between *strategic umbrage* and meta-perceptions across all participants. The correlations with meta-perceptions were indeed positive—with counterpart self-reported *strategic umbrage, $r(170) = .16$, $p < .05$*, and with observer-reported *strategic umbrage* for counterparts, $r(167) = .15$, $p = .06$.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated our finding from Study 1 that a sizable share of negotiators seen by counterparts as appropriately assertive mistakenly thought they were seen as over-assertive (i.e., *line crossing illusions* were common). We also found that negotiators exhibiting *line crossing illusions* had counterparts who engaged in higher levels of *strategic umbrage*, based on counterpart self-reports and on third-party observer ratings. We interpret this as consistent with our account: Counterparts' *strategic umbrage* behaviors shape negotiators' meta-perceptions, sometimes leading to *line crossing illusions*.

We hasten to add that Study 3 also addressed the question of whether people seen as under- and over-assertive are generally aware of how they come across. The majority of those seen by their counterparts as under-assertive thought they came across as appropriately assertive or over-assertive and the majority of those seen as over-assertive thought they came across as appropriately assertive or under-assertive. Together, these results suggest not only that many people seen as getting assertiveness wrong mistakenly think they have gotten it right but also that many people seen as getting assertiveness right mistakenly think they are seen as getting it wrong.

Study 4

Our results thus far suggest that self-awareness for assertiveness is modest: Many of us, including those who come across as appropriately assertive, do not know how our counterparts see us. In our final study, we considered consequences: Does it matter? We sought evidence linking a particular meta-perception error, the *line crossing illusion*, to negotiation outcomes. More specifically, we expected that negotiators displaying this illusion would often seek to restore relations with their counterparts as a way of making up for their (mistaken) belief that they were seen as pushing too hard initially. That is, in a second encounter, they may attempt to fix something that was never broken in the first exchange. We also expected that this effect would be strongest among those high in relational concerns: Among negotiators showing a *line crossing illusion*, those most concerned about relationships would be the most likely to attempt repairs (and sacrifice value) whereas those least concerned about relationships would be less likely to do so.

It is worth noting that in Studies 1 and 3, where we had negotiation outcome data, we found no link between meta-perceptions and outcomes. We believe this is due largely to the fact that these summary meta-perceptions were gauged *after* the bargaining episode. Had we measured meta-perceptions in the midst of bargaining, we might have found that someone concerned that they were coming across as too assertive would ease up as the interaction continued. In Study 4, we pursued a version of this mid-bargaining measurement approach, capturing meta-perceptions after an initial dyadic negotiation. Participants were then reunited in a second negotiation, allowing us to measure the degree to which they sought to repair their relationship. We recorded the amount of individual and joint value in this second negotiation, which had integrative potential (i.e., the possibility of achieving greater joint outcomes). We expected that those showing a *line crossing illusion*, in contrast to appropriate + aware negotiators as defined in Study 3, would use the second negotiation as a chance to repair their relationship with their counterpart and would subsequently create and claim less value. We expected this effect to be strongest among those highest in relational concerns.

Method

Participants included 78 MBA students enrolled in a negotiation course. Average age was 28.2 (*SD* = 1.95). Forty-nine percent were female. Fifty-four percent identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, 27% as Asian, 9% as Latino/Hispanic, and 4% as African/African American.

During the third week of a semester-long negotiation course, participants were randomly paired with a classmate and assigned a role in a dyadic negotiation to be conducted outside of class exclusively via email. This initial email negotiation revolved around the details of a joint marketing initiative between two companies. The case featured four factors, including a distributive (zero-sum) issue, a compatible issue (where both sides wanted the same outcome), and two issues with the potential for integration (i.e., one issue mattered more to one side, the other issue mattered more to the other). Participants had a week to reach an agreement over email; all pairs did so. After agreeing to a deal, participants completed an online survey, rating their own assertiveness, their counterpart's assertiveness, and meta-perceptions on the same scale used in Studies 1 and 3. Participants did not know the details of the case at this time (e.g., how their payoff compared with their counterpart's), nor did they know that they would negotiate with their counterpart again.

