Do Self-Presentation Management Concerns Override the Consequences of Regulatory Depletions on Perseverance?
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Introduction
The purpose of this study was to examine two possible explanations for perseverance—the motive for self-consistency and self-regulatory willpower. Self-consistency motives refer to the desire to maintain a consistent self-image. For example, research\(^1\) shows that people’s performance on tasks match expectations given them. Also, researchers\(^2\) find that people are particularly motivated to meet expectations when in public as a way to manage their self-presentation. Therefore, the specific purpose of this study was to see if expectations influence perseverance under conditions of depleted and non-depleted regulatory willpower.

Method
Participants \((N = 81)\) (run in small groups) completed personality tests that were ostensibly used to predict their performance on an upcoming “cognitive test.”

To manipulate self-control capacity, participants then completed either a non-depleting (easy) regulatory task or a regulatory depleting (difficult) task.

Next, participants were told in front of the group that personality profile indicated they were either expected to perform well or poorly on the upcoming anagram task, or they were given no feedback.

Finally, participants worked on 10 anagrams until they had completed them or quit.

Results
Results showed that participants performed better after the easy, non-depleting task than after the difficult, depleting task, \(F(2, 75) = .074, p = .481\) (see Figure 1). The expectations had no effect on performance, and there was no interaction between the two factors, \(Fs < 1, ns\).

Conclusion
These data suggest that expectations play an insignificant role in perseverance, even under the pressure to manage self-presentation goals. This work compliments our previous work under private conditions. Together, these studies indicate that willpower is the primary reason that people persevere.

References


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Figure 1: Time spent solving anagrams as a function of Expectations and Regulatory Depletion Task, showing that participants persevered more after the non-depleting task than after the depleting task.