BRUSH WITH GREATNESS:

AUDIENCE REACTIONS TO BASKING IN REFLECTED GLORY

by

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this study was to examine whether basking in reflected glory

(BIRGing) (i.e., publicly advertising associations with successful or famous persons) is

an effective self-presentation strategy. It was predicted that a BIRGing target would be

rated more positively by observers than a non-BIRGing target, and that BIRGing that is

prompted (vs. unprompted) would lead to the most favourable evaluations. It was also

hypothesized that a BIRGing target would be rated less positively after disclosing a self-

esteem threat. A 2 (self-esteem threat vs. no self-esteem threat) X 3 (basking prompted

vs. basking unprompted vs. no basking) ANOVA did not support the primary hypothesis:

Participants evaluated the non-basking target more favourably than the basking target.

The self-esteem threat prediction was supported. Results suggest that basking in

reflected glory is not the most effective strategy to use when one is attempting to

manage the impressions of others.

DEDICATION

To Adrian:
       for his tireless support and for teaching me the meaning of
       unconditional love.

To my beloved Sam Ellington:
       for showing me what is truly important in this life.

You are my teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, comedian David Letterman did a segment on his late-night talk show that he dubbed *My Brush with Greatness*. Letterman would ask for volunteers from the audience to stand and take turns telling stories of their real life close encounters with famous people. For example, one audience member rode in an elevator with Nick Nolte, another sold a Christmas tree to Dionne Warwick, and another ate lunch next to Darryl Strawberry. Letterman's viewers were sufficiently intrigued by these brushes with greatness for the segment to be made a regular part of The Late Show programming for many years.

The Letterman Show examples provide anecdotal evidence of a social psychological phenomenon known as basking in reflected glory or BIRGing. Basking in reflected glory is a self-presentational strategy that involves publicly announcing one's connection, however tangential, with a successful, famous or notable person or group with the intention of enhancing the public self by association (Cialdini, 1989). For example, a person might let it be known that they come from the same hometown as a famous actor, or that they share a birth date with a Nobel laureate. Cialdini and his colleagues have argued that an individual basking in reflected glory will publicly promote his or her connection to a notable person or group, even when he or she has no causal connection to the other's success (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980).

The pivotal BIRGing study by Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman and Sloan (1976) revealed that university students demonstrated a greater tendency to display school identifying apparel following a winning game by their school team than following a losing game by their school team (Study 1). The researchers also found that students were more likely to use the pronoun 'we' than the pronoun 'they' in describing a team victory (e.g., "We won!"). In contrast, they were more likely to use the pronoun 'they' than the pronoun 'we' in describing a team loss (e.g., "They lost"). According to Cialdini et al. (1976), BIRGing serves the function of creating a favourable impression in others by strategically presenting information, such as an association with a winning team, that will increase the BIRGer's public image.

Previous Research in Impression Management

Whether one is applying for a job, negotiating a contract, or simply engaging in everyday social interaction, the impressions we create in others, and the social judgments they make about us, can affect our outcomes. Impression management, also known as self-presentation, is "the process by which people attempt to control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Arkin and Shepperd (1990) define self-presentation as "the process of establishing an identity through the appearance one presents to others" (p. 175). According to Schlenker, Britt, and Pennington (1996), impression management is a goal directed behaviour, and a "characteristic of social conduct that permits us to relate successfully to others" (p. 118).

People are typically motivated to make a good impression in order to achieve a particular goal that might be derived by being perceived by others as likeable or socially

competent. In other situations it might be considered advantageous for an individual to present an unfavourable impression either to avoid an aversive task, or to gain sympathy or attention from others (Leary, 1995). In almost every situation, it is possible to imagine the reward of presenting one image or another. Although the notion of controlling other's perceptions of the self may appear on the surface to be manipulative, deceitful, or self-serving, it is not always the case. Because the impressions we create affect the way we are evaluated and treated by others, self-presentation is an essential and "fundamental component of all social transactions" (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000, p. 37).

Interest in the processes of impression management began with the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who published his influential book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in 1959. According to Goffman, an individual will *self-present* in order to establish, maintain, and refine a particular image of the self in the minds of others. Goffman observed that self-presentation is a fundamental component of all social interaction, and argued that it is clearly in the interest of the individual to control the conduct of those with whom he or she is interacting.

Shortly after Goffman published his sociological observations of human behaviour, early social psychological research on self-presentation was conducted by Edward Jones and colleagues (Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973; Jones & Pittman, 1982). These researchers examined the role of strategic self-presentation in social interaction, more specifically, the ways in which people try to get others to form particular impressions of them. Jones and Pittman (1982) outlined five strategies designed to manipulate a target person's attributions of an actor, and reported that strategies differ in

terms of the goals of the actor and hence the attributions sought. For example, ingratiating behaviour (e.g., flattery, attentiveness) is a tactic used when a person is seeking to appear likeable, whereas intimidation is a tactic used when a person is seeking to induce compliance based on fear. Self-promotion and exemplification are tactics used when the influencer or self-presenter is trying to be respected and admired, although Jones and Pittman (1982) note subtle differences in these strategies. Self-promoters are attempting to be seen as "competent, masterful, Olympian" (p. 245), whereas the exemplifier seeks to be seen as "morally worthy and of high integrity" (p. 245). Lastly, the strategy of supplication is used by individuals who exploit a personal weakness and vulnerability with the intention of soliciting help from others by arousing feelings of obligation.

According to Leary (1995) "many psychologists initially viewed self-presentation as ... the ugly underbelly of interpersonal life" (p. 9), and the tactics of ingratiation, self-promotion and intimidation can give the impression that those who employ self-presentational strategies are manipulative or deceitful. However self-presentation doesn't necessarily indicate the presentation of a false self. On the contrary, we are engaging in impression management anytime we actively try to influence other's impressions, and that can mean attempting to convey an accurate self-image. Goffman (1959) proposed that self-presentation is "the over-communication of some facts and the under communication of others." (p. 141), as individuals select aspects of themselves that will best achieve a situational objective. Leary (1995) states that, although behaviour is affected by a variety of factors "virtually any observable behaviour can

serve self-presentational goals" (p. 37), and the variety of behaviours that have been the focus of research on impression management supports this claim.

Strategies of Impression Management

A tactic that is used to convey that an individual is a particular type of person or a person who possesses certain characteristics or attributes is an *attributive tactic*, whereas a tactic that conveys an individual is not a particular type of person is a *repudiative tactic* (Leary, 1995). Attributive tactics include such behaviours as self-descriptions or attitude statements. For example the self-descriptions one might hear from a job applicant could include selected pieces of information chosen to show that the applicant possesses desirable qualities for the job, such as competence, intelligence, skill, or loyalty (Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002). Attitude statements (e.g., Ban the leg-hold trap!) can be used to project a favourable image if the attitude is expressed for tactical reasons.

Public attributions, that is, statements about the cause of a particular event, can be used to serve self-presentational goals, and people often report attributions for events in their lives that give the most favourable impressions. For example, people typically make internal attributions for their successes and alternatively make external attributions for their failures (Luginbuhl, Crowe, & Kahan, 1975). In a study examining the influence of self-presentational goals on attributional reports, Tetlock (1981) asked participants to describe situations in which they or an acquaintance had behaved in a desirable or an undesirable way. Participants were then asked to make attributions about their own or their acquaintances' behaviour. One group of participants was told their attributions

were to be anonymous, whereas the other group were told their attributions would be discussed publicly. The study revealed that participants' attributions for their own behaviour were more self-flattering and were more likely to impress others favourably than were participants' private or public attributions about their acquaintances' behaviour. Tetlock (1981) also reported that the self-serving bias was more pronounced when participants thought their attributions about their own behaviour were to be made a topic for public discussion rather than be kept anonymous.

In some situations people attempt to manipulate the attributions others make about them by engaging in *self-handicapping,* that is, by either constructing or claiming an impediment to success (e.g., partying the night before an exam), in order to minimize blame for a failure, or augment perceived ability following a success. Kolditz and Arkin (1982) examined the role of self-handicapping as an impression management strategy. In their study, participants were given success feedback following a puzzle task with either soluble or insoluble analogies. Participants were told they would be tested again and were given the choice of taking a performance enhancing or a performance-debilitating drug prior to the second test. Half the participants were told that the experimenter would have access to their second test scores, and half the participants were told that the experimenter would not have access to their test scores. Participants in the insoluble analogy condition were more likely to take the debilitating drug prior to the second test than participants who had participated in the soluble analogy condition. This effect was strongest when the participant thought the experimenter would have access to their test scores on the subsequent test. Thus, when participants believed their performance might be less than average, and that their performance was to be

evaluated by an observer, they were motivated to establish an external, rather than an internal, cause for their potentially poor performance.

Similar to self-handicapping is a self-presentational strategy examined by Gibson and Sachau (2000) called sandbagging. Sandbagging involves a feigned demonstration of incompetence or disability used to create a low expectation in an observer of the sandbagger's performance on a particular task. For example, a good student may publicly predict that she will perform poorly on a final exam. Her public prediction is intended to create a low expectation of her in the eyes of others, in the hope of looking highly competent following a better than expected performance. Gibson and Sachau (2000) posited that sandbagging would be used to reduce performance pressure, and to enhance observers' evaluations of one's performance. They also predicted that the tendency to use sandbagging as a self-presentational strategy would be associated with high social anxiety and low-self esteem. To test this, the researchers used a video game paradigm, and placed participants in either a high performance expectation condition or a low performance expectation condition to create performance pressure. Gibson and Sachau (2000) developed the Sandbagging Scale to measure an individual's motivation for sandbagging as well as the behavioural tendency to strategically use sandbagging. A high score on the Sandbagging Scale would indicate an individual who actively attempts to reduce performance pressure by sandbagging. The results of their study indicate that participants who had scored high on the Sandbagging Scale were more likely to predict a low personal performance in the high performance expectation condition than in the low performance expectation condition, relative to those participants who had scored low on the Sandbagging Scale. The

results were consistent with the notion that sandbagging is a self-presentational strategy used to manipulate observer's expectations of the target and thus reduce performance pressure on the sandbagger.

The Self-Presentational Tactic of Basking in Reflected Glory

Similarly to many of the strategies mentioned, those who resort to basking in reflected glory do so with the purpose of creating a favourable impression in others. Cialdini et al. (1976) have theorized that those who engage in BIRGing behaviour can expect more favourable evaluations from others or an increase in prestige due to processes best explained by Heider's (1958) balance theory. According to Heider (1958), people tend to perceive associated things as evaluatively similar in order to maintain cognitive consistency or balance. The relevance of Heider's balance theory to BIRGing is that if a perceiver (P) has a positive regard for an individual (X), and also sees the individual (X) as having a positive unit connection with another person (O), then there is cognitive pressure on (P) to also perceive the other person (O) with the same positive regard that (P) has for individual (O). To translate Heider's triadic language to basking, a target basks in reflected glory by publicly claiming an association with a successful or notable other. If an observer of the basking behaviour recognizes the claimed connection, and also has a positive regard for the successful or notable other, then the observer should be motivated to maintain cognitive harmony by regarding the basker in an equally positive light. According to Richardson and Cialdini (1981) the resulting process of striving for cognitive balance is a type of "perceptual distortion" that results when things linked by association are "subjectively seen as sharing the same

attributes" (p. 44). Even simple connections between things, such as physical proximity, will increase or decrease the perceived evaluative similarity of the objects.