In a subsequent class session, before debriefing the email negotiation, participants were reunited, face-to-face, with their email counterparts and conducted a second negotiation in the same roles, bearing in mind their prior interaction. This second negotiation required the two parties to agree on a manufacturing contract for one of six possible products. Unbeknownst to the participants, these six products had different bargaining zones (i.e., the total dollar value between the least the seller would accept and the most the buyer would pay, ranging between US$0.3 million and US$1.5 million). In effect, the negotiation asked participants to identify which one of six different-sized "pies" they would divide. An optimal deal would feature the division of the largest pie, though which product entailed the largest pie was not initially apparent to either individual and discovering it would require some persistence and exchange of information rather than agreeing to the first workable proposal. In addition, two other features could be added to a possible deal (an exclusivity agreement and a co-branding agreement), each of which would add another US$0.25 million in joint value (thus the potential joint value to be divided ranged between US$0.3 million and US$2.0 million). In sum, participants could easily and quickly find an acceptable deal in this negotiation but "growing the pie"—capturing all the possible joint value—required some creativity, information exchange, and a willingness to persist in seeking a better deal for both parties rather than embracing the first acceptable settlement.

All pairs reached a deal in this second negotiation, after which they completed a survey reporting their deal terms. The survey also asked participants about their repair motivations, asking "To what extent did you use this negotiation as a chance to repair or improve your relationship with your counterpart or make up for your prior interaction?" (on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "definitely").

In an online survey for the course, several weeks before the negotiation, participants indicated their general motivational orientations regarding conflict and negotiations, rating items capturing relational concern ("In conflicts with other people, I work hard to get along with everyone involved") and instrumental concern ("In most conflicts, I focus all my energy on getting my way") on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

Results

The distribution of cases (Figure 5) was similar to what we observed in Studies 1 and 3 with a significant share of people exhibiting a *line crossing illusion*. As in Study 3, we compared the two categories of targets relevant to our central question: those who thought their counterparts found their assertiveness appropriate and whose counterparts did indeed find it appropriate (appropriate + aware negotiators) and those who thought their counterparts found them to be over-assertive when in fact those counterparts found their assertiveness appropriate (negotiators exhibiting a *line crossing illusion*). This allowed us to hold counterpart perceptions of assertiveness constant while contrasting meta-perceptions.

These two groups showed different responses and outcomes in the second negotiation.[3] Repair motivations for the face-to-face negotiation were significantly higher for those showing the *line crossing illusion*—4.00, *SD* = 0.89—than appropriate + aware negotiators—2.83, *SD* = 1.37, $t(44)$ = 3.07, $p < .01$. Collective value across both parties was significantly lower for those showing the *line crossing illusion*—1,644,994, *SD* = 254,044—than appropriate + aware negotiators—1,894,000, *SD* = 175,904, $t(44)$ = 3.49, $p < .01$. Those showing the *line crossing illusion* were significantly less likely than appropriate + aware negotiators to secure a deal with the product model featuring the largest bargaining zone (37.5% vs. 83.3%; χ^2 = 9.98, $p < .01$). The difference in individual deal value, however, was not significantly lower for those showing the *line crossing illusion*—822,843, *SD* = 239,886—than appropriate + aware negotiators—936,000, *SD* = 364,967, $t(44)$ = 1.12, *ns*.