Additional evidence in support of Richardson and Cialdini's (1981) position that basking in reflected glory serves to create a favourable impression in others by creating a positive association between the BIRGer and a successful, famous or notable person or group, is drawn from a Manis, Cornell, and Moore (1974) study. Manis et al. (1974) reported that messengers who deliver favourable information are liked more than their negative message-wielding counterparts. Presumably, a person merely associated with bad news is seen in a negative light whereas a person associated with good news is seen in a positive light. In sum, Cialdini's theoretical argument for the effectiveness of BIRGing as a self-presentational strategy is that because we strive to maintain cognitive balance, and because two things that share a connection will be perceived as having other similarities, BIRGers are able to "exploit the pressures for cognitive balance operating in others" (Richardson & Cialdini, 1981, p. 44), and absorb some of the positive regard or favourable attention associated with a prestigious person or group.

Research by Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986) supports Cialdini's (1976) claim that BIRGing is used for strategic self-presentation. Snyder et al. (1986) assigned college students to one of three group performance feedback conditions: failure, no information, or success. They reported that those in the failure group were more likely than those in the success group to suppress their group membership by stating a preference not to be present during the group presentation to the judges, and by declining to wear group name badges. In contrast, subjects in the successful group

were more likely than subjects in the failure group to advertise their group membership by stating a preference to participate in the group presentation to the judges, and by agreeing to wear group name badges.

In an earlier basking study, Cialdini and Richardson (1980) attempted to identify some of the conditions that prompt basking behaviour. In that study, the experimenter provided participants with either negative feedback (a below average score) or no feedback (no score) on a bogus test of 'latent creativity'. Subsequently, participants were asked to respond to seven questions rating either their own university or a rival university. Results indicated that participants who had experienced a public threat to their self-esteem were more likely to engage in basking than subjects who had not experienced a threat to their self-esteem. Basking was measured by having participants rate their member university versus a rival university. Those participants who had received a negative score on the test were more likely to report favourable ratings of their member university and unfavourable ratings of the rival university than participants who had received no feedback on the test. Cialdini and Richardson (1980) concluded that persons for whom prestige is publicly threatened are motivated to increase the perceived quality of those persons or things with which they are affiliated, presumably in an attempt to restore their public self-image.

In another BIRGing study involving sports fans, End, Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, and Jacquemette (2002) examined whether fans are more likely to identify with teams that were highly successful. Their results indicate that college students are not only more likely to identify with teams that are successful, but are also more likely to associate with

teams that have a history of being successful, or are expected to be successful in an upcoming season. In addition, fans that identify with multiple teams are more likely to report the most successful of their chosen teams as their favourite team, the second most successful team as their second favourite team, and so on. The researchers interpret their findings to mean that fans' tendencies to BIRG may be premeditated for self-presentational benefits.

Although much of the research on basking in reflected glory has focussed on college students and sport affiliation, a field study by Boen, Vanbeselaere, Pandelaere, Dewitte, Duriez, Snauwaert, Feys, Dierckz, and Avermaet (2002), tested whether or not the phenomenon of basking would emerge in a political context. Boen and his colleagues reported that there was a tendency for homeowners to continue to display poster and small lawn signs in favour of the victorious political party following an election, and that this tendency was even more significant when the margin of the election victory was clear cut than when the election victory was close.

Reactions to Impression Management Strategies

Whereas the research described above has focused on factors that influence the likelihood of using various impression management strategies, other research has focused on the effectiveness of using impression management strategies. Research examining the interpersonal consequences of using self-presentational strategies has revealed that reactions to strategies are mixed (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Gordon, 1996). Many of the impression management strategies discussed have been shown to create the desired reactions in the intended audience (for reviews, see Schlenker &

Leary, 1982; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Other research has demonstrated that the impressions created are not necessarily the intended ones (Carlston & Shovar, 1983; Colvin, 1995; Crant, 1996; Forsterling & Rudolph, 1988; Godfrey, Jones & Lord, 1986; Gordon, 1996; Gurevitch, 1985; Harris, Kacmer, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Paulhus, 1995; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Vonk, 1998).

Godfrey, Jones, and Lord (1986) conducted a study in which participants were asked to rate the likeability and competence of ingratiators (i.e., those seeking to enhance their likeability through flattery and attentiveness to a target) and self-promoters (i.e., those who say things calculated to make others think they are highly competent). In this study, the researchers had pairs of participants engage in a twenty minute unstructured conversation. Prior to the experiment, one participant from each pair had been instructed to converse in either an ingratiating or a self-promoting style. A non-self-presentational control group was also used to establish a baseline. Following the conversation, the naïve target participant was asked to evaluate his or her partner on measures of competence and likeability. A *likeable* person was one defined as enjoyable to interact with, converse with, be friends with, and one with whom you feel comfortable. A *competent* person was defined as the kind of person who "always comes out on top" (p. 108), does well at everything, and is successful whenever he or she desires to do something. Results demonstrated that ingratiators were perceived as more likeable than either self-promoters or control participants. Self-promoters were perceived as less likeable and less competent than control participants. Surprisingly, ingratiators were also perceived as more competent than self-promoters.

In another study examining audience reactions to the use of ingratiation, Vonk (2002) reported that the recipient of ingratiating behaviours such as flattery responded more favourably to the ingratiator than did observers of the behaviour. In other words, an individual who is flattered is more likely to see the flatterer as credible and likeable than is an individual who observes the flattery taking place.

In a study by Gurevitch (1985) participants were asked to recall a situation in which a person self-presented in a way that was a tactical self-presentation or ordinary self-presentation. In the tactical self-presentation condition, participants were asked to recall a situation in which someone provided information about him or herself in an attempt to impress the listener. In the ordinary self-presentation condition, participants were asked to recall a situation in which someone provided information about him or herself "without defining the character of that information or the intentions behind it" (p. 148). The author reported that participants not only rated tactical self-presenters as less competent, less positive, and more manipulative than ordinary self-presenters, but they also doubted the veracity of the information presented by the tactical self-presenters.

In another example, Carlston & Shovar (1983) reported that audience reactions to individuals using self-serving attributions were not always positive. The use of self-serving attributions in general produced lower participant ratings of the target on a modesty dimension. In addition, external attributions were seen as dishonest, and the overall likeability of the individual was affected by the tendency to attribute failure to external causes. Results showed that successful performers were liked equally well

regardless of whether their attributions for success were internal or external, whereas unsuccessful performers were liked more when they attributed their performance to internal rather than external causes.

A study by Powers and Zuroff (1988) revealed that individuals who used self-criticism as a self-presentational strategy did not engender anticipated sympathy and support, but rather, were seen as poorly functioning individuals. In the same study, self-enhancement, that is, the promotion or advertising of one's positive qualities, created mixed audience reactions. Although perceived as competent, participants also perceived self-enhancers as socially unattractive relative to those who did not self-enhance.

A similar mixed impact on audience reactions was revealed for individuals who engaged in self-handicapping. Luginbuhl and Palmer (1991) conducted two experiments to explore observer's reactions to a target using a self-handicapping strategy. Participants viewed a film in which a target either did or did not self-handicap (went to a film instead of studying for an exam). Participants were told that the target did well, average, or poorly on the exam. The researchers reported that ability attributions were affected by self-handicapping: Participants rated the self-handicapper as more intelligent than the non-self-handicapper, and as more likely to do better on future exams than the non-self-handicapper. However, self-handicapping also led to more negative attributions about the self-handicappers personality characteristics. The self-handicapper was viewed as less motivated, less concerned about performance, and less desirable as a study partner. Despite higher ratings on evaluations of ability, the authors concluded

that higher ability ratings were a "poor trade-off" (p. 661) given the lower personality ratings, thus self-handicapping can, at times, prove to be more detrimental than beneficial.

In a final example of audience reactions to impression management strategies, a recent study by Tal-Or, Philosoph, Shapira, and Malca (2005) examined participants' impressions formed in response to a target's use of strategies associated with Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation model (SEM). Tal-Or et al. (2005) reported that perception is influenced by the SEM variables of field relevance (i.e., the importance of the field of success to the self) and psychological closeness (i.e., the degree of closeness of the relationship of the self to the other). According to the self-evaluation model (Tesser, 1988), an individual who is outperformed by another will experience the event as positive or negative depending on the degree of closeness to the other, and whether or not the performance occurred in a domain important to the individual. In other words, if a colleague were more successful in a domain important to a particular individual, that individual would suffer negative effects during the comparison process. However, if the colleague's success were in a domain irrelevant to a particular individual, then that individual would enjoy the reflected positive esteem bestowed on the colleague. In Study 1, Tal-Or and colleagues (2005) revealed that a target is perceived as more competent when outperformed in a field irrelevant to that target. When outperformed in a relevant field however, the target is perceived as less competent. In Study 2, the target either did or did not publicly claim field irrelevance. Individuals who publicly claimed field irrelevance were perceived as strategically trying to manage the audience

impressions, and were seen as being more manipulative and less sociable than individuals who did not publicly claim field irrelevance.

In sum, research on audience reactions to impression management has shown that, although certain strategies can result in positive evaluations, when individuals are perceived as tactically managing the impressions of others, they may be viewed negatively on certain trait dimensions.

Overview of the Current Research: Reactions to BIRGing

As noted earlier, previous research has examined the conditions under which an individual is likely to engage in BIRGing behaviour. However, there is little evidence pertinent to evaluating the claim that BIRGing actually boosts perceivers' evaluations of the target. To date, it appears that no studies have examined the effectiveness of the strategy, or whether such an effect might be adequately explained by Heider's (1958) balance theory.

The primary goal of the current study was to examine whether BIRGing serves the self-presentational goal of successfully managing the impressions of others. In other words, is basking in reflected glory an effective tactic? In addition, factors that might potentially influence the favourability of audience reactions to basking were examined. The main prediction was that reactions to a basking target should vary depending on whether or not the basking behaviour was prompted (i.e., whether or not the person was requested to mention a connection to a famous other). It was hypothesized that individuals prompted to bask in reflected glory would be viewed more favourably than

individuals who basked in reflected glory spontaneously. It was further hypothesized

that individuals who basked in reflected glory, either prompted or unprompted, would be

viewed more favourably than individuals who did not bask. In addition, it was

hypothesized that a target engaging in basking behaviour (i.e., mentioning a connection

to a famous person) after reporting a recent threat to his or her self-esteem would

receive more negative evaluations than a target engaging in basking behaviour without

reporting a recent threat to self-esteem. The study utilized a 2 (self-esteem threat vs. no

self-esteem threat) X 3 (basking prompted vs. basking unprompted vs. no basking)

between subjects factorial design to examine whether BIRGing accomplished the self-

presentational goals theorized by Cialdini and colleagues (1976; 1981), and whether the

presence of prompting, and self-esteem threat, influenced audience reactions to

basking. The primary dependent variable was an index of overall favourability based on

subjects' impressions of various trait and personality ratings of the basking target.

Support for the predictions would be revealed by significant main effects for the self-

esteem threat and basking variables, although it is also possible that an interaction effect

could occur if the effect of self-esteem threat is greater within the basking conditions

than within the no basking control condition.

Rationale for Predictions: Asking for Basking

The prediction that basking that is prompted would elicit more favourable

audience evaluations than basking that is spontaneous is supported by previous

research suggesting that individuals who are modest are perceived more favourably

than those who are obviously self-aggrandizing (Leary, 1995). If one is recognized to be

competent in a given domain, a modest understatement of one's achievements leads to

more favourable reactions than an accurate but boastful self-presentation (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In addition, Vonk (1999) reported that likeability ratings are derived indirectly from inferences of traits and motives. If the basking is spontaneous rather than prompted, participants may be suspicious of the target's motives, inferring that the target is manipulative, or may perceive the target as boastful or socially unskilled. In contrast, if the basking is in response to a genuine inquiry (e.g., have you ever met anyone famous?), participants may make the inference that the target is merely being informative and socially appropriate. Thus, it is plausible that an individual who spontaneously declares a connection with a notable or famous person would be viewed more negatively than an individual who discloses the same information in response to a specific inquiry. Note that although unprompted basking may be less effective than prompted basking it may still be effective relative to the case where no basking behaviour occurs.

In sum, the current study represents an attempt to explore whether basking in reflected glory is an effective self-presentational strategy, and whether there are differences in audience reactions to BIRGing as a function of whether or not the basker has recently suffered a threat to self-esteem, and whether or not the basking behaviour was prompted or spontaneous. A control group that involves a target that does not engage in basking was included in the study to provide a baseline against which these various forms of basking could be compared.

Rationale for Predictions: The Role of Target Self-esteem Threat

There is some empirical support for expecting self-esteem threat to influence reactions to BIRGing. Individuals who bask in reflected glory are trying to "raise their esteem in the eyes of others" (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992, p. 724) or generally create a favourable impression (Cialdini et al., 1980; Cialdini, 1989). Schlenker (1980) states that the tendency to engage in BIRGing behaviour is greatest following a threat to one's public image. Cialdini et al. (1976) reported that student participants were more likely to proclaim an association with their successful school team if they had been made to fail a test publicly. Cialdini theorized that when an individual's public prestige is threatened, the individual is motivated to bolster his or her public self-image by making the observer aware of his or her association with a successful team. The previously discussed study by Cialdini and Richardson (1980) provides additional support for the idea that basking in reflected glory can be a compensatory strategy following a public threat to self-esteem. Participants who were told they had performed poorly on a test were more likely to engage in BIRGing than students who had been given an average score or no score on the test. Rather than mentioning their association with a successful other, participants basked in reflected glory, and thus compensated for the threat to their self-esteem, by bolstering the positivity of the "other" with which they were associated.

Further support for the self-esteem threat prediction is provided by Leary (1995), who argues that when people believe that the impressions they have made are less than favourable, they will engage in face-saving behaviours such as apologies, verbal explanations, or compensatory self-presentational strategies. Compensatory self-

presentations are attempts to make up for a negative impression by presenting a particularly positive aspect of the self that is unrelated to the dimension that has the negative association. For example, if a woman realizes that others see her as academically incompetent, she might try to let it be known that she does a great deal of volunteer work in the community. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to postulate that people who have disclosed a self-esteem threatening event and subsequently basked in reflected glory, might be perceived as engaging in an "obvious" compensatory self-presentational strategy to counteract the embarrassment of the self-esteem threat. If they are viewed as acting defensively they are likely to be perceived as lacking confidence or lacking emotional adjustment, and hence might be evaluated more negatively overall.

METHOD

Participants and Design

Participants were 109 undergraduates recruited from the research participation subject pool at Simon Fraser University (62 female, 46 male, 1 gender unspecified) with a mean age of 19.95 years. The sample was comprised of 53 Caucasians (40.8%), 37 Asians (28.5%), 11 East Indians (8.5%), and 8 persons who did not specify their ethnicity (5.4%). The language preference of the participants was as follows: 73 English first language students (56.2%), 33 English second language (ESL) students (25.4%), 2 English third language students (1.5%), and 1 language not specified. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions in the 2 (self-esteem threat vs. no self-esteem threat) X 3 (basking prompted vs. basking unprompted vs. no basking) design. The distribution of the random assignment of participants was as follows: There were 18 participants in each of the following conditions: self-esteem threat/basking unprompted; self-esteem threat/basking prompted; no self-esteem threat/basking prompted. There were 19 participants in the no self-esteem threat/basking unprompted condition and in the self-esteem threat/no basking control condition, and there were 17 participants assigned to the no self-esteem threat/no basking control condition. Participants were assured that their responses were anonymous and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. The students received course credit for their participation in the research.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the lab, participants, who took part individually, were told that they would be listening to an audiotape of an interview between a clinical psychology graduate student interviewer and an undergraduate interviewee. They were told that the researchers were interested in how personality traits affect social judgements. Participants were told the following:

> *You will be asked to listen to an audio tape in which a graduate student will be interviewing an undergraduate volunteer. Graduate students in clinical psychology learn a variety of interviewing techniques and styles. The particular interview you will hear is a "warm-up session" during which the graduate student is trying to gather some general information (e.g., family background, academic goals, hobbies) about the undergraduate student. The undergraduate student you will hear is not a client, but is one of several student volunteers who have agreed to help the graduate students with the interview process by providing information about themselves.*

Participants were then informed that, after listening to the audio tape, they would be asked to rate the interviewee or the interviewer on a variety of dimensions, and to complete a brief personality questionnaire.

Manipulation of Basking and Self-esteem Threat

Participants heard the introductory portion of the interview during which the interviewer asked for some general information about the undergraduate's background, family, academic goals, etc. Both actors were female. The interviewer and interviewee had followed a script that allowed for six possible outcomes, one corresponding to each condition in the design. The interviews were identical in all other respects. The six versions were as follows: self-esteem threat/basking unprompted; self-esteem

threat/basking prompted; self-esteem threat/no basking; no self-esteem threat/basking unprompted; no self-esteem threat/basking prompted; no self-esteem threat/no basking. In summary, the interviewee either did or did not disclose a threat to self-esteem and either basked spontaneously, basked when prompted to do so, or did not bask in reflected glory. In the 'threat to self-esteem' condition, the target disclosed that she had recently received the "worst grade ever" on a term paper. In the 'no threat to self-esteem' condition, the target disclosed that she had recently received a "pretty good grade" on her term paper. In the 'basking prompted' condition, the interviewer asked the interviewee "What is the most interesting thing that has happened to you since you moved to Vancouver?" The target responded by describing the following basking story:

> *I met Robin Williams! I was on Robson in the line-up at some coffee bar and he was standing in front of me. I didn't recognize him at first. He couldn't decide what to order and was joking around with all the people and stuff; anyway, he turned and told me I could go ahead of him. He's such a nice guy, really polite and funny. It was great meeting him.*

In the 'basking unprompted' condition the target described the identical basking incident, but did so spontaneously at the same identical point in the script, but without the interviewer having asked the question "What is the most interesting thing that has happened to you since you moved to Vancouver?" In the no basking control, the interviewee responded to the question "What is the most interesting thing that has happened to you since you moved to Vancouver?" by recounting an interesting story about winning a grand prize in a contest. Specifically, the interviewee stated the following:

> *I was in this coffee bar on Robson and I was waiting in this extremely long line. Anyways when I was almost at the front of the line, this woman behind me said she was in some sort of a hurry and asked if she could go*

ahead, so I let her and... when I finally got to the front, the guy told me
that I was the thousandth customer that month and I won this really great
prize... I won an Italian cappuccino machine, a pound of organic beans,
and I also get a free specialty coffee every week for a year!

The interesting story was included in the no basking control to ensure that the

difference observed between the control group and the basking groups was due

specifically to basking and not to the fact that the target was relating a story that

captured the listener's attention or interest. The audiotapes were identical in all other

respects. (For a full script of the interviews see Appendix A.)

Dependent Measures

After hearing the taped interview, participants were given a questionnaire

package (see Appendix B). Participants provided evaluations of the target on 27

dimensions. The first item assessed their overall impression of the target from

1(*extremely unfavourable*) to 11(*extremely favourable*). The remaining items assessed

evaluations of the 26 additional, more specific personality and trait dimensions. These

items were measured as follows: (1) likeable (1 = *very unlikeable* and 11 = *very*

likeable), (2) pleasantness (1 *very unpleasant* and 11 = *very pleasant*), (3) social

competence (1 = *very socially incompetent* and 11 = *very socially competent*), (4)

emotional adjustment (1= *very poorly adjusted emotionally* and 11 = *very well adjusted*

emotionally), (5) intelligence (1 = *very unintelligent* and 11 = *very intelligent*), (6)

friendliness (1 = *very unfriendly* and 11 = *very friendly*), (7) ability to work with others (1

= *very bad to work with* and 11 = *very good to work with*), (8) sense of humour (1 = *not*

at all humourous and 11 = *extremely humourous*), (9) comfortable to interact with (1 =

not very comfortable to interact with and 11 = *very comfortable to interact with*), (10)

coldness/warmth (1 = *very cold* and 11 = *very warm*), (11) confidence (1 = *not at all confident* and 11 = *extremely confident*), (12) boring to be around (1 = *very boring* and 11 = *not at all boring*), (13) politeness (1 = *not at all polite* and 11 = *extremely polite*), (14) interesting (1 = *not at all interesting* and 11 = *extremely interesting*), (15) motivation and willingness to work hard (1 = *very unmotivated/not hardworking* and 11 = *highly motivated/hard working*), (16) supportiveness of others (1 = *not very supportive* and 11 = *very supportive*), (17) arrogance or boastfulness (1 = *extremely boastful/arrogant* and 11 = *extremely modest and humble*), (18) honesty (1 = *very dishonest* and 11 = *very honest*), (19) manipulativeness (1 = *not at all manipulative* and 11 = *extremely manipulative*), (20) defensiveness (1 = *not at all defensive* and 11 = *extremely defensive*), (21) attention seeking (1 = *tries hard to get attention from others* and 11 = *doesn't try to get attention from others*), (22) uniqueness (1 = *not at all exceptional or unique* and 11 = *very exceptional and unique*), (23) good fortune/luck (1 = *not at all fortunate or lucky* and 11 = *very fortunate and lucky*), (24) impulsivity (1 = *very impulsive* and 11 = *not at all impulsive*), (25) sliminess (1 = *not at all 'slimy'* and 11 = *extremely 'slimy'*), (26) social skill (1 = *not at all socially skilled* and 11 = *socially skilled*). The questionnaire items were chosen based on a comprehensive review of the literature on audience reactions to self-presentational strategies (Braver, Linder, Corwin, & Cialdini, 1977; Campbell & Fehr, 1990; Carlston & Shovar, 1983; Elliott, 1979; Fosterling & Rudolph, 1988; Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Luginbuhl & Palmer, 1991; McFarland, White, & Newth, 2003; Paulhus, 1998; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Smith & Strube, 1988; Vonk, 1998; 2002; Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

Participants were asked to rate the degree to which the stories told by the target were interesting in order to ascertain if there was a difference between the basking story told in the basking conditions and the prize-winning story told in the no basking control condition. Participants were asked "How interesting did you find the stories or anecdotes mentioned by Alison (the interviewee)?" They were then asked to rate the stories from 1 (not at all interesting) to 11 (very interesting). The results indicated that there was no difference in the degree to which participants rated the basking and non-basking stories as interesting between the basking unprompted, basking prompted and no basking control conditions $F(2,103) = 2.11$, $p < .126$, or between the threat and no threat conditions $F(2,103) = .82$, $p < .368$. There was no significant basking by threat interaction $F(2,103) = .52$, $p < .593$. In addition, a filler item was included using the same question format asking participants to rate the degree to which they found the stories or anecdotes recounted by the Carol (the interviewer) as interesting.