The impact of relational concerns. We expected that people high in relational concerns experiencing a *line crossing illusion* would care more, and more actively seek to rebalance relations, than those less concerned with relationships.[4] Focusing on those exhibiting a *line crossing illusion* following the first negotiation for Study 4, we found that relational concern was negatively related to both individual deal value—$r(16)$ = −.48, $p = .06$—and collective value—$r(16)$ = −.66, $p < .01$—in the second negotiation. Instrumental concern was not related to either value measure. Neither value
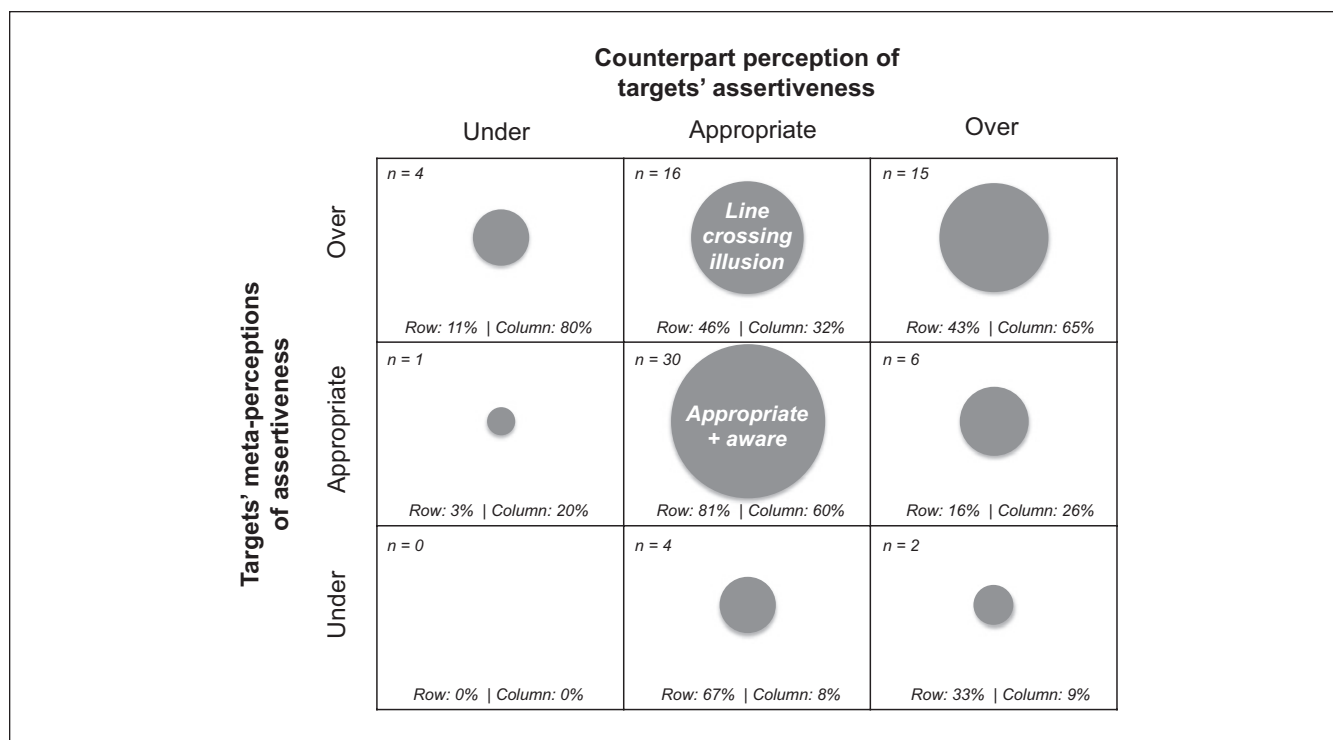
Figure 5. Self- and meta-perceptions of assertiveness, Study 4.
Note. Circle size reflects number of cases in cell.

was significantly related to outcomes for those in the appropriate + aware group.

These results suggest that relational concern may act as a moderator on the impact of the *line crossing illusion*. To illustrate the magnitude of this effect, we followed up on the correlational results noted above with a median split on the relational concern measure, contrasting those low in relational concern (1-5 on the 7-point scale, *n* = 8) versus those high in relational concern (6-7 on the scale, *n* = 8). Among those showing a *line crossing illusion*, those high in relational concern, compared with those low in relational concern, claimed less individual value—698,186 versus 947,500; $t(14) = 2.38, p = .03$—and created less joint value—1,493,738 versus 1,796,250; $t(14) = 2.92, p = .01$. These high relational concern negotiators displaying the *line crossing illusion* also claimed less individual value and created less joint value than accurate + aware negotiators—698,186 versus 936,000; $t(36) = 1.72, p = .09$ and 1,493,738 versus 1,894,000; $t(36) = 5.69, p < .01$, respectively. Those showing low relational concern along with the *line crossing illusion* did *not* show significant differences in individual and joint value compared with accurate + aware negotiators.

With our earlier findings, these results suggest that negotiators exhibiting the *line crossing illusion* may forego collective and individual value in subsequent interactions—and that those who are relationally oriented may be especially prone to forego value in an (unnecessary) effort to restore relations.

Discussion

Study 4 considered whether meta-perceptions of assertiveness matter. In the wake of an initial negotiation, meta-perceptions predicted reports and outcomes in a second negotiation between the same pairs. Those showing a *line crossing illusion* were more likely than appropriate + aware negotiations to say that they used the second negotiation to "repair" their relationship with their counterpart. Their agreements featured less joint value with their counterparts, in part because they were half as likely to strike a deal featuring the most-valuable product. We interpret this as suggesting that those exhibiting a *line crossing illusion* sought to repair relations (even though they were not damaged in the first place) by quickly agreeing to an acceptable deal in a second negotiation, rather than revealing and seeking information that could have led to a better deal with more value to both parties.

Relational concerns appeared to amplify the effect: People exhibiting the *line crossing illusion* who were also high in relational concern created less joint value and captured less individual value than those who did not show the illusion. The *line crossing illusion* appeared to have little effect on those low in relational orientation. These results are consistent with past work showing that prosocial and egalitarian motives (e.g., Curhan, Neale, Ross, & Rosencranz-Engelmann, 2008; De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995) can lead to rapid yielding and missed opportunities

for crafting jointly valuable deals; a motivation to appease can, ironically, lead to dividing a smaller pie.

General Discussion

Asserting oneself effectively is a pervasive challenge. Press too hard, too often, and relationships crumble. Yield too readily, too much, and valued outcomes slip away. Many times each day, people decide how hard to push, often trying to find some middle ground between those extremes. Past work suggests that our behavioral choices are guided by motivations and values concerning one's own and others' outcomes (e.g., Carnevale & De Dreu, 2006) and by expectancies about the social and instrumental outcomes that different behaviors will yield (e.g., Ames, 2008). However, prior research has not clarified the degree to which people know how others see their assertiveness. Motivational accounts of competitiveness could be seen as implying that people are generally aware of how their assertive behavior comes across—that we live, in colloquial terms, in a world of knowing jerks and self-conscious pushovers. A different tradition of work on self-awareness and meta-perceptions suggests that self-awareness exists but is limited, in part because others' views of us are hard to read and because our attention or interpretations fall short. Some accounts propose that we often fill in the blanks by assuming the best about ourselves and our behavior (self-enhancement) and assuming others see us similarly (projection). If so, we may live in a world of oblivious jerks and unwitting pushovers, with many people assuming their assertiveness, like Goldilocks' porridge, is just right.

Drawing on past work, we began with two expectations: that there would be a *modest link* between self-views (and meta-perceptions) and counterpart views of a targets' assertiveness and that targets would show a *moderate self-view* effect, whereby those seen as under- or over-assertive would show a marked tendency to see themselves as appropriately assertive. Our initial study of negotiating dyads lent support to these notions. It also revealed an unexpected shift in meta-perceptions in the direction of targets assuming their counterparts saw them as over-assertive. In particular, a substantial share of those seen as appropriately assertive mistakenly thought their counterparts saw them as pushing too hard, an effect we dubbed the *line crossing illusion*. Collapsing across Studies 1, 3, and 4, this illusion was prevalent: Among people seen by counterparts as appropriately assertive, nearly 40% thought they were seen as over-assertive whereas only 15% made the opposite meta-perception error, thinking they were seen as under-assertive.