Participants were also asked to complete a mood rating scale to ascertain whether or not reactions to the target were creating different moods in the participants. The mood scale was comprised of the following items: (1) happy (1 = *not at all happy* and 11 = *extremely happy*), (2) satisfied (1 *not at all satisfied* and 11 = *very satisfied*), (3) pleased (1 = *not at all pleased* and 11 = *very pleased*), (4) disappointed (1 *not at all*

disappointed and *11 = very disappointed*), (5) sad (1 = *not at all sad* and 11 = *very sad*), (6) proud (1 *not at all proud* and 11 = *very proud*), (7) competent (1 = *not at all competent* and 11 = *very competent*), (8) ashamed (1 *not at all ashamed* and 11 = *very ashamed*), (9) humiliated (1 = *not at all humiliated* and 11 = *very humiliated*). A two way ANOVA revealed that there was no difference in participants' moods for basking vs. no basking $F(2,103) = 1.19$, $p < .308$, no difference in participants' moods for threat vs. no threat $F(2,103) = .824$, $p < .366$, and no basking X threat interaction $F(2,103) = .38$, $p < .687$. Participants were also asked whether the target mentioned anyone famous in the interview in order to ascertain whether the story told was correctly identified as a basking story or a non-basking story. All participants in the basking conditions stated that the target had mentioned a famous person and identified that famous person as Robin Williams. All participants in the no basking control stated that no famous person had been mentioned. Therefore, the basking manipulation was successful. In sum, the stories were rated by participants as equally interesting, listening to the interview did not alter people's moods in any way, and all participants in the basking condition properly identified the target as a basker.

Computation of the Primary Dependent Variable

An overall favourability index of the target was calculated by taking the mean of the 27 items assessing participants' impressions of the target (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Negative items were reverse scored so that higher numbers would represent higher favourability.

Primary Analysis

The main research goal was to examine whether basking in reflected glory is an effective self-presentational strategy, and whether it achieves the positive results that Cialdini and his colleagues (1976, 1980, 1997) have proposed. It was predicted that basking in reflected glory would create more favourable impressions of the target when the basking was prompted than when the basking was unprompted. It was also predicted that basking, either prompted or unprompted, would create more favourable impressions of the target than not basking. A secondary goal of this research was to examine whether or not audience reactions to the target would vary following the target's disclosure of a threat to her self-esteem. It was predicted that participants would rate a BIRGing target more positively if the target had not disclosed a recent threat to her self-esteem than if the target had reported a recent threat to her self-esteem.

A 2 (self-esteem threat vs. no self-esteem threat) X 3 (basking prompted vs. basking unprompted vs. no basking) ANOVA performed on the favourablity index revealed a main effect for basking, $F(2,103) = 10.26$, $p < .0001$. Planned contrasts revealed that, contrary to predictions, participants were significantly more likely to give positive evaluations to a target that did not bask in reflected glory ($M = 8.19$), than to a target that was prompted to bask ($M = 7.65$), $t(1,103) = 2.67$, $p < .01$, or who basked unprompted ($M = 7.31$), $t(1,103) = 4.35$, $p < .001$. Within the basking conditions, those who were prompted to bask in reflected glory were not viewed significantly more favourably ($M = 7.65$) than individuals who basked in reflected glory unprompted ($M = 7.31$), $t(1,103) = 1.68$, $p > .05$. The means from the analyses and the results of the pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Mean Ratings on the Overall Favourability Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	7.06	7.48	7.89	7.48c
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	M	7.54	7.83	8.53	7.94d
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.31a	7.65a	8.19b	7.71
	N	37	36	36	109

Note. Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Because there was no significant difference between the basking prompted (M = 7.65) and the basking unprompted conditions (M = 7.31) $t(1,103)$ = 1.68, p > .05, and because both basking conditions showed the same pattern of results relative to the no basking control (i.e., prompted and unprompted basking was rated significantly less favourably than non-basking), I dichotomized the basking variable (i.e., basking prompted and basking unprompted were combined into one group) and used the weighted mean to compare to the no basking control group. The analysis yielded a significant difference between the combined basking condition (M = 7.48) and the no basking control group (M = 8.19); $t(1,103)$ = 4.05, p < .001.

The analysis also revealed a main effect for self-esteem threat, $F(1,103)$ = 8.74, p < .004. The main effect for self-esteem threat indicated that individuals viewed the target more favourably if the target had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction, $F(1,103)$ = .27, p > .05.

In sum, contrary to my predictions, participants evaluated the target more favourably if the target did not bask in reflected glory than if the target did bask in reflected glory. There was no significant difference in participants' favourability ratings of the target between the basking prompted and basking unprompted conditions. However, as predicted, participants rated the target significantly more favourably if the target had not disclosed a threat to her self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to her self-esteem.

Additional Analysis

The preceding primary analysis used an overall favourability index based on all 27 items in the questionnaire. Further analyses were conducted to explore which particular types of qualities were affected by the manipulations (i.e., which variables underlie the effects on the overall index). The results on the overall index could be due to strong effects on a few items, or to a general tendency across numerous items. It was not possible to run a factor analysis on the impression items, because there were not enough participants to support the procedure. However, the 27 individual items were grouped conceptually into 6 categories and Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the sub-indices comprised of multiple items to verify the internal consistency of the groupings. The grouping of items into the following categories allowed for two different sets of analyses. First, I was able to explore the underlying basis of the effects on the overall favourability index representing 27 items, and second, the 6 sub-indices reflecting specific attributes could be used in subsequent mediation analyses designed to explain why the overall general impression item was affected by the independent variables.

The items were grouped into the following 6 conceptual categories: (1) an overall impression item, based on the single item in the questionnaire reflecting participants' overall or general impression of the target (2) a social competence index ; (3) an interpersonal warmth index; (4) a good student index; (5) an interesting person index; (6) and an impression management strategist index. For a detailed listing of the attributes in each category and the reliabilities for multiple item indices see Table 2.

Table 2.

Item Categories and Reliabilities

Mediator	Trait Items	Cronbach's α
Overall Impression	overall impression	N/A
Social Competence	social competence emotional adjustment confidence social skill	(α = .85)
Interpersonal Warmth	comfortable to interact with sense of humour pleasantness friendliness works well with others supportive warm polite likeable	(α = .90)
Good Student	intelligent hardworking	(α = .47)
Interesting Person	interesting boring unique lucky	(α = .74)
Impression Management Strategist	slimy manipulative defensive boastful honest impulsive attention seeking	(α = .66)

Note. Indices created by averaging individual trait items. Negative items were reverse scored so that higher scores on the indices consistently reflect more positive ratings than lower scores. Thus, a higher rating indicates that the target was viewed as a more competent, interesting and warm person, a better student, and as less of an impression management strategist.

In order to explore which of the 6 sub-indices might form the underlying basis for the main effects on the overall favourability index (i.e., results using the main dependent variable including all 27 items), additional 2X3 ANOVAs were calculated using the 6 sub-indices as dependent variables.

Overall Impression Item

Analysis of the single item in the questionnaire reflecting participants' overall or general impression of the target, revealed a main effect for basking, $F(2,103) = 5.13$, $p < .008$. Participants were more likely to report a positive overall impression of a target that did not bask ($M = 8.64$), than a target that did bask either prompted ($M = 7.92$), $t(1,103) = 2.15$, $p < .05$, or unprompted ($M = 7.62$), $t(1,103) = 3.05$, $p < .005$. Within the basking conditions, there was no significant difference between participants' ratings of a target prompted to bask ($M = 7.92$) and a target that basked unprompted ($M = 7.62$), $t(1,103) = .897$, $p > .05$.

As with the analysis using the overall favourability index (i.e., the main dependent variable containing all 27 items) there was no significant difference in participants' ratings of the target between the basking prompted ($M = 7.92$) and basking unprompted ($M = 7.62$) conditions, $t(1,103) = .90$, $p > .05$. Therefore, I dichotomized the basking variable and calculated a weighted mean for the basking groups that was compared with the mean of the no basking control. The mean of the two basking conditions combined ($M = 7.77$) differed significantly from the control group mean ($M = 8.64$), $t(1,103) = 2.99$, $p < .005$, with participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking target on the overall impression index.

The analyses also revealed a main effect for self-esteem threat $F(1,103) = 5.72$, $p < .019$. Participants rated the target higher on the overall impression index if the target had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction, $F(1,103) = .40, p < .68$.

In sum, not surprisingly, the degree to which the target was perceived as having made a more favourable overall impression appears to be one of the variables underlying participants' overall reactions to the target on the favourability index, with the non-basking target being perceived as having made a more favourable overall impression relative to the basking target, and the target who had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem being perceived as having made a more favourable overall impression relative to a target that had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The means from the analyses and pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3.

Mean Ratings on the Overall Impression Item as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	7.11	7.67	8.42	7.75c
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	M	8.11	8.17	8.88	8.37d
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.62a	7.92a	8.64b	8.06
	N	37	36	36	109

Note. Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Social Competence Index

Analysis of the social competence index revealed a main effect for basking, $F(2,103) = 12.78$, $p < .0001$. Participants were more likely to rate the target higher on the social competence index if the target did not bask ($M = 8.59$) than if the target were prompted to bask ($M = 7.78$), $t(1,103) = 2.72$, $p < .05$ or if the target basked unprompted ($M = 7.12$), $t(1,103) = 4.95$, $p < .005$.

Within the basking conditions, those prompted to bask ($M = 7.78$) were rated higher than individuals who basked unprompted ($M = 7.12$), $t(1,103) = 2.22$, $p < .05$. However, using the dichotomized variable for basking did yield a significant difference between the no basking control ($M = 8.59$) and the combined basking condition ($M = 7.45$), $t(1,103) = 4.41$, $p < .001$, with participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking targets on the social competence index.

The analyses also revealed a main effect for self-esteem threat $F(1,103) = 10.10$, $p < .002$. Participants rated the target higher on the social competence index if the target had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X threat interaction, $F(1,103) = .22$, $p < .802$.

In sum, the degree to which the target was perceived as being socially competent (i.e., having the characteristics of social competence; emotional adjustment; confidence; social skill) appears to be one of the variables underlying participants' reactions to the target on the overall index, with the non-basking target being perceived

as more socially competent relative to the basking target, and the target who had not

disclosed a threat to self-esteem being perceived as more socially competent relative to

a target that had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The means from the analyses and

pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Mean Ratings on the Social Competence Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	6.64	7.38	8.33	7.46$_d$
	N	18	18	18	55
No Threat	M	7.58	8.19	8.88	8.19$_e$
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.12$_a$	7.78$_b$	8.59$_c$	7.83
	N	37	36	36	109

Note.   Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Interpersonal Warmth Index

Analysis of the interpersonal warmth index revealed a main effect for basking,

$F(2,103) = 6.18$, $p < .003$. Participants were more likely rate the target higher on the

interpersonal warmth index if the target did not bask ($M = 8.41$) than if the target were to

bask unprompted ($M = 7.50$), $t(1,103) = 3.39$, $p < .001$. Although not basking was also

rated more favourably than basking prompted, the result was not significant ($M = 7.99$),

$t(1,103) = 1.57$, $p > .05$.

Within the basking conditions, those who were prompted to bask ($M = 7.99$) were

not rated significantly differently than individuals who basked unprompted ($M = 7.50$),

$t(1,103) = 1.83$, $p > .05$, though again, the difference approached significance. Using the dichotomized variable for basking did yield a significant difference between the no basking control ($M = 8.41$) and the basking condition ($M = 7.74$), $t(1,103) = 2.88$, $p < .05$ with participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking target on the interpersonal warmth index.

The main effect for self-esteem threat indicated that participants rated the target higher on the interpersonal warmth index if the target had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to self-esteem $F(1,103) = 6.27$, $p < .014$. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction.

In sum, the degree to which the target was perceived as having interpersonal warmth (i.e., comfortable to interact with; sense of humour; pleasantness; friendliness; works well with others; supportive; warm; polite; likeable) appears to be one of the variables underlying participants' overall reactions to the target, with the non-basking target being perceived as having more interpersonal warmth relative to the basking target, and the target who had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem being perceived as having more interpersonal warmth relative to a target that had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The means from the analyses and pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.

Mean Ratings on the Interpersonal Warmth Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	7.19	7.88	8.02	7.70 c
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	M	7.78	8.10	8.86	8.23 d
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.50 a	7.99 ab	8.41 b	7.96
	N	37	36	36	109

Note.   Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Good Student Index

Analysis of the good student index revealed a main effect for basking that approached significance $F(2,103) = 2.95$, $p < .057$. Participants were more likely to give higher ratings on the good student index to a non-basking target ($M = 8.15$), than to a target not prompted to bask ($M = 7.58$), $t(1,103) = 2.28$, $p < .05$. Participants also gave higher ratings to the non-basking target ($M = 8.15$) relative to the basking prompted target ($M = 7.81$), but the difference was not significant $t(1,103) = 1.36$, $p > .05$.

Within the basking conditions, there was no significant difference in participants' ratings of the target on the good student index between the basking prompted ($M = 7.81$) and basking unprompted conditions ($M = 7.58$), $t(1,103) = 0.92$, $p > .05$. Using the dichotomized variable for basking did yield a significant difference between the no basking control ($M = 8.15$) and the basking condition ($M = 7.69$), $t(1,103) = 2.12$, $p < .05$,

with participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking target on the good student index.

The main effect for self-esteem threat indicated that participants rated the target higher on the good student index if the target had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem than if the target had disclosed a threat to self-esteem $F(1,103) = 4.38, p < .039$. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction, $F(2,103) = 1.54, p < .220$.

In sum, the degree to which the target was perceived as being a good student (i.e., intelligent; hard-working) appears to be one of the variables underlying participants' reactions to the target, with the non-basking target being rated more favourably on the good student index relative to the basking target, and the target who had not disclosed a threat to self-esteem being rated more favourably on the good student index relative to a target that had disclosed a threat to self-esteem. The means from the analyses and pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6.

Mean Ratings on the Good Student Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	7.47	7.72	7.71	7.64 c
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	M	7.66	7.89	8.65	8.05 d
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.58 a	7.81 ab	8.15 b	7.84
	N	37	36	36	109

Note. Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Interesting Person Index

Analysis of the interesting person index revealed a marginally significant main effect for basking, $F(2,103) = 2.76$, $p < .068$. Although the contrast was not significant, participants were somewhat more likely to give higher ratings on the interesting person index to a non-basking target ($M = 7.10$), than to a target not prompted to bask ($M = 6.41$), $t(1,103) = 1.39$, $p > .05$. Participants also gave somewhat higher ratings to the non-basking target ($M = 7.10$) relative to the basking prompted target ($M = 6.41$), but again, the difference was not significant $t(1,103) = 1.39$, $p > .05$.

Within the basking conditions, there was no significant difference in participants' ratings of the target on the interesting person index between the basking prompted ($M = 6.41$) and basking unprompted conditions ($M = 6.41$). Using the dichotomized basking variable did yield a significant difference between the no basking control (M = 7.10) and the basking condition (M = 6.41), $t(1,103) = 2.33$, $p < .05$) with

participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking target on the interesting person index.

There was no significant difference between the self-esteem threat conditions, $F(1,103) = .91$, $p > .34$, nor was there a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction, $F(1,103) = .46$, $p > .65$.

In sum, a target that did not bask was perceived as marginally more interesting relative to a target that did bask. Whether or not the target had disclosed a threat to her self-esteem did not appear to affect participants' ratings of the target as in interesting person. These results suggest that the degree to which the target was perceived as interesting (i.e., interesting; not boring; unique; lucky) is only minimally underlying participants' reactions to the target on the overall index. The means from the analyses and pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7.

Mean Ratings on the Interesting Person Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	*M*	6.14	6.47	6.92	6.52 b
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	*M*	6.66	6.36	7.29	6.76 b
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	*M*	6.41 a	6.41 a	7.10 a	6.64
	N	37	36	36	109

Note.   Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Impression Management Strategist Index

Analysis of the impression management strategist index revealed a main effect

for basking, $F(2,103) = 4.02$, $p < .021$. Participants were more likely to assign higher

ratings on the impression management index (i.e., to view the target as *less*

manipulative, slimy, defensive, boastful, impulsive, dishonest, and attention seeking) to a

non-basking target ($M = 8.29$) than to a target that was prompted to bask ($M = 7.76$),

$t(1,103) = 1.97$, $p < .05$, or to a target that basked unprompted ($M = 7.55$), $t(1,103) =$

2.76, $p < .01$.

Within the basking conditions, there was no difference in participants' ratings on

the impression management strategist index between a target prompted to bask

($M = 7.76$) and a target that basked unprompted ($M = 7.55$), $t(1,103) = .78$, $p > .05$.

Using the dichotomized basking variable yielded a significant difference between the no

basking control ($M = 8.29$) and the basking condition ($M = 7.66$), $t(1,103) = 2.72$, $p < .01$

with participants rating the non-basking target higher than the basking target on the

impression management strategist index.

There was no main effect for self-esteem threat, $F(1,103) = 2.52$, $p < .12$, and no

significant basking X threat interaction, $F(1,103) = .50$, $p < .61$.

In sum, a target that did not bask was perceived as less of a strategic impression

manager relative to a target that did bask in reflected glory. Whether or not the target

had disclosed a threat to her self-esteem did not appear to affect participants' ratings of

the target on the impression management strategist index. These results suggest that

the degree to which the target was perceived as an impression management strategist (i.e., manipulative, slimy, defensive, boastful, impulsive, dishonest, and attention seeking) is underlying participants' reactions to the basking target. The means from the analyses and pertinent contrasts are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8.

Mean Ratings on the Impression Management Strategist Index as a Function of Basking and Self-Esteem Threat

Target's Level of Self-Esteem		Basking Condition			Marginals
		Basking Unprompted	Basking Prompted	No Basking Control	
Threat	M	7.52	7.49	8.06	7.69 c
	N	18	18	19	55
No Threat	M	7.57	8.03	8.53	8.03 c
	N	19	18	17	54
Marginals	M	7.55 a	7.76 a	8.29 b	7.86
	N	37	36	36	109

Note. Higher scores indicate more favourable reactions. Marginal means not sharing a common subscript differ significantly.

Summary of Additional Analyses

The goal of the additional analyses was to explore the underlying basis of the effects on the overall favourability index representing 27 items (see the primary analysis above). With regard to the self-esteem variable, the pattern of results found with the sub-indices is generally consistent with the pattern of results found on the overall favourability index, with the exception of the interesting person index and the impression management index that revealed non-significant and marginally significant differences respectively. Reactions to the target on the overall favourability index appears to be driven primarily by the degree to which the target was perceived as having made a

favourable overall impression, as being socially competent, as having interpersonal warmth, and as being a good student. Reactions to the target on the overall favourability index were not driven by the degree to which the target was perceived as being interesting and as being an impression management strategist. A target that disclosed a threat to self-esteem engendered more negative ratings on all indices than a target that did not disclose a threat to self-esteem.

With regard to the basking variable, the results indicate that, participants' reactions to the target on the overall 27 item favourability index were affected most significantly by the degree to which the target made a favourable impression, and was perceived as having socially competence, interpersonal warmth, and as being an impression management strategist. The characteristics associated with being an interesting person and being a good student contributed only marginally to participants' overall reactions to the target, but it should be noted that the effect still followed the same pattern of results as that occurring on the overall favourability index. That is, basking in reflected glory engendered more negative ratings on all indices than not basking.

Results of Mediation Analyses

Tests for Mediation

The creation of sub-indices not only allowed me to assess which type of qualities were affected by the independent variables but it also provided a basis for additional analyses exploring possible mechanisms underlying the primary result, wherein

participants general overall impression of a basking target were less favourable than

those of a target that does not bask in reflected glory. It seems reasonable to propose

that the independent variables of basking and self-esteem threat lead participants to

impute certain specific characteristics or qualities to the target, qualities that in turn

mediate the favourability of their general overall impression of the target. To isolate the

possible mediating role that perceived social competence, interpersonal warmth, being a

good student, being an interesting person, and being perceived as an impression

management strategist might play in determining the overall impression of the target, I

utilized the mediation analysis procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). The

single overall impression item was treated as the dependent variable of interest and the

5 sub-indices representing specific attributes were treated in separate analyses (i.e.,

sets of regressions) as mediators.

In order to perform the mediation analyses, I dichotomized the basking variable

(basking unprompted and basking prompted were combined). Coding of the basking

variable was as follows (basking = 1, no basking = 0). Dichotomizing was justified

because the mean for the two basking conditions combined differed from the mean for

the no basking control, but were not significantly different from one another, in every

analysis except that conducted on the social competence index. In the case of the

social competence index, the basking prompted condition and the basking unprompted

condition (M = 7.78) did differ significantly from one another (M = 7.12), $t(1,103)$ = 2.22,

$p < .05$. However, for all sub-indices, including social competence, the basking

unprompted and the basking prompted conditions combined differed from the no basking

control with the same pattern of results, that is, participants rated the no basking target

more favourably on all the sub-indices than they rated the basking targets. Thus, the independent variable in the mediation analysis reflects a contrast between the combined basking conditions and the no basking control group.

To test for mediation, I used the multiple regression approach as outlined in Baron and Kenny (1986). According to these authors, a test of the possible mediation of the relationship between basking and overall impression of the target, and of self-esteem threat and overall impression of the target, requires that I establish the co-occurrence of a series of effects through the use of a set of regression equations. As an example, I will outline the steps using basking as the independent variable and social competence as the mediator. First, the dependent variable (i.e., the single overall impression item) is regressed on the independent variable (i.e., the dichotomized basking variable), and it must be shown that basking predicts scores on overall impression. Second, the basking variable should predict scores on the mediator, in this case, the perceived social competence of the target. Third, when the dependent variable (the overall impression item) is regressed on the mediator (social competence) holding the independent variable (the basking variable) constant, the mediator (social competence) should predict the dependent variable (the overall impression item). Finally, when the dependent variable (the overall impression item) is regressed on the independent variable (the basking variable) simultaneously with the mediator (e.g., social competence), the effect of basking on overall impression should be weaker than in the first equation, and potentially be reduced to non-significance.