We speculated that, in contrast to "top down" self-enhancement and projection effects, this *line crossing illusion* might often stem from a "bottom up" misreading of a counterpart's strategic displays (e.g., exaggerated disappointment and offense). We termed these signals *strategic umbrage* and tested their existence in natural settings in Study 2. There,

hundreds of reports of real-world negotiations confirmed that these behaviors were commonplace and were associated with meta-perceptions. Study 3 tested these effects in a controlled setting, revealing that actor and observer reports of counterparts' *strategic umbrage* behaviors were associated with targets exhibiting a *line crossing illusion*. We do not believe *strategic umbrage* is the only mechanism that can beget *line crossing illusions*, but we suspect it may be a common and important source.

Study 4 examined the impact of these illusions, showing that those committing this meta-perception error were likely to use a second negotiation as a chance to repair their (unbroken) relations, ironically sacrificing value for both parties in the process. Individuals high in relational concern showed this effect most strongly. In short, the *line crossing illusion* matters, shaping approaches to subsequent interactions, sometimes in maladaptive ways.

While our results took us in unexpected directions—identifying the prevalence of *line crossing illusions* and tracing them back, in part, to *strategic umbrage*—we also want to loop back to address a motivating question articulated in our introduction. Are people seen as under- or over-assertive generally aware of how they come across? Our results suggest that many are not. In Study 3, for instance, of those seen as under-assertive, 57% thought their counterparts viewed them as appropriately assertive or over-assertive. Of those seen as over-assertive, 56% thought their counterparts viewed them as appropriately or under-assertive. Thus, not only are those who come across as appropriately assertive often mistaken (e.g., the *line crossing illusion*), a large share of those seen as showing too little or too much assertiveness appear to be unaware. Many people seen by counterparts as getting assertiveness wrong mistakenly think they have gotten it right—and many people seen as getting assertiveness right mistakenly think they are seen as getting it wrong. As we expected, oblivious jerks may indeed be as common as knowing ones and unwitting pushovers may indeed be as widespread as self-conscious ones. To our surprise, we also found that many of those seen as having the right touch think that they have gone too far. In sum, we are often pushing in the dark and our counterparts may sometimes be complicit in turning out the lights—or even firing up a beacon that leads us astray.

Limitations and Generalizability

Our research has a number of limitations, including causality. We gauged *strategic umbrage* in a number of ways (in real-world negotiations and controlled role-plays, using self-reports and observer judgments) though we did not manipulate them to definitively establish their causal effect. Future work might directly manipulate such signals and parse which kinds of displays lead to various effects.

Another limitation concerns the iterative nature of meta-perceptions and behavior. People likely adjust their behavior during an interaction based on their real-time meta-perceptions,

though we gauged summary judgments after interactions. In Study 4, we found links between meta-perceptions from a first negotiation and outcomes in a second negotiation. Future work might gauge mid-interaction meta-perceptions (e.g., in the wake of opening offers) and harness them to predict subsequent judgments and outcomes.

How far do our results generalize? We can offer some speculation based on our results. In Study 2, where U.S. adults recalled real-world negotiations, participants reported their level of bargaining experience as well as whether the negotiation was in a work/professional context or in their personal/home life. These dimensions of experience and context had little to no meaningful effect on our results, suggesting to us that the dynamics of assertiveness judgments, meta-perceptions, and *strategic umbrage* are not restricted to business contexts or experienced dealmakers. Whereas Study 2 focused on U.S. adults, roughly a third of participants in our samples in Studies 1, 3, and 4 came from outside the United States, implying some cross-cultural generalizability as well. Nonetheless, it seems likely that relevant cultural norms exist. Future research might examine the role of culture in the production of, and reactions to, *strategic umbrage* behaviors.

Implications and Outstanding Questions

Meta-perception dynamics. Meta-perception accuracy is often portrayed as a challenge because counterpart signals may be faint, targets may be preoccupied or otherwise unable to decode these noisy messages, and self-enhancement may displace reading others' reactions. Only limited research has examined how counterparts may be complicit in keeping us in the dark (Carlson & Kenny, 2012). In one such effort, Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and McNulty (1992) reported that people with negative self-views often found counterparts to be verbally positive, even though the counterparts were nonverbally disdainful. As a result of these "white lies" verbalized by counterparts, those with negative self-views persisted in self-limiting behaviors, mistakenly thinking they were adaptive. Our results suggest that *strategic umbrage* may be another potentially important white lie. Meta-perception scholars may find value in further documenting and accounting for effects in which counterparts are not just hard to read but are purposefully and strategically sending non-candid feedback. Meta-perception scholars may also reveal new insights by focusing on judgments for dimensions with curvilinear effects—that is, dimensions like assertiveness where evaluations tend to be more positive up to a point, after which they become more negative. Self-enhancement motivations imply that moderate self-views may dominate (e.g., people may think they are in the moderate "sweet spot" for dimensions such as enthusiasm and confidence) but there may be other dimensions where many people mistakenly believe their behavior is seen as problematic even though those around them think they are acting appropriately.

Interventions. Our work suggests that the challenge of assertiveness is twofold: Not only is "pushing appropriately" a formidable balancing act, but we are also often unaware of how the balance we strike comes across to others. Assertiveness is not only a challenge of behavior, but also of mind-reading. However, gaps in self-awareness are potentially good news: They point to prescriptions that do not require editing peoples' motives or values. When those exhibiting *line crossing illusions* understand how to take counterpart reactions with a grain of salt, they may correctly understand that they are succeeding in being appropriately assertive—and they may refrain from attempting potentially costly relational repairs. Likewise, when unaware jerks and unwitting wimps are brought into closer contact with the consequences of their behavior, and how others see them, their natural motivations might lead them to enact behavioral changes that improve their outcomes and their relationships—bolstering their own well-being as well as the well-being of the people around them. This echoes what some prior scholars have observed about the value of modeling, practice, and feedback for training on assertiveness and negotiation (e.g., McAdoo & Manwaring, 2009; Smith-Jentsch, Salas, & Baker, 1996). Put another way, if people are often pushing in the dark, teachers, trainers, and practitioners may help them to find their own balance in interpersonal assertiveness by turning on the lights.

Notes

1. Schmid Mast, Hall, Murphy, and Colvin (2003) found a significant but low self-other correlation for assertiveness with participants making judgments of previously unknown others on the basis of minute-long videotapes. Our research focuses on judgments following actual interactions.
2. The correlations shown in Table 1 did not differ significantly between men and women. While past work has revealed some differences in behavior and perceptions in negotiation contexts, our predictions about the dynamics of meta-perceptions do not vary by sex. Across our studies, we did not find reliable patterns of sex differences for meta-perception effects and, accordingly, we report our results collapsing across sex.
3. The same pattern of results emerges comparing more general groups based only on meta-perceptions (people who thought

they were seen as over-assertive versus appropriately asser-
tive, regardless of counterpart perceptions). Those believing
they were seen as over-assertive in the first negotiation showed
higher repair motivations, struck deals with lower collective
value, and were less likely to do a deal with the "optimal" prod-
uct model than those believing they were seen as appropriately
assertive.

4. Relational concern was not significantly correlated with self-,
counterpart, or meta-perceptions of assertiveness in the ini-
tial negotiation, nor was it significantly correlated with repair
motives.

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