Results of Mediation Analyses Exploring the Effect of Basking on Overall Impression

The first set of mediation analyses explored factors that mediate the link between basking and the overall impression item. With regard to the first step in each analysis: basking predicted scores on the overall impression item (β = -.27, t(1,103) = -2.95, p < .004), with basking leading to lower ratings on the overall impression item than non basking. Note that the first step in the mediation analysis is the same for all mediation analyses using the basking variable as the independent variable and the overall impression item as the dependent variable.

Social Competence as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Basking and Overall Impression

The results of steps 2 to 4 of the mediation analysis using social competence as a mediator were as follows. Step two: the independent variable basking predicted scores on the mediator social competence (β = -.38, t(1,103) = -4.20, p < .0001), with basking leading to lower ratings of social competence than non-basking. Step three: the mediator social competence predicted scores on the dependent variable overall impression when the independent variable basking was held constant (β = -.58, t(1,103) = 6.99, p < .0001). Step four: when the mediator social competence was held constant, the effect of basking on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to non-significance (β = -.06, t(1,103) = -.68, p > .51). To test the mediation model, a Sobel (1982) test was conducted to formally examine the significance of the indirect mediating effect of social competence on overall impression. The Sobel test allowed me to examine whether the indirect effect of the independent variable basking on the dependent variable overall impression (i.e., via the mediator) is significantly

different from zero. Sobel test statistics revealed a significant p value for the indirect

effect of social competence as a mediator between basking and overall impression

(z = -3.60, p < .0003). Thus, the mediation analysis supported the notion that the effect

of basking on overall impression was mediated by perceived social competence. It

appears that baskers engendered significantly more negative impressions at least in part

because they were perceived as being less socially competent than non-baskers.

Interpersonal Warmth as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Basking and Overall Impression

Results of the mediation analysis using interpersonal warmth as a mediator were

as follows. Step two: basking predicted scores on the mediator interpersonal warmth

(β = -.26, t(1,103) = -2.80, p < .006), with basking leading to lower ratings of

interpersonal warmth than non-basking. Step three: interpersonal warmth predicted

scores on overall impression when basking was held constant (β = .70, t(1,103) = 10.02,

p < .001). Step four: when interpersonal warmth was held constant, the effect of basking

on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to non-

significance (β = -.09, t(1,103) = -1.34, p > .18). The Sobel test statistic revealed a

significant effect for interpersonal warmth as a mediator between basking and overall

impression (z = -2.70, p < .007). Thus, the analysis supported the notion that the effect

of basking on overall impression was mediated by perceived interpersonal warmth.

Baskers engendered significantly more negative impressions at least in part because

they were perceived as having less interpersonal warmth than non-baskers.

Good Student as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Basking and Overall Impression

Step 2 to 4 of the mediation analysis using good student as a mediator were as follows. Step two: basking predicted scores on the mediator good student (β = -.20, $t(1,103)$ = -2.12, p < .04), with basking leading to lower ratings on the good student index than non-basking. Step three: good student predicted scores on overall impression when basking was held constant (β = .35, $t(1,103)$ = 3.89, p < .0001). Step four: when good student was held constant, the effect of basking on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation but was not reduced to non-significance (β = -.21, $t(1,103)$ = -2.30, p < .05). The Sobel test statistic revealed a marginally significant effect for the good student index as a mediator between basking and overall impression (z = -1.862, p < .062), supporting the notion that the effect of basking on overall impression was, to a small degree, mediated by participants' perceptions of the target as being a good student. In sum, baskers engendered more negative ratings than non-baskers in part because they were perceived as having less of the characteristics of a good student (i.e., less intelligent and less hardworking).

Interesting Person as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Basking and Overall Impression

Step 2 to 4 of the mediation analysis using interesting person as a mediator were as follows. Step two: basking predicted scores on the mediator interesting person (β = -.22, $t(1,103)$ = -2.34, p < .021), with basking leading to lower ratings of on the interesting person index than non-basking. Step three: interesting person predicted scores on overall impression when basking was held constant (β = .48, $t(1,103)$ = 5.65, p < .0001). Step four: when interesting person was held constant, the effect of basking

on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to marginal significance (β = -.16, $t(1,103)$ = -1.91, p < .06). The Sobel test statistic revealed a significant effect for interesting person as a mediator between basking and overall impression (z = -2.16, p < .031). Thus, the analysis supported the notion that the effect of basking on overall impression was mediated by the degree to which the target was perceived as an interesting person. Baskers engendered significantly more negative impressions at least in part because they were perceived as less interesting than non-baskers.

Impression Management Strategist as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Basking and Overall Impression

Step 2 to 4 of the mediation analysis using impression management strategist as a mediator were as follows. Step two: basking predicted scores on the mediator impression management strategist (β = -.25, $t(1,103)$ = -2.68, p < .008), with basking leading to lower ratings of being an impression management strategist than non-basking. Step three: impression management strategist did not predict scores on overall impression when basking was held constant (β = .16, $t(1,103)$ = 1.657, p < .10). Step four: when impression management strategist was held constant, the effect of basking on overall impression was not weaker than in the first equation and was not reduced to non-significance (β = -.24, $t(1,103)$ = -2.48, p < .015). The Sobel test statistic did not reveal a significant effect for impression management strategist as a mediator between basking and overall impression (z = -1.43, p < .16). Thus, the analysis did not support the notion that the effect of basking on overall impression was mediated by the degree to which the target was perceived as being an impression management strategist.

Summary of Analyses Assessing Mediation of the Basking Variable

In sum, the results of these mediation analyses indicate that the relationship between basking and impression of the target can be attributed to the degree to which the participant viewed the target as socially competent, interpersonally warm, and interesting. The relationship between basking and impression of the target was mediated to a lesser degree by the perception of the target as a good student. In contrast, the degree to which the target was perceived as an impression management strategist did not mediate the relationship between basking and impression of the target.

Results of Mediation Analyses for Self-esteem Threat and Overall Impression

The second set of mediation analyses explored the role of the five potential mediators in the relationship between self-esteem threat and overall impression. Coding of the self-esteem threat variable was as follows (self-esteem threat = 0, no self-esteem threat = 1). With regard to the first step in each analyses: self-esteem threat predicted scores on the overall impression item (β = .21, $t(1,103)$ = 2.21, $p < .029$), with self-esteem threat leading to lower ratings on the overall impression item than no self-esteem threat. Note that the first step in the mediation analysis is the same for all mediation analyses using the self-esteem variable as the independent variable and the overall impression item as the dependent variable.

Social Competence as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Self-Esteem Threat and Overall Impression

With regard to the second step in the mediation analyses, self-esteem threat predicted scores on the mediator social competence (β = .26, $t(1,103)$ = 2.74, $p < .07$) with self-esteem threat leading to lower ratings of social competence than no self-

esteem threat. Social competence predicted scores on overall impression when self-esteem threat was held constant (β = .59, $t(1,103)$ = 7.38, $p < .0001$). Finally, when social competence was held constant, the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to non-significance (β = .06, $t(1,103)$ = .73, $p > .46$). The Sobel test statistic revealed a significant effect for social competence as a mediator between basking and overall impression (z = 2.57, $p < .01$). Thus, the analysis supported the notion that the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was mediated by social competence. A target that disclosed a self-esteem threat engendered significantly more negative impressions in part because they were perceived as having less social competence than a target that did not disclose a threat to self-esteem.

Interpersonal Warmth as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Self-Esteem Threat and Overall Impression

With regard to the second step in the mediation analyses, self-esteem threat predicted scores on the mediator interpersonal warmth (β = .22, $t(1,103)$ = 2.29, $p < .024$) with self-esteem threat leading to lower ratings of interpersonal warmth than no self-esteem threat. Interpersonal warmth predicted scores on overall impression when self-esteem threat was held constant (β = .71, $t(1,103)$ = 10.26, $p < .0001$). Finally, when interpersonal warmth was held constant, the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to non-significance (β = .06, $t(1,103)$ = .82, $p > .415$). The Sobel test statistic revealed a significant effect for interpersonal warmth as a mediator between basking and overall impression (z = 2.23, $p < .026$). Thus, the analysis supported the notion that the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was mediated by interpersonal warmth. A target that disclosed a

self-esteem threat engendered significantly more negative impressions because they were perceived as having less interpersonal warmth than a target that did not disclose a threat to self-esteem.

Good Student Index as a Potential Mediator of the Relation Between Self-Esteem Threat and Overall Impression

With regard to the second step in the mediation analysis, self-esteem threat marginally predicted scores on the mediator good student (β = .187, $t(1,103)$ = 1.97, p < .052), with self-esteem threat leading to somewhat lower ratings on the good student index than no self-esteem threat. In the next step of the analysis, good student predicted scores on overall impression when self-esteem threat was held constant (β = .36, $t(1,103)$ = 4.02, p < .0001). Finally, when good student was held constant, the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was weaker than in the first equation and was reduced to non-significance (β = .141, $t(1,103)$ = 1.57, p > .119). The Sobel test statistic revealed an effect for the good student index as a mediator between self-esteem threat and overall impression (z = 1.76, p < .078) that approached significance. Thus, the analysis supported the notion that the effect of self-esteem threat on overall impression was, to a small degree, mediated by participants' perceptions of the target as being a good student. A target that disclosed a self-esteem threat engendered more negative impressions because they were perceived as having less of the characteristics of a good student (i.e., intelligent, hard-working) than a target that did not disclose a threat to self-esteem.

Analyses of Other Mediators of the Self-Esteem Effect

The indices of interesting person and impression management strategist were not revealed to be significant mediators of the relationship between self-esteem threat and overall impression. The Sobel test statistic for these potential mediators was as follows: interesting person (z = .84, p < .40); and impression management strategist (z = 1.20, p < .23).

Summary of Mediation Analyses

The goal of the mediation analyses was to explore possible mechanisms underlying the two primary results. I proposed that the independent variables of basking and self-esteem threat lead participants to impute certain specific characteristics or qualities to the target that mediated the favourability of their general overall impression. With regard to the basking variable, the target engendered a more favourable overall impression from participants if she were regarded as more socially competent, as having greater interpersonal warmth, and as being more interesting. The effect was mediated to a lesser degree, and only marginally significantly, if the target were regarded as a good student. With regard to the self-esteem variable, the target engendered a more favourable overall impression from participants if she were regarded as more socially competent, and as having greater interpersonal warmth. The effect was mediated to a lesser degree by the degree to which the target was regarded as a good student, but was not related to perceptions of the target as interesting, or as an impression management strategist.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the present study was to explore whether there was evidence to support the assumption of Cialdini et al. (1976; 1989) that basking in reflected glory is an effective impression management strategy. To date there is little research testing the claim that basking in reflected glory actually boosts perceiver's evaluations of the target. Based on Cialdini et al.'s (1976) theorizing, the main prediction of the current research was that a basking target, either prompted or unprompted, would be viewed more favourably than a target that did not bask in reflected glory, and that a target prompted to bask would be viewed more positively than a target that basked unprompted. My primary hypothesis was not supported, as the non-basking target was rated more positively on the overall favourability index than a basking target. Also contrary to predictions, within the basking conditions, a target that was prompted to bask was not rated more positively on the overall favourability index than a target that basked unprompted.

My secondary hypothesis was with regard to self-esteem threat. I predicted that a target engaging in basking behaviour after reporting a recent threat to self-esteem would receive more negative evaluations than a target engaging in basking behaviour without reporting a recent threat to self-esteem. This prediction was supported: A basking target that had not disclosed a threat to her self-esteem engendered significantly more favourable ratings than a target that did disclose a threat to her self-

esteem. Similarly, a non-basking target that had not disclosed a threat to her self-esteem engendered significantly more favourable ratings than a non-basking target that did disclose a threat to her self-esteem.

Further analyses were conducted in which the individual items of the overall favourability index were grouped conceptually into sub-indices that allowed me to explore the underlying basis of the effects on the overall index. The results indicate that the basking target made a less favourable impression, was perceived as less socially competent, and as having less interpersonal warmth than a non-basking target. The basking target was also perceived as an impression management strategist relative to a target that did not bask in reflected glory. There is less strong evidence that a basking target was also perceived as less interesting and as having less of the qualities that make one a good student, than a non-basking target.

Mediation analyses confirmed that there are several possible mechanisms underlying the relationship between basking and the overall impression of the target. The non-basking target engendered a more positive overall impression than the basking target because she was perceived as more socially competent, interpersonally warm, and interesting. The relationship between basking and overall impression of the target was mediated to a lesser degree by participants' perceptions of the target as a good student (i.e., hard-working, intelligent). In contrast, the degree to which the target was perceived as an impression management strategist did not mediate the relationship between basking and impression of the target.

Additional mediation analysis revealed that the relationship between self-esteem threat and overall impression was mediated by the degree to which the target was perceived as socially competent, and as having greater interpersonal warmth. The effect was mediated to a lesser degree by participants' perceptions of the target as a good student.

It should be noted that the mediation items were measured after the dependent variable overall impression. This was done to prevent participants' responses on the overall impression item from being affected by any exposure to the mediator items, had they been measured prior to the dependent variable. For example, had participants been asked to rate the target on measures of social competence and manipulativeness and then were subsequently asked to rate the target on overall impression, the overall impression item could easily be a reflection of the previously endorsed items rather than a pure assessment of the participants' initial impression of the target. Although, for this reason, the practice of measuring mediation items after the dependent variable is common in the literature, it is not without problems (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). It is possible that participants' responses to the mediation items represent a post hoc justification of their responses on the overall impression item, rather than a pre-impression judgement that engendered particular impressions.

Proposed Mechanism

Cialdini and his colleagues (1989) have reasoned that an individual basking in reflected glory can expect more favourable evaluations from others due to the perceived association created by the announcement of a connection with a famous or notable

person. My research would suggest that a basking individual does create an impression in others, but that impression is most likely to be less favourable than had that individual not basked. My explanation of the current findings is that people who observe a target basking in reflected glory are likely to perceive the target as trying excessively to self-enhance, and that the very act of trying to create a good impression can have the opposite effect. In a sense, the person can be seen as *trying too hard*, or perhaps be seen as overcompensating for some interpersonal or personality deficiency. Basking targets were rated as less interesting, as less socially competent, and as having less interpersonal warmth. Their lower ratings on these dimensions were the primary contributor to the lowered overall impression rating.

Basking in reflected glory is clearly a tactical self-presentation strategy that involves an attempt at public self-enhancement, as it is intended to advertise one's positive qualities via an association with a notable other. It is a consistent finding in the impression management literature that those who are perceived as trying to make a good impression are frequently viewed more negatively than their non-self-enhancing counterparts (Colvin, 1995; Gurevitch, 1985; Leary, 1995; Paulhus, 1995; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Vonk, 1999). Gurevitch (1985) states that targets using tactical self-presentation are perceived as "ego-defensive, thus covering up for weaknesses" (p. 145). Similarly, Powers and Zuroff (1988) who examined the interpersonal consequences of various self-presentational strategies, report those participants who interact with self-enhancers (i.e., those attempting to increase their positive public self-image) rate them as "socially unattractive" and state that participants reported negative feelings toward self-enhancing targets relative to non-self-enhancing

targets. The results of the current research confirm that the self-enhancing strategy of basking in reflected glory has the potential to backfire, as it did not, under the current circumstance, create the intended favourable impression in others.

It was expected that participants would view a target that basked spontaneously as more of an impression management strategist (i.e., manipulative, etc.) than a target that basked when prompted or a target that did not bask. Although the basking target was seen as more of an impression management strategist than a non-basking target, the impression management strategist index was not revealed to be a mediator of the relationship between basking and overall impression of the target. Although participants in the current study did perceive the act of basking as somewhat strategic or manipulative (i.e., "sleazy"), it was their perceptions of social maladjustment (i.e., lower ratings of social competence, interpersonal warmth) that most strongly influenced participants' overall evaluations. This is evidenced by the fact that the relationship between basking and overall impression was mediated most strongly by perceived interpersonal warmth and perceived social competence, not perceived manipulativeness. My findings are consistent with the findings of a longitudinal study by Colvin (1995) in which self-enhancement was associated with poor social skills and psychological maladjustment, and was viewed as "detrimental to positive social interaction" (p. 1152).

A negative reaction to the perceived blatant self-enhancing aspect of basking would also explain the difference in participants' reactions between the basking prompted target and the spontaneously basking target. The basking prompted target,

(i.e., the target that was asked to tell the interviewer "the most interesting thing that has happened" recently), tended to be rated more positively than the target who described the identical basking story without prompting.

In sum, the results of the mediation analyses indicate that the relationship between basking and overall impression of the target can be attributed to the degree to which the participant viewed the target as having social competence, interpersonal warmth, and as being an interesting person, but not to the degree to which the participant viewed the target as being an impression management strategist.

Alternative Interpretations

An alternative explanation for the findings is that the story told by the target in the non-basking control condition was more interesting to participants than the story told in the basking conditions, and therefore it created more favourable responses toward the non-basking target. Participants rated the degree to which the stories or anecdotes recounted by the target were interesting from 1(*extremely uninteresting*) to 11(*extremely interesting*). Results indicated that there was no difference in ratings of the stories between the basking conditions and the no basking control, or between the threat and no threat conditions. Neither was there a significant basking by threat interaction. This provides clear evidence that the stories were equally interesting. However, given that this study was designed to examine an impression management strategy, it might have been more useful to ask directly whether or not the participant was *impressed* with the story told by the interviewee (e.g., How impressed were you by the stories or anecdotes

mentioned by Alison (the interviewee)?). Such a question may have yielded a different result.

It is also possible that the question regarding the degree to which the stories were perceived as interesting (e.g., How interesting did you find the stories or anecdotes mentioned by Alison (the interviewee)?), was too general a question. The target also told other anecdotes (e.g., going to university, moving to Vancouver, interacting with family) and these anecdotes were identical in all the conditions. Consequently, the participant may not have been clear as to which story or stories in the interview the question was referring to, or participants may have just combined all the stories in a general way. The fact that all the other stories and anecdotes were identical in all conditions may account for the lack of difference between conditions with regard to the question of the interestingness of the stories.

Another alternative explanation for the lower ratings of the basking targets relative to the non-basking target, is that participants did make a connection or association between the target and celebrity Robin Williams, but that their ratings of Robin Williams were not favourable, and therefore the ratings of the basking target were lowered relative to the non-basking target as a result of that association. In order to examine this possibility, participants in the basking conditions were asked to rate their impressions of Robin Williams from 1(*extremely unfavourable*) to 11(*extremely favourable*). Ratings of the basking subject Robin were very favourable, with a mean rating for all basking conditions of 9.23. In addition, an ANOVA conducted on the impression ratings of Robin Williams did not reveal a significant difference in

participants' ratings for basking, nor for self-esteem threat. Also, the ANOVA did not reveal a significant basking X self-esteem threat interaction. These findings argue against the alternative account that the negative evaluations of baskers derive from negative evaluation of the famous individual. The famous person mentioned by baskers was rated highly overall, and the act of basking did not lower evaluations of the famous person.

Although the alternative interpretations discussed do not appear to be valid explanations for the results found in the current study, there are other possible interpretations of why basking received more negative ratings than not basking that are less easily refuted.

It is possible that participants did not make a strong enough connection between the target and Robin Williams. Previous basking studies have primarily focused on the act of basking in the reflected glory of a sports team or a successful group in a college setting (Cialdini et al., 1976; Boen et al., 2002; Snyder et al., 1986; Hirt et al., 1992), whereas the current study used a Hollywood celebrity as the object of the basking story. Theoretically, mentioning a chance meeting with a celebrity should qualify as basking. Schlenker (1980) has stated:

> How many times have you heard people (yourself included) mention the time they shook hands with some famous celebrity...or sat next to a famous actress during dinner. It is common to walk into an office and see a picture of the occupant standing next to a famous politician or author. Dozens of examples of basking in reflected glory should come to mind. (p. 107)

However, it is reasonable to suggest that there may be a difference in audience reactions to recognizing pride in one's association with a winning sports team, and participants' reactions to hearing about a chance meeting with a famous celebrity with whom one could have no possible connection. A sport team to which one is aligned is typically connected to the city in which one lives, or to the school one attends (e.g., the Vancouver Canucks, the SFU Clan). People follow and support a favourite team over time, and they do so in the company of other team supporters. Such behaviours may constitute a clearer connection to a successful group, as the affiliated team becomes part of one's social identity. Even previous BIRGing studies in which a connection of birth date is created between the participant and a successful other (e.g., a high achieving student), or an infamous other (e.g., Gregori Rasputin) may represent a greater connection than the targets' encounter with the celebrity in the current study. If participants did not make the necessary association between the target and the celebrity, then any possible interpersonal benefits of basking could not occur.

Cialdini et al.'s (1976) explanation for BIRGing assumes that, through assimilation, one would be able to successfully bask in the glory of an encounter with a successful or notable other. However, it is possible that participants, primed with the image of Robin Williams, who is an extremely well known, well-liked, talented, actor, engaged in comparison with the target who would seem by contrast, to be an unremarkable, average person. The resulting contrast effect may have been so extreme that the target was viewed in a significantly unfavourable way. Social cognition research would support this possibility. Herr, Sherman and Fazio (1983) have shown that participants primed with exemplars of extreme categories evaluate an ambiguously

described target in the opposite direction from the activated category. Wanke, Bless and Igou (2001) reported a similar effect in a study using a political party paradigm. In their study, an extremely positive exemplar (a well known, well liked political figure) elicited a contrast effect and a downward comparison among participants in their evaluations of a moderate target if the target were not considered to be in the same social category as the exemplar. When the target was shown to share a social category with the exemplar (i.e., same political party), the negative contrast effect did not occur. With regard to the current study, if participants in the basking conditions regarded Robin Williams as an exemplar of a person who is humourous, intelligent, warm, etc., and in a social category that is distinct from, or superior to, that of the target, then the target person would 'pale in comparison' to the dynamic celebrity.

Future research could examine whether there is a difference in reactions to basking when the basking subject is relevant to the domain or social category of the basker. In this study, Robin Williams' only relevance to the basking target and the participant was that he was a famous actor/celebrity and therefore intriguing or exciting to meet. Results might have been different if the basking target were recounting a story in which he or she had met someone of relevance to his or her career. For example, if two psychology graduate students were talking and one mentioned having met and conversed with a world-renowned social psychologist, it might create a more favourable impression of the basking target than simply having met or seen a notable person from an unrelated domain.

Concluding Remarks

Whether in the boardroom or the classroom, in a social setting, or professional situation, basking in reflected glory is a ubiquitous phenomenon.

> "I used to live in L.A., and I remember you couldn't go into a restaurant or a store without seeing framed pictures of the celebrities who frequented that place. The ethos of BIRGing was so deeply ingrained in the psyche of the city, that even my local dry cleaner was getting caught up in it." (Cialdini, cited in Halpern, 2007, p. 129)

This study represents an attempt to explore whether basking in reflected glory serves the self-presentational goal of creating favourable impressions, and what factors might influence audience reactions to a basking target. My research would add to previous research on basking by examining whether or not claims of strategy efficacy are well founded. Results of this study support the notion that basking is most effective in response to a direct question, but less effective than not basking at all. In sum, it appears that, contrary to previous assumptions in the literature, basking in reflected glory is not the optimal strategy to use when trying to create a favourable impression. Furthermore, should situations arise in which one is unable to resist using a basking strategy, one should at least wait until being prompted to do so.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

TRANSCRIPTION OF PRACTICE INTERVIEW (10.05.03)

Interviewer: Carol

Interviewee: Alison

Carol: Hi Alison, I'm Carol nice to meet you, unh just have a seat and make yourself comfortable.

Alison: Okay, thank you.

Carol: First of all I just wanna say thanks for coming in, we really appreciate you taking the time to participate. What we'll do first is just chat rather generally, and you can tell me a bit about yourself, and then if you feel comfortable we'll move on and we'll talk about issues that are commonly discussed in this type of interview. Why don't you start by giving me a bit of background information about yourself. Where are you from?

Alison: Well, I'm from Winnipeg, and I just moved to Vancouver about 2 months ago.

Carol: So is this your first time away from home?

Alison: Well I moved out of my parent's house, unh, last year, and I shared an apartment with my girlfriend for the last year that I was in Winnipeg, but, I mean, as far as being away from my hometown and family, I guess you could say this is my first real big move.

Carol: It can be quite an adjustment making a big move like that, especially if it takes you away from your family. Um, can you tell me a bit about your family, brothers, sisters?

Alison: Unh, my mom and Dad are both back in Winnipeg. I have a brother in Brandon and a sister in Calgary. We're pretty close, especially my sister.

Carol: At least Calgary's a bit closer than Winnipeg so that's good. Any family here on the West Coast?

Alison: No, nobody out here, but I talk on the phone to my family a lot, especially my sister.

Carol: Oh, that's good, and with email, and cheap phone rates it's fairly easy to stay connected. Um, but it's different still than being there. How are you adjusting?

Alison: Okay.

Carol: Okay. That's good to hear. Um, what part of town are you living in?

Alison: I'm in North Burnaby, renting part of a house.

Carol: Oh, that's good, so you don't have a big commute to school every day. Do you have a roommate?

Alison: No, just me. It's good...nice and quiet.

Carol: Probably better for studying isn't it?

Alison: Definitely.

Carol: So what made you decide to come to Simon Fraser?

Alison: Well I actually applied to a couple of schools, um, University of Toronto, and Windsor, but I really wanted to go to a school out West.

Carol: Hmm, why was that?

Alison: Well the weather's better for one thing, um, and I like the water, and I would love to learn to ski.

Carol: Well it's good that you like the water because it rains here all winter as you've probably heard.

Alison: Yeah, I mean, but that also means more snow for skiing right?

Carol: True enough, and Whistler is an excellent ski area. So, are you pretty active then?

Alison: Yeah, I mean I run and cycle, stuff like that.

Carol: Well it sounds like you picked the right city. So, so far, I know your family's back east, you're getting settled here and that you picked Simon Fraser because you wanted to go to school in the west. Is that right?

Alison: Yes.

Carol: Okay, umm, now I'm just gonna ask you some questions about school? How are your courses going?

Alison: Okay I guess. I mean, the classes are much bigger than high school of course, um, but the profs are okay, and I got all the courses that I wanted. Um, it's just, it's a heavier workload than I thought it was gonna be. You know, just tons of reading!

Carol: Yeah. I think first year can be, can be a bit of a shock for a lot of people.

I. Self esteem threat condition

Alison: And I just got the worst mark I've ever had on a term paper, and it's my favourite course too. I...I don't know what went wrong. Anyway, it was a real blow. Hopefully my other courses will go better than that one.

II. No self-esteem threat condition

Alison: And I just got a pretty good mark on my term paper, and it's my favourite course too. So that's good. Hopefully my other courses will go as well as that one.

Carol: Well it's good that you like the course, and I think you're getting used to the pace, umm and you're also getting used to what's expected of you. So have you had any free time to get out and see the city or go skiing?

Alison: Some.

Carol: What kinds of things have you been doing?

Alison: I've done some tourist sorta things, um, Cypress, Stanley Park, and Gastown. You know, just getting to know my way around the city. It's a lot bigger than Winnipeg, and downtown Vancouver is really great.

I. Basking unprompted condition

Carol: Yeah it is isn't it?

Alison: Hey, I met Robin Williams!

Carol: Really? Where'd you meet him?

Alison: I was on Robson in the lineup at some coffee bar and he was standing in front of me. I didn't recognize him at first. You know, he couldn't decide what to order, and was joking around with all the people and stuff like that. Anyway, he turned around and told me I could go ahead of him. He was just really polite, and, and, and funny…you know, like what a nice guy! It was great to meet him.

II. Basking prompted condition

Carol: Yeah it is isn't it? So, can you tell me the most interesting thing that's happened to you since you've been here?

Alison: Hmm, well I did meet Robin Williams!

Carol: Really? Where'd you meet him?

Alison: I was on Robson in the lineup at some coffee bar and he was standing in front of me. I didn't recognize him at first. You know, he couldn't decide what to order, and was joking around with all the people and stuff like that. Anyway, he turned around and told me I could go ahead of him. He was just really polite, and, and, and funny…you know, like what a nice guy! It was great to meet him.

III. No Basking Control Condition

Carol: Yeah it is isn't it? So, can you tell me the most interesting thing that's happened to you since you've been here?

Alison: Hmmm. Oh I know. Umm, I was in this coffee bar on Robson and I was waiting in this extremely long line. Anyways, when I was almost at the front of the line, this woman behind me said she was in some sort of a hurry and asked if she could go ahead, so I let her and… when I finally got to the front, the, the guy told me that I was the thousandth customer that month and I won this really great prize!

Carol: Really, what'd you win?

Alison: Umm, I won an Italian cappuccino machine, a pound of organic beans, and I also get a free specialty coffee every week for a year!

Carol: Wow, that's great! I guess anything can happen on Robson! So there's just one more thing I'd like to ask you. What are your long-term academic goals?

Alison: Well, I want to finish my BA, major I think in psychology, and then hopefully go on to graduate school. But I think that I'd like to take some time off after my undergrad, you know maybe travel a little bit.

Carol: Yeah, that's good. I think travelling can provide just as valuable an education, um, as school sometimes. Well I think we've got lots of information for this part of the interview, why don't we take a little break before we go on to the next part.

Alison: Okay.

APPENDIX B.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED

We are interested in obtaining your impressions of the two individuals you have just heard on the tape. Please note that your responses are completely anonymous and you will seal your questionnaire in an unmarked envelope when you are done.

First, please answer the following questions as they relate to the undergraduate student **Alison (the interviewee)**. Later you will rate the graduate student **Carol (the interviewer)**.

A. Based on the interview, please rate Alison (the interviewee) **on the following dimensions:**

1. Overall Impression

| extremely unfavourable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | extremely favourable |

2. Likeability

| extremely unlikeable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | extremely likeable |

3. Pleasantness

| extremely unpleasant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | extremely pleasant |

4. Social Competence

| very socially incompetent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | very socially competent |

5. Emotional Adjustment

| very poorly adjusted emotionally | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | very well adjusted emotionally |

6. Intelligence

very
unintelligent   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   very
intelligent

7. Friendliness

very
unfriendly   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   very
friendly

8. Working with Others

very bad
to work   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   very good
to work
with

9 Sense of Humour

not at all
humourous   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   extremely
humourous

10. Comfortable to Interact with

not very
comfortable
to interact   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   very
comfortable
to interact
with

11. Coldness/Warmth

very
cold   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   very
warm

12. Confidence

not at all
confident   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   extremely
confident

13. Boring to Be Around

very
boring   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11   not at all
boring

14. Politeness

not at all 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 extremely
polite   polite

15. Interesting

not at all 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 extremely
interesting   interesting

16. Motivation and Willingness to Work Hard

very
unmotivated/ 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 highly
not hardworking   motivated/
hardworking

17. Supportive of Others

not very 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 very
supportive   supportive

18. Arrogant or Boastful

extremely
boastful/ 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 extremely
arrogant   modest and
humble

19. Honesty

very
dishonest 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 very
honest

20. Manipulativeness

not at all 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 extremely
manipulative   manipulative

21. Defensiveness

not at all 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   11 extremely
defensive   defensive

22. Attention Seeking

tries hard to get attention from others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	doesn't try to get attention from others

23. Exceptional/Unique

not at all exceptional or unique	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	very exceptional and unique

24. Good Fortune/Luck

not at all fortunate or lucky	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	very fortunate and lucky

25. Impulsivity

very impulsive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	not at all impulsive

26. "Slimy"

not at all 'slimy'	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely 'slimy'

27. Social Skill

not at all socially skilled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	socially skilled

B. Please indicate the point on the scale that best describes how _you_ currently feel on the following dimensions:

1. not at all happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely happy

2. not at all satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely satisfied

3. not at all pleased	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely pleased

4. not at all disappointed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely disappointed

5. not at all sad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely sad

6. not at all proud	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely proud

7. not at all competent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely competent

8. not at all ashamed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely ashamed

9. not at all humiliated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely humiliated

Final questions regarding the interview

1. How interesting did you find the stories or anecdotes mentioned by Alison (the interviewee)?

not at all interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	very interesting

2. How interesting did you find the stories or anecdotes mentioned by Carol (the interviewer)?

Stories and anecdotes were:

not at all interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	very interesting

3. Did Alison (the interviewee) **mention any famous or notable people during the course of the interview?**

YES_____   NO_____

If you answered **NO**, please turn to the demographic sheet on the final page of the questionnaire:

If you answered **YES**, please write the name of the person the interviewee mentioned.

How would you rate the famous or notable person that Alison (the interviewee) **mentioned on the following dimensions?**

1. Overall Impression

extremely unfavourable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely favourable

2. Humourous

not very humourous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely humourous

3. Nice

not very nice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	very nice

4. Polite

not very polite	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	extremely polite

5. Someone You Would Like to Meet

would not like to meet him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	would definitely like to meet him/her